

Letter 21

3-16-26

Hole

When I first arrived on my cellblock, I was mystified by the cell door that never opened. There was clearly an inmate in there, but for some reason he was never allowed out with us. His food trays were slid through the lockable hatch in the middle of his door, the wicket. The door was only ever opened when the rest of us were safely locked away in our own cells for the daily hour-long afternoon lockdown.

He would emerge for this hour. He looked too soft to be dangerous and appeared too dumb to be a master criminal, yet for some reason they kept us protected from him. Rumor had it that he had been in there months, since before most anyone else had been on the block.

After a few more weeks, the warden granted him the mercy of being released from his solitary existence alone in his cell.

It was confirmed that he was not dangerous, and certainly not an evil genius. He was just a kid that, through some combined defects of parenting, schooling, and genetics, sucked at being a human being. He had never learned how to exist within a group of people. He would argue, yell, beg, and just otherwise make himself a pest. After six days of "freedom," he attempted to start a fight and was promptly returned to his cell.

Within a couple of days, he was moved to "The Hole." This ominous-sounding locale is a section of this zoo reserved specifically for the animals that aren't compatible with the others in their habitat.

The cells of The Hole are reportedly smaller, single occupant rooms lacking even the limited comforts of our cellblock. At one point, E Block, the location known as The Hole, probably had a bookshelf and tablets available for inmate use. However, the inmates who specialize in ruining things for others eventually run out of others and end up ruining things for themselves.

So, here it was that our friend "Lefty" found himself for a month or so. Sometimes, though, like an overfull septic tank, E Block gets so full of shit that it needs to be cleaned out. After a particularly loud week of yelling, fighting, and cell flooding, the inmates of The Hole were redistributed throughout the rest of the jail. This is how Lefty found his way back to us.

While he has rejoined our block in spirit, he has been returned to lockdown status of 23 hours in the cell and never allowed out with the rest of us. Nevertheless, we remain aware of his presence.

He is relentless in his efforts to mooch from the rest of the block. Even when he gets a fresh supply of tobacco chew from commissary on Thursday, he is out by Monday. Then it's multiple days of him trying to secure more chew by offering future deals, or worst of all, food

from his tray. Normally an offer of food would be considered for a trade, but with his door perpetually closed, the food would need to be squeezed through the gap under the locked door. I am pleased to report that the folks here are not desperate enough for that version of a smash burger.

I get annoyed at his begging, not just because he can't ration his money or supplies, but because he is rude about it.

"Hey Peter, let me get a chew," when that fails it's immediately followed by, "Hey Paul, let me get a chew." The follow-up to that is, "Hey Peter, your celly got chew?"

With no "please" or "thank you," he gets limited success. Not zero success, which shows there are nicer folks than me in here.

For the staff, he saves a particularly strong brand of pointless defiance. He will refuse random orders for seemingly no reason. For instance, he will be told to close a door behind him and he will refuse. The guard will insist. He will refuse louder, with profanity. The guard will threaten to mace him. We overhear this and hope it's true. He refuses with even more uncreative profanity. The warning of mace is repeated. We pray it happens this time... he caves in and closes the door.

It is at this point that I want to remind you, dear reader, that what I write is always true and accurate to the best of my knowledge. I only change the names to protect the guilty.

This week the guard went to Lefty's door to collect his dinner tray. Lefty refused to pass it out of the open wicket. After an exchange of yelling, Lefty's motives became clear. He needed to keep his tray as evidence for a lawsuit against the jail. You see, he only received two chicken tenders, but saw that someone else had three.

To be fair, I had a similar thought when I saw the two tenders on my tray and three on the tray of the person next to me. We both had an equal volume of chicken, but it did look better as three tenders. This subtle nuance didn't seem like the addition that the argument needed, though.

Lefty conceded that he would send out the tray if someone would bring a camera for him to take a photo of his missing chicken. The guard's counteroffer was mace. The negotiation continued until mace was accepted as the final offer.

At this point, it was Lefty in his cell, three guards outside, and the rest of the cellblock observing from a safe distance. Everybody was told to lockdown in our individual cells. It's safe to say we were giddy with anticipation. It's not that any of us hate Lefty; it's more that we were excited for the promise of a spectacle. Since Lefty was volunteering and the staff was obliging his misguided request, we were but mere observers of what was to come.

The official report states he was sprayed with two short bursts of OC spray. As any guy will tell you, "short" is a vague term, open to interpretation. That can was probably nearly empty to start with.

