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Warnings We Do Not Heed

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332 Reasons to Regret

My dearest Monica,

Day 332 of 365. Another day and night have passed stuck in this small, windowless cell and I have yet to resolve my captivity problem. I know how I got here, I just don't know how to leave. Nor how to communicate effectively with my captors, whom I doubt would even commute my sentence even if I were able to make a formal request. Not that I haven't tried. I spent the first month communicating in every conceivable way talking, whispering, yelling, banging on surfaces, imitating animals, pantomime gestures, sounds, dances, you name it. Essentially the worst game of charades ever played. And still nothing. When charades didn't work, I went on the attack - punching, prodding, scratching and gouging - generally making myself a nuisance. But this had no discernible effect. And then I tried to escape employing every plan with the meager tools I had at my disposal. All unsuccessful.

Still I am here. You might not believe there is a worse fate, but I have discovered there is. Three hundred and thirty two days forced to live with their monotonous sameness. First, they wake me with a cup of coffee and two slices of buttered toast - well that's what I think they're going for. The shapes are wrong, the texture odd, and the flavors suggesting something similar to coffee and toast, but not really. It keeps me alive though.

After breakfast, I sit at a desk they provide with pen and paper daily. At least the paper and pen feel authentic though I have no idea how they could've pulled this off. We haven't use such antiquated devices since the end of the twenty-first century. And not explored this quadrant of the universe till I arrived to map it. But there they are issuing one piece of paper each day – always white and blank with a single number written in the upper right hand corner. I'm given no instruction and am left to stare at the page wondering what they want me to write. All I think of is you and my folly for having taken on another exploration mission when I promised you I would not. "One last mission," I begged you, "One more adventure and then I will retire." Oh what a fool I was. How short sighted of me. And selfish. All you wanted was a family, children, a home. And what did I do but go running off to the wilds of space.

Oh Monica, I do so want to escape and return to you. By any means necessary. But as I wrote earlier, I've been hugely unsuccessful and fear I overplayed my hand. My captors rarely enter my room, except to drop off breakfast, desk, pen and paper. Then every evening to collect the same. I'm not afforded the same opportunities I once had during the first weeks when they spent long hours observing from the corners of the room. And I am growing more fearful by the day time has run short.

You see Monica, when I first arrived, the number 365 was clearly inscribed in black on the upper right edge of the page. And then, each recurring day that number reduces by a factor of one. Including this morning when my piece of paper stated the number 33. Now whether that means I do not know for sure: do I have only thirty-three days left before they end my captivity and return me to my spaceship? Or end my life? Or is the number reduction simply their way of tracking a finite supply of paper? I do not know the answers. Or even how they know our number system in the first place. Because we cannot communicate. Why I do not know since I've done my part. My captors remain a mystery.

They are obviously intelligent creatures who appear technically proficient so there should be no reason they shouldn't communicate well in return. They do have different physiology being a completely different species and race, but still. They seem to have acquired technical skills and cognitive thinking capabilities. For example, when they enter, I recognize the respiratory re-breather apparatuses they wear as being similar to our mariner scuba diving equipment back on Earth. But rather than oxygen in the tank, their equipment appears to contain liquid which they breathe in and out. But the liquid makes their ability to speak nearly incomprehensible to me. All I ever hear when they open their oddly shaped mouths are the bloop of water bubbles rising up and then bursting at the top of their helmet bowls. Which are pretty large and opaque. And they wear a modified scuba suit which covers the rest of their entire body consisting of no less than eight limbed tentacles lengthened to the floor. Which they use as arms and legs interchangeably. Your basic evolved octopus as far as I can tell.

The equipment they wear does look extremely uncomfortable though. Heavy. They think so too in this open air environment. How I know is conjecture since their faces don't offer expressions of any kind. Just eyes and oddly shaped mouths blooming water. But I can "feel" them. I feel their discomfort like soft ocean waves breaking in my brain and rolling along. I am hesitant to call it telepathy because the waves only impart vaguely familiar emotions and not specific thoughts. Possibly they are using some form of extra sensory perception to speak and I just don't have the proper receiving tool, I guess. Which makes them very frustrated. I can feel it. It is day 332 and I am not sure they'll continue tolerating me past 365 if I cannot find a way to effectively communicate back.

I think I know what you would advise in such circumstances, Monica. Where there's a will there's a way. You were always completely confident in your ability to find solutions to difficult problems. But were you here – and I am glad you are not – I doubt

you could find advantage where I have not. Believe me I have tried in every conceivable and inconceivable way. Without even the smallest success.

They do treat me humanely. There has never been torture or experiments or any such thing. But they are cruelly inattentive and indifferent now. And I have become so mind numbingly bored. I know they can sense it, but nothing changes. Knowing they cannot communicate has severed any interest they seem to have in me. Oh, they still collect each numbered piece of paper at the end of the day, whether I write on it or not, but I do not know they read what I write. They haven't demonstrated they do. I am left to my own thoughts now. Which have become my only means of intellectual exercise as I lie on my bed worrying what reaching zero on the paper scale will do. What happens next? I do not know.

My dear Monica, space has run out on the page, front and back, to continue writing, so I must sign off. I fear I knew the last of you when I left home with no more than the briefest hug and kiss so I could travel here over a year ago. I regret taking you for granted. And now I've only thirty-three more days to picture your visage fondly till who knows what. But I do not sense it will be good. I regret leaving you for this expedition and dream you have forgiven me - wishing with all my heart I could return safely home to you.

With a broken heart,

In captivity,

Yours always

Jack.

