

He had been given the name *prisonnier dix* by the other men. Not that he would refer to them as men, rather *animals*. Even then he was reluctant to engage in such negative connotations. He had been raised on a farm and therefore he knew animals; he understood them. He understood their majesty and power and place in a spinning, out-of-control world. He knew their smell, their breath, and their every dignified, controlled, informed move. The regal way in which a cow moved, the side-look from a ewe, the way in which a pig would move its body next to a human. Just enough - not quite a touch, but a spark. A nearness that said *we are connected*. Because of this, the man nicknamed Prisonnier Dix knew the difference between real animals and the men who acted like them. The men who shared the prison pigpen with him were way worse than animals. They were less because there had not yet been a word invented, which more clearly showed who or what they were. Where they came from. How they existed. They were not merely descendants of the devil; they were rather disciples, to describe them accurately. They were fornicators and drug-addled plebeians who crawled at Satan's feet, desperately feeding on whatever scraps he threw them and hoping to attract his attention. Prisonnier Dix did not need the devil's attention; he knew he already had it, and he was watching on in awe. Prisonnier Dix was not the devil's protege. He was more. He was rage, and he was more powerful than even he understood.

However, it had not stopped Prisonnier Dix from being locked in a cage. It had taken everything he had to survive and to make it through. He was counting the days until he would be free again, and it had almost destroyed him. He was locked up in a place which claimed to be a place of rehabilitation, but in reality was a pit of misery, filled with screams of anguish and despair as prisoners who were desperately clinging on to hope slowly lost it. Anger and fury were so palpable, everyone in that miserable hell hole could taste them. Despite his nickname's simplicity and unoriginality, he had taken it with a sense of pride because it seemed to be a badge of honour. It told everyone that he was to be feared. *Beware, this man is dangerous*. The name had been chosen because it indicated the number of his kills before he had been finally caught. The stupidity of his capture still stabbed at him like a red-hot poker to his heart. It angered him to his core because he had allowed it. He had seen it coming, yet he had watched helplessly the noose tightened around his neck. It was like a speeding train, and he was the deer caught in the headlights as he met his demise. In some ways, it had been a relief because he believed it would finally silence the noise in his head. Except it had not; his capture amplified the noise. Being incarcerated had only presented one advantage - a chance to repose and to begin again. He had become lost. He made mistakes because he had become complacent, impatient to finish something he was not sure had an end, or whether he wanted to kill or not. His time away allowed him to focus. He would play the long game because he needed to savour every moment.

What was about to happen had been planned for a long time. They had gone through every detail time after time because a lot of things could go wrong. He could not and would not allow mistakes to happen. He lifted his head, sucking as much air through his nose as he could manage. This would be his day, a day warm after the summer rain. The smell was intoxicating, and it filled him with a warmth he had only felt each time he killed - when his lungs were filled with the scent of human blood pumping from a gaping wound. The scent of summer rain was a reminder of how important his escape was.

He turned his head, watching as the countryside whizzed past him. He narrowed his eyes, squinting in an attempt to see through the narrow eye slats of the mask they had forced him to wear. His tongue slid lazily between the metal spikes of the mouthguard, bubbles forming on his thin lips. He sucked air through the gaps and closed his eyes. The brightness of the sun was too much for him; he had forgotten that the world outside was colourful. The colour of captivity was grey - grey sky, grey pallor of everyone's skin, grey painted walls and bars. Never ending grey. So much grey it was as if it

had permeated his skin and seeped into his pores, throttling his mood. So much so, he had forgotten there were other colours, particularly his favourite - the rust-red of blood.

