

The Prison

by Stephen Heger

He sat uncomfortably in the hard plastic chair and his eyes glanced quickly from one face to the next. The room was small, contained only one window and felt as if it was encroaching on him. It was hard for him to discern what exactly was in the room unless he focused his vision and concentrated. Everything was white and the only definition to anything seemed to be the subtle shadows that were cast by the vast array of fluorescent lights that lined the ceiling. This made him even more nervous than he already was and forced him to close his eyes and gather several deep breaths.

“So, where do we start?”, a deep, gravelly voice said from his right.

He opened his eyes and blurted out, “I see no reason to start at all. We’ve been over this hundreds of times and I see no reason to do it again.”

“But we see a reason for it and that is enough.”, casually dropped from the mouth of the face directly in front of him. He wished it wasn't so bright in here. The face seemed to float in front of him and he wanted to see the body it was attached to. It gave them an advantage that he was obviously lacking. It gave them power.

They already had him on the defensive and he felt the agitation and anxiety begin to build up within him. He hurriedly said, “I’ve had to live with what I’ve done. Don't you think I feel guilty enough by now?”.

“If you felt guilty enough you would have actually done something about it. But you're content to sit here and feel that introspection and intent is enough. It is not.”

His thin frame shrunk in a bit. He hated the way they spoke so

matter-of-factly. They were so confident in what they were saying and it certainly didn't help that he knew they were speaking the truth. It's as if they had dissected him in every possible way; studied and cataloged and computed every little aspect of him and put him back together knowing the answer to everything including the ones he was going to put forth. It was all a foregone conclusion and he wondered if they somehow got some sort of sick joy from it.

"You know we don't enjoy this." the one to his right said. "We just want you to know what you've done and haven't done."

He lowered his head and ran his hand from his scruffy chin and up over his forehead putting his thin, gray hair back into place.

With a deep sigh he flatly stated, "I've been a less than wonderful human being. Is that what you want to hear? That I have shortcomings? That I'm scared? I ask you this: who isn't?". His agitation was slowly coming to the surface.

Another mouth attached to another face opened to his left and curtly said, "Stop. You know this isn't about how others act or react. You are not responsible for them. You are responsible for your actions and yours alone. There is no need to quantify your actions with comparison to others."

"Fine. You want it? I'm a shit. I've done bad things. I've regretted doing them, but not enough to stop from doing them again. I've lied to myself and others to make myself look and feel better and finding ways to rationalize my behavior.", he said. "I've cheated on ones I've been with and loved and hated people at the mere sight of them. I've wanted to kill and the only thing that has stopped me is the idea of incarceration. Not some moral quandary as to whether it's right or wrong. It was fear that stopped me. It was also fear that stopped me from being something bigger than I thought I could be. That stopped me from doing so many things. Fear of failure and also the

possibility of achieving it. To have to maintain that standard. Is this what you want to hear?"

"We believe it's what you want to hear. Does it make you feel better admitting all these things without actually changing them? Do you not see the point of this? We're only here to help.", said the baritone voice from his right again.

"No. You're not here to help. You're here to persecute and find fault. You come in here every day and expect something new and it's the same thing. The same damn thing. Every. Fucking. Day."

He stood up abruptly and tossed over the chair, its echo clanging in the empty quarters, and began pacing the room pointing to invisible people and shouting.

"Should we get somebody?", the man in the white jacket asked his superior in a similar white jacket next to him holding a clipboard. They were peering through the window, taking notes and making observations.

"No. He'll be fine.", the superior said quickly and then paused as he wrote more things down in a chart that would be read once and then shelved along with all the other volumes. "He's been doing this since I've been here and will be doing it long after I've gone."

