

Prologue

‘Where are we going?’ He asked as they were walking down the long and seemingly endless corridors of the prison, the Warden did not answer, in fact, he did not even turn his head back to look at the prisoner, he just kept on walking.

‘Where are we going?’ The prisoner asked again, the Warden, clearly irritated by the chattering prisoner, continued ignoring him. The corridors of the prison were uniform wherever they went, the blinding white fluorescent lights that were always on and the unpainted gray concrete walls covered with cells on each side were carefully designed to create a monotone environment all throughout the facility that drained the life essence of it’s inhabitants. There were no windows, and nothing other than thick bars of countless chambers on each side to break the uniformity of the long, soul crushing hallways.

‘Where are we going?’ He asked for a third time. The Warden stopped. ‘One more word from you, I swear...’ he sounded annoyed, but just as before, he did not turn his head back to look at the prisoner, and when he resumed walking he was walking faster then before.

Finally, after a long walk through many corridors, which were hard to count as they all looked the same, the Warden came to a stop. He reached for a key chain that was strapped to his belt and shifted through many different keys until he found the one he was looking for – it was a black metal key, substantially larger than the other keys on his chain, and it was not marked with any label. He inserted the key into a lock on a large metal door, the only door which was slightly different from the other countless doors they had walked by before stopping.

He opened the door. It made a screeching sound as the hinge pivoted.

‘Why am I here?’ The prisoner asked. Once again, the Warden ignored his question.

‘In you go’ he said.

It was dark inside, or at least darker than the prison which was illuminated at all times, probably so that it would be impossible for any prisoner to attempt an escape under the cover of shadows. Only a single light bulb hanged from the ceiling, emitting a soft yellow white which barely lit up the room.

There was a table in the middle, right below the bulb, and three chairs, one on one side of the table, and two on the other. The Warden said nothing as he closed the door behind the prisoner, and locked it in from the outside.

Two men sat on the other side of the table. They said nothing. They waited for the prisoner to take his seat.

But he didn’t. He just stood at the other side of the room, studying the men from a far.

One man, was wearing a black suit, with a black tie. He had no discernible facial hair, and no hair on his head as well. He was smoking a cigarette, smoking was prohibited inside the prison.

The man was wearing a serious expression on his face, and he was sitting straight up in his chair as he was staring at the prisoner, still saying nothing – as if he was patiently waiting for him to take his seat.

The other man, was wearing a colorful buttoned shirt. He had both his hands behind his head as he stretched on his chair as much as he could, almost sliding down to the floor beneath. He had long hair, a long beard and a much more relaxed expression compared to the man who was sitting beside him.

The two men were in stark contradiction to each other, like Yin and Yang, they were two complete opposites, but somehow, two parts of a greater whole – a whole which the prisoner did not yet understand.

‘Please’ said the man with the long hair as he pulled one of his hands from behind his head and pointed at the empty chair at the other side of the table. The bald man put out his cigarette, the smoke still filled the dark room.

Reluctantly, The prisoner sat down. He did not know who the men were, and he did want to find out. But being locked in the room left him no other choices. The man with the long hair reached below the table and pulled a folder full of papers.

‘It’s an honor’ the man said. He extended his other hand from behind his head to offer a handshake as he straightened his back onto the chair. The prisoner did not accept the offer. Whatever kind of show this was, he thought, he would not fall for it, and though it was still unclear as for the motivation of the men, he was certain it was nothing good.

The man who offered the handshake pulled his hand back, surprisingly, he did not seem angry as to the blatant show of disrespect from the prisoner, he just kept a colorful expression, as colorful as his shirt.

He took out a stack of papers out from his folder and shifted through them as the bald man stared down the prisoner, still saying nothing.

The prisoner said nothing as well as they both waited for the other man to say, or do anything.

‘Here it is’, The other man exclaimed as he finally found the paper he was looking for.

He showed the paper to the bald man, he nodded in agreement.

The man then slid the paper on the table towards the prisoner, slowly, until it was right beside his lap. He waited a few seconds, both men were sitting there, silently, waiting for him to pick it up. It was a torn page from some newspaper, carefully cut with precision as to only show what was important, or perhaps to hide something which they did not want him to see.

He read the title, silently – “Orion Galiues, the militant leader of the ZRF, captured by Euruss undercover forces, awaiting execution”

He sat down the paper. He had no interest in continuing to read the story, he already knew everything that was in it – and possibly more. Finally, the prisoner decided to talk – ‘Have you come to wave the flag of defeat in my face?’