It was almost time. He did not need a watch to tell him. He could feel it. The scent of the rolling meadows and the faint aroma of the vineyard was blowing towards him. He wanted to place his feet on the ground so desperately, so wholeheartedly. He felt as if his body was on fire, coursing with adrenaline and the heat of unspent desire. It reminded him of his past when his desire was a beast he could barely control. It cost him dearly because he had become lazy, dazed and confused by the shadows of his past. It caused him to make a grave error - the gravest of errors and it had led him to where he was now. In prison, he spent twenty-two hours a day in solitary confinement and the remaining two hours spent shackled and masked. Walking inanely around an auditorium, his eyes were trained on the single window, offering a view of nothing but a hedge. It was all he had, and he worshipped it because it gave him hope. He would walk amongst the trees once again and he would make certain he never made another foolish mistake. Revenge could wait, but his incarceration was eating away at his psyche. He had known unequivocally if he spent much longer behind bars, he would begin to lose grip of reality. He could not bear the thought of losing who he was because it had taken him so long to become the person he always wanted to be. The chrysalis from which he had been reborn almost cost him everything. He *would* not go back. He *would* move forward. He *would* finish what he had started.

The mask was tight against his face and he could feel sweat trickling down his cheeks. He wanted to claw at it, scratch and pull it from his face. But he knew he could not. His hands were tied behind his back. *Not for long.* The smell from the change in the countryside told him they would soon be at the intersection. If all went according to his plan, his path to freedom would begin. The plan HAD to work. There were no other options.

He opened his eyes slowly, focusing on the four other prisoners in the cage with him. As the van moved, they swayed in unison, unable to do anything but slide back and forth along the bench to which they were all chained. They were men he despised, not just for the *banal* crimes they committed, but for sharing his space, polluting the air he breathed.

He was not like them in any way, and he believed that he did not deserve to be treated the same way. He was not a monster like they were. They were insipid and stupid, born out of filth and destined to remain the same, committing one unadventurous crime after another. It was true he had made a ridiculous mistake. He knew he was only in prison because those who were in power, those who had the audacity to judge, did not have the foresight or the intelligence to understand what he was doing. They were foolish in their beliefs. Their lack of imagination made them follow the rules of society. Prisonnier Dix understood the way the world worked and how it should be. Yet, he could not continue his work while enslaved by plebeians who refused to see what was right in front of them. Prisonnier Dix was the world's deliverance.

'What are you staring at?' A guard yelled from behind the locked cage door. 'Take your filthy, perverted eyes off me, y'hear? Or else I'll come back there and show you what we really think of scum like you.'

Prisonnier Dix held the guard's gaze. Behind the mask, he was smiling. It did not matter that the guard could not see the smile. It was enough for Prisonnier Dix to know himself what the smile meant. *Non, imbecile. You are the one who will discover how I deal with scum like you.*

'You're still looking at me, you bastard. I told you to take your eyes off me or I'll make sure you never see through them again,' the guard hissed.

*Take your eyes off me.* Prisonnier Dix made a mental note of that. *I will remember those words shortly,* he thought, his smile spreading even wider. *And so will you, when you realise what is coming to you.* He turned his

head, lowering it towards his feet. As much as it pained him to appear weak in front of the stupid guard, he did not want to risk him coming into the back of the transport van just yet. The plan had been meticulously arranged right down to the minutest detail. He did not dare risk deviating from it. He would have his freedom, and then he would make the guard pay. In the meantime, all he had to do was to remain patient and calm.

‘What time is it?’ Prisonnier Dix called out to no one in particular.

The guard cackled, slapping the back of another guard, the driver. ‘Hey, nombre dix over there is getting impatient to start his new life in Maximum Security. You wanna get a move on? I’d hate to disappoint him.’ He snorted as if he had just spoken the wittiest of jokes.

The driver cackled. ‘Yeah, me too, although I wouldn’t be in such a hurry if I was him. Where he’s going, they pay *special* attention to perverts, real special attention, you get me?’ he called over his shoulder.

The guard cackled again, glancing at his watch. ‘It’s 09h00, creep. Just about thirty minutes to go and you’ll be nice and cosy in your new padded cell. But if I were you, I’d try to catch some ZZZs because I have a feeling from now on, you’ll be sleeping with one eye open. While you’ve still got ‘em, that is!’ He snorted, satisfied with himself.

Prisonnier Dix turned his head towards the back of the van. 09h00. His eyes flashed with the intensity of a burning sun. It was time.