Come to find out, mace is a team event. Lefty definitely took the brunt of it, but there was plenty of fun for all.

The three guards all took a hefty dose of back spray. The boss got the most of those three, which amused the other two. While the boss was hacking into the garbage can, the other two had to figure out how to laugh and choke at the same time.

The rest of us all got doses that varied depending on how close our cells were to ground zero. I'm convinced a cough drop helped me deal with the worst of it, but I still went through a quarter roll of toilet paper blowing my nose.

The close quarters and limited circulation of the cellblock really helped to make sure we all got our fair share of the lingering cloud.

While getting sprayed appears to be a zero-star event, watching it happen is still worth it, despite the side effects. 5 stars.

Letter 22

3-19-26

Skald

The door closed and only the two of them remained on the cellblock. With the release of that inmate, things would be quieter, but too quiet for Reli's tastes.

Reli slid a napkin across the table. The big guy sitting on the opposite side of the metal table pocketed it without looking. He could feel the teeth folded within as he slid the napkin into his pocket.

Reli regarded the big guy across from him. "Who the hell could think this guy is human?" he wondered to himself.

Indeed, while Skald was somewhat handsome for a troll, he was damn ugly for a human. His face was wide and flat. It looked to Reli like someone had sculpted a beautiful face, but dropped the wet clay on the floor, said, "Fuck it," and put it on Skald.

"I'mma go get that ready," the troll grumbled as he stood up and lumbered off to his cell.

Reli was left alone with his thoughts and his craving. He enjoyed the taste of food, but could live without it. Crystals, on the other hand, are what made life worth living. He wasn't sure what Skald did with the teeth he took as payment, and honestly, he didn't really give a damn.

He heard the troll grunt from within his cell and considered the big guy's choices. That dumb oaf actually seemed to enjoy life in jail. It made some sense, Reli supposed. Skald was big enough that nobody ever messed with him. That left him free to enjoy three hot meals a day, cable TV, and naps whenever he wanted. Plus, if he didn't have someone like Reli around when he needed teeth, he would just knock one out of an unsuspecting inmate. This was a win-win for Skald: these minor assaults kept him both in jail and stocked with teeth.

Reli didn't mind being in jail, but his habit of helping other inmates acquire their freedom often led to situations like the one he currently found himself in. He was still locked up, but with nobody left for him to deal with.

Damn, what was taking that troll so long to make that crystal?

Reli had his own magic, but it was conditional. If he was captured, or as he found out, incarcerated, someone needed to make a wish. His powers allowed him the ability to grant even outlandish wishes. However, he had two limitations. He, as with all leprechauns, could not grant his own wishes. Also, because he wasn't pure-blooded, he required a price to be paid for each wish granted. The price varied as the fates decreed, and needed to be voluntarily paid by the one making the wish.

Reli's reward for his part in making dreams come true is that he is left feeling rejuvenated and healthy every time he uses his magic. This is nothing, however, compared to the feeling he gets from the troll's crystals.

Just as the craving hit again, Skald emerged from his cell. Reli walked past him on his way to his cell. As their paths crossed, they briefly shook hands.

Once he was alone in his cell, Reli O'Shitagan looked down at his hand.

In his palm sat a jagged crystal about the size of a marble. The pearlescent crystal flickered with red and brown highlights on the miniature peaks and crags. He popped it in his toothless mouth and began to suck. Crystals were an acquired taste, but nobody used them for the flavor.

Almost at once he could feel the buzzing start in his core. As it radiated into his limbs, he felt alive and full of lightning.

He looked down at his hands. His fingers were stubby and his hands callused, but they looked fine. Energy tingled beneath the skin.

He checked himself in the mirror. The polished metal that sat firmly bolted to his cell wall distorted his reflection. It didn't matter much, though, he had somehow inherited the worst genes from both parents. An ugly face with a toothless grin smiled back at him. He looked closer at his right eye. It had a hazy film over it that made it harder to see from that eye, especially at night. That could be solved at the hospital, he decided. He ran his fingers through what was left of his hair and felt electricity in his scalp.

As he turned away from the homely visage in the mirror, he looked for his pencil. It annoyed him that they only issued the inmates half a pencil. "Like I need more than three inches to stab someone", he thought as he snickered to himself. Once he found his stub of a pencil, he left his cell.

He poked his head into Skald's cell.

"Later, fucker. I'm out of here."

"See ya next time, buddy," the troll grunted from the toilet. He was busy working out another crystal. Reli wished that he could afford it, but he was out of teeth and short on prospects for more. Reli left Skald to finish his business and turned into the main floor of the dayroom.

