



BARRACKS 13

In Our Barracks You are Never Alone

Can you imagine a world of endless work in the bitter cold? Inhuman guards who revel in the mistreatment of prisoners. I live where all this is true, all except for Barracks 13... for no one goes in Barracks 13.

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Our camp is a long nightmare. A place specializing in the production of misery and desolation. Our captors are fond of taking prisoners. After all, the dead cannot be tormented. I live in barracks 9. Of course, there is terrible overcrowding. The building was built to house 30. It contains 91. The cold enters the buildings and arrives in your body like a cat. The smells are unholy; death and rot. I cannot even begin to describe them. And if I could, you wouldn't wish to read them.

There are work parties every day to cut wood in the forests, but our stoves are empty. We do not cut fuel for ourselves but to keep our captor's warm. When I first came here, I refused to swing an ax. There was no desire in my bones to act as if it was a slave for the betterment of those who kept us prisoners. But I soon discovered the only way to keep warm was to join the work parties. There it was revealed to me the hopeless dream of killing one of them. Holding the ax in your hands gave you those wonderful dreams. There was power in swinging an ax. Even if your only target was a tree.

When we return, the beatings and the torture commence anew. I run to escape these, but if they find you, the beatings are worse. The torment is more concentrated and... if such a thing is possible... more sadistic. For walking too slow, Prisoner 95647328 had his feet crushed in a metal printing press. I can still hear the hollow crunch of his bones and the terrible screams.

The camp press used to print documents for the camp regulations is a citadel of horror all by itself. There is no ink. The blood of the prisoners is used. This dries quickly, requiring constant replenishment. One day the printer's assistants came after me, so I ran. There are few places to hide and the guards know about all of them. Some prisoners throw themselves in the well. I ran for Barracks 13. Despite the chronic overcrowding, no one is ever assigned to Barracks 13. Not even the guards go in there.

It is not as empty as the inmates have been led to believe. If anything, it is more crowded than all the other buildings combined. But the residents do not mind. They are happy to sit on each other, lay ten to a bunk, and walk through each other. Some are no more than shadows. Others appear as tricks of the light. They glide silently through the air. I could see through everyone, their transparent forms walking across the floor as a fog cloud rolls over a valley in the early morning twilight.

I feel safe here. It is not as I imagined it would be as a child. There is no nightmare here... the nightmares are outside. The Barracks Committee does not treat me as an interloper, they see me as an honored guest. They murmur their secrets to me in soft tones. This is a place of wonder and relief. Even their insubstantial forms cannot hide their smiles. I learn where the tunnel is dug leading to the food storage area. The patterns and the habits of the guards are now known to me. When one sleeps on guard duty, I have knowledge of this at once. I am now a full-time resident of Barracks 13.

And the guards never enter.