‘Quite the contrary’ Said the man with the long hair as he pulled back the paper and inserted it back into his folder. ‘We’ve come to offer you a deal’. The bald man lit another cigarette, still keeping silent.

‘I have no interest in dealing with you’ The prisoner answered in a cold tone.

The man with the long hair seemingly ignored what the prisoner said, and continued – ‘We are offering you a chance at redemption, and a new life’.

The bald man continued smoking his cigarette, smoke filled the room once again.

‘Not interested’ the prisoner said, trying to wrap up the encounter and head back to his cell.

‘I think’ the bald man finally broke his silence, he inhaled from his cigarette, and slowly exhaled the smoke from his nostrils. ‘You might want to hear the details, before declining.’ He had a deep, hoarse voice, presumably from decades of smoking.

‘As my partner here said, I think you should first listen to our proposal’ the other man continued.

The prisoner said nothing, but opted to listen regardless, somewhat curious to hear what the men would say next.

The two men looked at each other, the bald man with the cigarette gave a small nod to his partner, as if giving him permission to continue speaking.

‘What we are offering you, is a partnership, one that will benefit both sides’.

The men who sat in front of the prisoner were surely Euruss agents, he was certain of this. Even though they did not properly introduce themselves, he had a strong sense as to their identity, he could almost smell the putrid smell of Euruss in the room.

‘You will be allowed to return to your homeland, escaping imprisonment in the face of impossible odds, to lead your people once again and reclaim your destiny’.

‘And of course’ the man continued ‘escaping what was seen by many around the world as a guaranteed death’.

‘The war will continue’ The bald man spoke, still smoking his cigarette - ‘And you shall reap the rewards of many future, guaranteed victories’

‘Your people will praise you, you will become an international symbol of resistance in the face of oppression, and your legacy will outlive you, forever’.

‘All we ask of you...’ The bald man spoke once again – ‘Is to assist us, Euruss, behind the scenes.’

The man with the long hair jumped in again, it seemed to the prisoner that this was a well rehearsed speech by the two.

‘No one will ever know of your secret collaboration, there will be no records kept, to the outside world, you will live, and die, a hero’.

The men went silent. They were waiting for the prisoner to respond. He looked at the two men as he was considering his next words, until finally, he spoke -

‘I will choose to die a million times before I will even consider helping your corrupt, murderous regime, do you even know who I am?’ He asked arrogantly.

The bald man chuckled ‘We certainly do’ he said as he lit yet another cigarette. The man with long hair continued where his partner stopped - ‘And we know what you truly want, and we are offering you just that’.

‘You know nothing about me’ the prisoner quickly replied.

‘We know more than you think’ the bald man replied, even faster.

‘You want a legacy, you want to be remembered as someone great’ The man with the long hair said, for the first time his expression has changed, he looked serious, intense.

‘You want to bring glory and victory to your homeland, and to be remembered for it, you want to go down in the books of history as a great leader to your people’

‘Or’ The bald man continued now – ‘You can be remembered as the great man who could have been, but never was’.

‘I suggest you consider your next move, carefully’ The man with the long hair continued, he seemed more serious than the other man by now – ‘If you reject our offer, you will die a no one’.

‘And you will be forgotten to the tides of time, we will make sure of it’ The bald man said, concluding the speech, and they both went silent.

‘And what’s in it for you?’ The prisoner asked.

‘We are looking at the bigger picture’. The man with the colorful shirt explained, shifting his expression once again, appearing relaxed with a hint of a smile on his face. He was a master of manipulation, the prisoner thought.

For a moment there, the idea of returning to his homeland of Zephyrus, to once again lead his people in what he considered was a righteous and just war against a devilish enemy, seemed very tempting. But that would require abandoning every single ideal that he held deeply, and was proud to embody.

And yet, the men were right. He wanted a legacy, he wanted to be remembered, he wanted to be a part of history. For everything that he did, everything that he sacrificed and the suffering he had been through, he had earned himself a page in the book of history, he thought. Dying in a soulless cold concrete box that was the prison was not the vision he had had for himself, and the opportunity to change that was now within grasp, served to him on a golden platter.

The man with the folder, as if reading his mind, said - ‘We will speak again, soon’.

The prisoner got up. He walked to the metal door and knocked, as hard as he could, ‘We are done here’ he yelled. The sound of another cigarette being lit could be heard from behind.

The Warden opened the door, he said nothing as he walked the prisoner back to his cell. The prisoner said nothing as well, but inside his head, a thunderstorm was raging, he knew what must be done, for the good of his people, but more importantly, for his own benefit.