With a brief glance to the security camera, he tripped and fell. His fist slammed onto the floor, holding the pencil. His face landed on the pencil.

He stood up, screaming. The pencil was sticking out from his impaled right eye.

When you don't need a guard, they seem to be everywhere. When you have a sharpened number-two pencil drawing on the back of your eye socket, they seem to take forever to arrive.

The door to the cellblock finally slid open and three guards rushed in, carrying a sorry excuse for a first aid kit, an old towel (probably clean), and a pair of handcuffs.

By the time the ambulance arrived, he was sitting on the jail's loading dock with a guard. Reli was cuffed and holding a towel to his bleeding eye. He let out a moan and a sob as he and his chaperone were ushered into the back of the ambulance.

He had granted a wish that morning, so his healing ability was working well. Perhaps a little too well.

He had his cuffed hands holding the towel to his eye, but during the ride he could feel the pencil being pushed out as his body healed itself.

This wouldn't do at all, he thought.

If someone gets out of jail early because they ate a banana that a magical leprechaun farted on, they tend to keep that story to themselves. No, this would look like an inmate being healed by the miraculous hand of God. Reli didn't need the kind of publicity that kind of story would create.

That left him with the singular option of making sure that he did not have a miraculous recovery.

As he felt the wound heal and push the pencil out, he would push the pencil back in. Unfortunately, his ability to heal didn't do much for pain. So the entire ambulance ride it felt as though he was being stabbed in the face, because he was. At least his moans, cries, and occasional screams as they went over bumps in the road sounded realistic.

Soon enough he found himself in a curtained section of the Emergency Room in the Rainbow County Hospital. His guard, still on duty from the jail, was paying little attention to Reli. After all, where would a guy with a pencil sticking out of his face rather be than laying on a hospital bed waiting for a doctor? Plus, a couple of the nurses had caught the guard's eye. They were much better than the inmates that he usually saw during his workday.

Reli took advantage of the inattention to remove the pencil from his eye and slip out through the curtain that was pulled around his bed. Avoiding detection was a leprechaun gift apparently even bestowed upon half-breeds.

Reli passed through a curtain and spied a dress folded up on a chair next to another hospital bed. He could sense that the old woman on the bed would pass soon, so the dress wouldn't be missed. It was a dress, and it was ugly, but it was better than his ass hanging out of a hospital gown.

As he was helping himself to his new attire, he felt a tug on his gown. He looked down to see a woman's ancient, wrinkled hand gripping a fold of his gown. He turned to her as she whispered, "I wish I didn't have to die alone."

Reli thought about hiding his cuffed hands, but the woman didn't seem to be aware of much around her. Her wish flashed through his mind and he saw what he had to do. Why did the fates need to be so damn weird?

He looked again at her hand clutching his gown, and whispered, "I can stay with you. Here, put this in your mouth." He held his hands above her face and slipped his pinky into her mouth. She suckled on his finger like a hungry calf. He felt the sensation lessen as she faded. As the line on her heart monitor went flat, he pulled his finger from the dead woman's mouth. He scooped up her dress and disappeared behind a curtain in search of a way out.

Getting out of an ER is much easier than getting in. All of the security is focused on stopping people from entering. It was fairly easy for Reli to move about until he found a bathroom within the ER. Once he locked himself into a stall, he took a deep breath; the next part was going to suck.

Reli sat on the toilet and gathered himself a large wad of toilet paper that he then stuffed into his mouth. He leaned back and brought his knee up between his arms, resting it on the handcuffs that shackled his wrists. With a muffled scream, he pulled his arms back and pushed his knee forward.

He felt flesh tear and bones break as his hands pulled through the too-small opening of the cuffs. As a particularly rough moan escaped his throat, he heard the door to the bathroom open. The would-be guest apparently thought better of being part of whatever tragedy was happening in the stall and quickly left.

Alone again, Reli shrugged off the gown and clumsily used his broken hands to put on the stolen dress. Once he was dressed, he stuffed the gown and cuffs in the trash and walked out of the bathroom. From there he picked his head up proudly and followed the signs out of the building.

Reli O'Shitagan didn't need any leprechaun magic to escape the hospital now. It wasn't that he was hard to see; it was that nobody really wanted to see, let alone make eye contact with, the ugly, limp-wristed man in a dress that was patterned like a grandmother's couch. The more he turned to meet people's gaze, the faster they turned away from him.

Reli learned long ago that the easiest way to be invisible was to look either ugly or homeless enough. He was a master of both.