

THE MAMMALIA TRAGEDY

The constant loop is draining. The days are carbon copies of the previous day. Mind numbing existence is temporarily broken by low level stimuli. Distraction is a survival technique I adopted on induction. Distraction removes me from the despair and places me in the present. Little whispers of despair are always audible in my subconscious. Fear is a disease and left untreated will rot your body and soul.

I was never this bleak before. All those years ago a younger version of me was full of hope and wonder. Naivety and ignorance are real blessings. The days were rays of sunshine and the nights were peaceful under the twinkling canopy. The separation from freedom was hard but bearable; I quickly adapted to my new environment.

The early years I was treated with interest and care. People would look at me in awe and spectators stare like I was in a type of zoo. The attention was initially comforting, however over time, those prying eyes started to become intrusive. Loud shrieks and other animalistic noises kept me awake at night.

Thankfully, I had my distractions. By now my visitors had taken to hiding my food. At first, I thought they had gone crazy. Why would you hide food so high up? Were they being mean? It took the hunger pains to motivate me to lumber around and piece together a whole meal. On reflection the hunting of food took my mind off my predicament.

Other strange concepts were introduced over the years. Coloured cards were placed in my field of vision. I was urged to pick one after a vocal command was spoken. I simply picked at random. Sometimes the helpers would frown and look at each other; other times their eyes would widen. On those occasions I would be rewarded with pieces of ice cold water melon.

Over time I began to learn the words spoken correlated to the colours or shapes on the cards. My brain had formed synapse bonds and I could pick the cards at ease. The more I learnt the more restless I became.

Most visitors came in pairs. One carried the cards and fruit and the other a clipboard. On some occasions the visitor with glasses and no hair came alone. He would sit just out of arms reach and read quietly. His soft voice would soothe me and draw my attention to the words spoken. I understood some of the words and tried to repeat them. However hard I tried I could not vocalise the correct pronunciation. Gurgles and growls omitted from my throat causing the helper to frown then laugh.

I liked this helper and over the years he came closer and closer. He was reading an abstract from Homer's Odyssey. He had explained earlier that he had completed a disertation on the Odyssey for his English lit degree. He likened our evolution from ape to man as a long hard journey. He was reading lines when I saw a fly land on his shoulder.

Instinctively, I reached through and scared the winged little biter away. The reading stopped and the visitor turned showing me dull sad eyes. Something was wrong with my friend but I could not understand. His skin was ghostly white and his hands trembled. I felt his fear. This was my friend. I felt protective towards him. I wanted to reassure him.

"Greenberg!" A voice boomed through the air. "Away from there now. You know your chemo has lowered your immune system".

I looked to see a bearded man dressed in khakis looking disappointingly at my friend. Greenberg, as I now knew him seemed scared by this revelation and quickly gathered his belongings and disappeared. The khaki beard scowled at me and soon left me to my own thoughts.

Greenberg, never returned. I hoped his immune system would be higher so that he could visit again. The days soon mingled into seasons and new faces replaced old. Those new visitors stopped playing games and eventually stopped hiding my food.

I felt restless. The solitude and boredom was starving me slowly. Was this a punishment? Had I done something wrong? When the visitors turned up with food I tried to repeat words Greenberg had taught me unsuccessfully. The visitors would laugh and taunt me. Soon a dark cloud of depression began to block out my optimism. Was this it? Would I spend the rest of my days caged up and laughed at? I had no voice. I had no way of articulating myself that I felt sad and alone. I felt buried alive.

A large splash startled me from my reflections. The noise scared me and made me reach out and grab the maker of the noise. A squeal frightened me again and I raced around clutching something in my hand. Water sprayed up and hit me in face. The cold water awakened my rational side of my brain. I stopped and looked down my arm to see a distressed little visitor in my hand.

Spluttering and crying the mini visitor looked at me with large sad eyes. Those eyes reminded me of Greenbergs. The memory evoked a strange emotion that made me feel protective. Why was he so sad? I placed my finger under his collar and lifted him to his feet. The crying automatically ceased.

"I want my mama" stated the little visitor. He placed two hands into the air to embrace me when a cracking sound made me jump. Who would scare such a little.....

Crack.

The second noise made me crane my neck and look up. Peering down angrily was a smoking barrel. The black metal gave way to an oak stock where the khaki beard stood attached to the trigger. Why are people screaming? Why the upset? Why does my body feel numb? I am confused. I did not want to hurt no one. I was only trying to help.. I feel drowsy.....I feel....

I feel like I am floating. I look down and I am confused to see myself sprawled out in red water. The mini visitor is reaching up to a wall as a khaki visitor crawls down with a rope. I breach the top of a tree canopy and I see a glimpse of several enclosures. Weirdly shaped animals sat in solitude as spectators laughed at their peculiarity. Are we really that strange? Do we deserve to be caged like this?

The air is cooler up here. I eventually succumb to the inevitable proceedings. A large clearing appears amongst the clouds showing another world. Instead of fake foliage and concrete walls this world had lush vegetation, large green trees and cascading waterfalls. Underneath a tree I can see Greenberg propped up on his elbow reading a giant volume of a book. He peers over the hardback and his dull eyes have been replaced by twinkling happiness. Up in the canopy on an outstretched branch sat my mother. One arm outstretched urging me forward.

I hesitate one moment. I look back down and realise I am free at last. I am out for good. No more captivity. No more oppression. I am free a free spirit. I myself into the new world and smile as the cotton wool softness of the clouds engulfs me. ^A
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