

The Beginning of the End

by Zainab Muladawilah

With the sound of metal clanking against each other and the heated air of the factory filling the man's lungs with anxiousness and despair, he moulded the piece of metal on his workbench into its required shape for future uses. People around him seemed to be working a lot harder than usual. **Why?** he thought. The muscles in all their arms would flex before they were followed by pounding sounds and heavy grunts. The fire in the furnace beside him roared angrily, spitting out the cinders that had formed within it, making him jump back, out of pure shock. He quickly composed himself, stepping back into his original position and continuing to work on what he had started. He coughed numerous times, spitting out a bit of blood as he did so then wiped his mouth, managing to disregard the pain that had instantaneously taken him over.

Though the fear was still there: the fear of knowing that with the amount of toxic fumes he had been breathing in, he could pass out any second. Die any minute. **I don't want to die. Not now anyway. Maybe soon things will get better** he thinks, blinking back the tears that began to brimmed his eyes. He wiped the beads of sweat that seemed to form every time he attempted to wipe them away, and put aside the now finished metal structure. He began another. He heated up the block of metal, not enough to let the metal completely liquify, but enough so he could accomplish his objective.

Hours that felt like days had passed. He was finally dismissed and he left the building with a relieved sigh. The air on the streets of England was quite cool in contrast to the air inside of the factory. The smell, though better than within the factory, overwhelmingly stank, for the streets were covered with the waste of horses' digestive systems. **Those poor orphan boys are going to be forced to clean that up** he thought gloomily. The full moon illuminating his way, he began his journey to his old, weathered house. He walked tediously, passing the various dimmed streetlights and with almost every step he took he would have water seep into the sole of his worn-out boots. A

gush of cold wind blew his way causing him to shiver which resulted in him pulling the thin coat around his body tighter than it was before and continued to trudge the journey home.

He opened the door to his home, hearing the sound creaks fill the house, breaking any silence it once contained and stepped into it taking his water-filled boots from off his feet and removed his damp socks to hang them and let them dry overnight. He sighed, running his hand down his tired face while leaning against the front door. He began to walk, the floor creaking beneath his feet, only to fall face first onto his stiff bed. The four walls of the room, seemed to close in on him, but that was the least of his worries. So as his breath slowed down to a calmed pace and his eyes began to droop shut, the world around him slowly dimmed to a pitch black.

He forces his eyes open. It was just before dawn and as he sluggishly got out of his uncomfortable bed. He heaved a long sigh that made his chest rise and fall. He washed his face with the limited amount of water he had before he got ready, changing into a worn-out shirt and baggy pants. He stepped out of his house and the puddles of water from the rain from the night before seeped into the holes of his boots. Then he turned a corner and walked past an alley way. Hearing muffled screams, he stopped in his tracks. He retraced his steps a couple of paces before pausing, then turned his head in the direction of the noise to see three people: one in a suit and the others dressed as typical commoners. The suited man had both hands over the others' mouths before managing to slice both their throats. He stepped towards the suited man in attempt to stop him from getting away from what he had just done. His strides were long and the fear of being killed seemed non-existent as he threw the first punch. It landed square on his jaw. The suited man quickly composed himself, throwing a punch, but he quickly dodged. Punch after punch was thrown, until finally one was knocked out: he was knocked out.

He opened and shut his eyes in attempt to rid of the sting that had taken over due to the bright light that his pupils had yet to adjust to. He looked around taking in the meticulous patterns that took over every inch of the ceiling above. A crystal chandelier hung low lighting the place with its candles that replicated the ones that were set around the room. He looked down, noticing his hands were tied with a thick piece of rope behind his back and a piece of cloth had been tied around his mouth, preventing him from speaking any words that had passed through his brain. *Where am I? How did I get here?* he thought, feeling his breaths becoming short as he felt panic injecting itself into his veins. He looked up to see a balcony with people of different sizes but similar builds stood tall and proud. He struggled to push himself up and prop himself onto his knees so he is seated instead of lying down.

"You have proven worthy," one of the people spoke, their voice rough and loud.

He squinted, trying to make out a face in the scarce lighting.

"You were able to put up a fight with one of our best, but you still have to prove if you're worthy enough."

The man made a gesture with his hand and in an instant footsteps began to near him. The beat of his heart quickened with every single step that you did from behind him and soon he was able to hear his heart pulse through his ears. He felt a hand quickly rip the cloth away from his mouth, making his head jerk to the side.

"Who are you? Where am I?" he spoke, voice shaky while confusion laced his words. With the aid of the lit candles, he saw the man's face forming into a slight smirk.

"You will find out who I am soon enough. As for where you are, you will find out if you pass," the man replied, angering him.

"If I pass?" he breathed out, glaring at the man.

"The initiation."

"And if I don't pass?"

The man looked to the people at his sides, before giving a short nod. "We kill you."

Silence quickly came over and the tension in the room was laid out like a thick blanket.

He broke the silence, "What must I do?"

"We will assign you a person. If you choose to let them be, you will face the consequences."

"If I kill?"

"You can leave or join, but speak no word of this brotherhood outside of this place or else you die."

He glared at the man. He knew it was wrong: killing was wrong, yet he agreed with a short nod.

"Who must I kill?"

The man smirked, then began filling him in on the details of his first target. When he was finished, he made a gesture with his hand. He narrowed his eyes at the man before a sack was put over his head. He suddenly felt drowsy and soon his eyes drooped shut.

After the days he was give to prepare, he soon found himself in the palace where the man he was to kill was located. And after successfully sneaking around corners and through a few aisles, he found himself in a room. His target, completely oblivious to him being there, continued to do whatever it was he was doing. He snuck up behind him and in one swift move, he turned his target around and held a short knife to his throat. The target looked terrified. One question was floating through his mind: **Do I go through with it, or do I not?**