

Option 3

“1-9-8-4 this is your last chance, what is your answer?”

1-9-8-4 lifted his head to meet the minister’s eyes. He leaned back in his chair and looked at the two men standing guard at each side. A bird chirping caught his attention as his eyes darted to the window. Tears filled his eyes as the window revealed a scene he could barely remember. Just above the high wall he could see tree tops and the sun was shining as a backdrop for the lone chirping bird.



He heard the metal door creak open and scrape the floor as he slowly opened his eyes. He could see a figure outlined by the dim light seeping in from the hall. A light sparked to life in the center of the room highlighting the only furniture in the barren landscape that was his cell. The figure walked to the table, sat down and beckoned him to the table. The chains binding him would release and he would take his place at the table. Sitting down he looked across the table at his interrogator. He was featureless, in a crowd he would be nothing more than a shadow if he were to pass by you, nothing at all remarkable about him. As the bare light bulb swung slowly above them, like a metronome keeping time, there was one thing he knew and it was that he hated this man.

The figure slowly opened a briefcase and removed a file. Opening the file he cleared his throat to speak.

“Prisoner 1-9-8-4, you are charged with heresy, sedition, treason, and conspiracy. How do you plead?”

1-9-8-4 looked at the man through swollen black eyes, and with a sneer on his bloodied lip, he gathered all the saliva he could and spat on the man’s file.

“Still insolent I see. No matter,” said the man as he looked toward the door. The door violently swung open as three men entered. “I’ll leave you for now and come back when you’re more receptive.” The figure slowly packed away his file in his briefcase and left 1-9-8-4 at the mercy of the three guards.

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He had danced this endless waltz since he could remember. His life before faded from memory everyday as the guards reshaped him, taking a piece of him every time they left. It was hard to breathe now for 1-9-8-4. He could feel his broken ribs teasing his lungs with every breath, as splintered bone met tissue. Exposed nerves screamed for his missing teeth as the very air caused them to writhe in pain. He knew there was no time here, not for the prisoner anyway. Time still flowed for the people on the outside, but here is where the unwanted go, and here is where they stay until they earn the right to be “re-educated” and deemed fit to re-enter society.

“Prisoner 1-9-8-4, you are charged with heresy, sedition, treason, and conspiracy. How do you plead?” said the figure in his veil of indifference.

“Every day, every fucking God damn day, the answer will be the same!” is what he screamed in his skull but the words wouldn’t leave his throat, they couldn’t. *I’m breaking* he thought. *Who the fuck am I kidding? I’ve crumbled; I just don’t have the strength to tell them.* He managed a small noise that could only pass as a chuckle because of the smile that had lightly formed on his lips.

The figure packed his things as the other three men entered. 1-9-8-4 could tell the men were tired of this because there was no enjoyment now. They stopped cuffing his hands together because he had no fight left in him physically; now the two men just held his arm as the third would administer a cocktail of drugs into his veins. It was a potent mix of drugs to keep him nauseous and docile with a hint of hallucinogens to make sleep as uncomfortable and unattainable as the sky already was to him. After the drugs, they just would chain him to the floor and play “the music.” *Always with that damn music*, he thought as he subconsciously sang along to the tune. *“Jesus loves me yes I know. For the Bible tells me so...”* Solid food became a myth as the I.V. drip replaced any memory of taste.

He was not a brave man. He had cried. He had begged. He had pleaded for mercy but yet when they asked him the question the sound of an unknown voice still said “no”. In the beginning all he knew was torture and pain; there was no question to answer. At least the torture gave him hope of death. He hoped for a slip up, a mistake; that his captors would go

too far and he would be released. Questions though have no end, even with no one to speak it the question lingers and haunts. He could feel it in the air he breathed and his lungs were filled with it. He was choking on it. Where did this pride come from? he thought as the question clawed at him from the inside.

He knew the man would be coming soon. They would only release him from his chains when he was to show up. He hated these hours more than the chair. The waiting was the worst part; he would wait for hours chained to a little metal ring on the floor as he was forced to wait on his knees like a common whore. It offended him, *there's nothing common about me!* he thought. Surprisingly he found himself still able to laugh. Though he couldn't tell if it was good to be laughing to himself anymore. That thought made him laugh again, confirming and denying everything in its response. Then the man would "graciously" enter, the metal hook would release and then would come the question.

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"Prisoner 1-9-8-4, you are charged with heresy, sedition, treason, and conspiracy. How do you plead?" said the figure in his veil of indifference. "I will add, this is your last chance to earn re-education otherwise execution."

The prisoner could only look at him. In an instant the interrogator could see it in his eyes, he was broken. They both knew it but still 1-9-8-4 wouldn't give the interrogator the satisfaction of hearing it from him. With hubris emanating from the interrogator he smiled and nodded toward the ceiling.

The figure packed his things as the other three men entered. This time, though, they attempted to help him to his feet. The prisoner stood up alone and followed the interrogator out. They walked down the windowless hallway in silence. Faint echoes of screams could be heard all around him. The screams just amplified his shame as they made their way down the hall.

As they turned right at the end of the hall the prisoner's eyes blurred as beams of sunlight poured in from an open door, like rain cascading on the dark floor. As they stepped into the light the prisoner shrunk under the might of the sun as he passed under, as an ant under a magnifying glass. The air was fresh and crisp as it filled his lungs. The grass under

foot refreshed his step as the morning dew wiped some of the grime from his toes. They entered a small building where the man in charge sat behind a large oak desk. The man was smartly dressed in a plain black suit just as his interrogator but unlike the man who questioned him this man was rather large. His neck was hidden from view, his head just seemed to be stuck on, it was swelled large and bald. When the man spoke his head wobbled slightly because of the loose skin on his skull. It hung loosely as if it was slowly trying to rid itself from its owner.

As the prisoner sat down the large man played a video. It was the prisoner: young, strong, the farthest thing from the dried husk that occupied the seat. He was protesting, "This country wasn't founded on a belief of a religious institution. This country was made for all. The founders knew that no religion had it right and that all of this was made to escape religious persecution. Yet you use God as a way to judge and condemn. We..." the prisoner watched in silence as he watched the police take his better self away.

"So here are your choices," said the large man with a hint of a smile, "You're left with three options. The first is the electric chair. The second is a needle to the vein. The third well it can be anything, well, accept old age of course." He laughed at his own little joke. "The third can be *nearly* anything; firing squad, defenestration (always entertaining he added), torn apart by horses happened last week but we could always do it again. As always the choice will be televised and shown to others as a warning not to defy God. Or you could do a public apology right now and beg for forgiveness. Who knows, we might even let you become re-educated and become one of God's children again. So what shall it be?"

The prisoner looked at the floor. He couldn't be re-educated, could he? He knew that he might one day be able to find happiness if he did this. He might even fall in love someday, have a family. Hell, maybe they were right and he was wrong. Maybe their God is true; he had never seen proof of a God of another kind.

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