

## Owen

The door opened. Good, I was getting tired of staring at the sheets of metal riveted into the door. Presumably put to stop people from digging at the wood. Like there was much chance of that, the oak was as hard as steel. I'd gotten a taste, once, when Roddy slammed my face into it after giving us a bit of exercise. He had to get us in shape for the sale. Fassogen the Puke Faced monster didn't want stale food, I suppose. Had to be something puke shaped under there, right? Why hide it with a mask otherwise.

Excercise didn't make much sense to me though. Maybe Roddy actually had a grain of heart left in him and he actually felt bad about what he was doing to an old comrade? Pfft. I must be delirious to be this stupid. Maybe Roddy just found it amusing somehow. Like we were a couple of old horse he was running around the corral.

Roddy thrust his way into the cell. "Well now. It's packing time. Get up boys!"

Without waiting he grabbed my arm and yanked me to my feet. Lemmy was able to stand on his own. His hands weren't shackled behind him.

"I know your still weak Owen boy. But I also know you." Roddy had said something like that when he had them hammered on a few days ago. My arms were absolutely killing me. I started off bad in this place, and now I was seriously concerned whether I'd ever be able to use them again. Were they still alive? Or just old rotting branches, stuck on a living body.

The grab and yank nearly made me pass out. I said, after breathing hard and catching my breath, I said, "You're a piece of work Roddy. Alright." I stared hard into his face, my eyes making promises I didn't think my body could actually keep.

"Hahaha, you got heart Owen, you always did! Shame about the fire ruining every meagre scrap you ever put together. You really thought that would be it? Haha. No my friend, It was always gonna be this way. You there, me here. Now, move!" He yanked me around by the arm again, my vision tunnelled, my head spun, and I stumbled into the corridor where his boys stood to take me on. Then he reached back grabbed Lemmy by the back of the neck and frog marched him out in front.

Roddy was grinning. Morning and Breeze actually looked a bit sheepish. This wasn't going to be good.

They led us down thin, short, stone lined corridors, we were under grade and then, there, before us was a small dock in a small gentle canal of water. It was evening. Daylight still dying purple and dark blue in the sky. Dark water lapped at the stone pier. Wooden piles protected it from a small boat that lay alongside.

"Watch this Owen!" Roddy said as he tripped up Lemmy with a foot and a thrust of his hand and Lemmy tumbled onto a bed sized frame covered with strong iron reinforced bands of hide.

"Remember these!" He yelled as he slammed the lid down on Lemmy, now trapped like a rat in between the pages and covers of a book. One frame of bands on either side, and then tied shut at the end. We used to use them when we caught elves, or anything else of similar interest. Guess he decided to put them to use here in his new mission. Mission? Job. Scheme. Whatever.

My anger consumed me, but my head blinded me and I took a stumbling step towards Roddy then fell. First to me knees, then flat on my face. In and out of blackness all I could hear was his mad laughter. Something was wrong with him, I thought. Something always had been, but there was something new, it's like he was breaking. I could barely grunt out the words, "you bastard..." as they threw me in the wrought iron capture frame next to Lemmy's and threw the lid down on me. And then I could barely breathe and....

## Lemmy

The men put us in the bow of the boat, strapped precariously to the gunwales, half of us each

hanging out over the water barely a foot away, and then a cloaked figure crawled up the gunwale and into the rowing seat. It was huge. Four rag covered arms took hold of four oars and we were off. Roddy and breeze shoving the boat away from the pier with their legs. Roddy still chucking himself, he yelled out and waved, "See ya later Owen, always a pleasure to meet my old mates!" Again more mad laughter and then we were out into the river.

I could hear the creature, steadily breathing, propelling us fast with powerful thrusts. I recognized where we were, and deduced where we had been. We were in Slough Bottom, and our prison must've been one of the workhouses.

By bits and bobs I was slowly able to move my head around to try and see Owen, in the contraption next to mine near my feet. Eventually, despite losing hair, and gaining a few new scrapes on a face already full of them I brought Owen into view.

I took a risk, breathing was hard, but it was still doable, and tried to say, "Owen are you alive?" I didn't get past his first name when an oar whacked powerfully onto me. Thankfully the thick leather bands and their iron plating acted as enough armour that it was not particularly damaging but it knocked the breath right out of me and I panicked as I tried to gain it back in this damn banded frame trap they put us in, it was a close run thing. The near suffocation drove a terror right into my brain, and I decided to stay silent.

No one pays attention to boats on the river after dusk. It's better not to, for most people. Mostly other dark shapes rowing past in the dark, or fishers with lights out to lure fish in. And the brassers, tariff men, patrolling, they still have to be avoided. Our boat however did not alter course except to avoid collision, no one glanced at us in our travels. Not once, let alone a second time. Like we were in an impenetrable mist, even though to me everything looked as it was supposed to be. I couldn't account for that.

We swung out onto the Sonts, closer to the East shore and then out across the wide Obbic, out in-between the great barges, plying up and down the river, even now at this dark hour. With dread I realized our destination, and soon that fear was confirmed we headed straight across to the Wastrials and up a canal in the shore. We were going to the Loveless, the infamous Lowvess Imperial Penance Dungeon. I've never heard of anyone leaving there, not even the dead...

## **Owen**

We'd been here a week... Kept in our own cell, again, but the guards have been trying to get us to recover. They all look like they were built by a Dun Rak mason, hard slabs of giant granite each one of them, and the faces to match.

You'd think a prison with this reputation would be noisy, scream, frantic. But we'd seen no one, nor heard nothing, place was like a silent tomb other than the occasional grunt from a guard when you didn't get their chin pointing message fast enough. After a while the guards did start talking to us, at least occasionally. They get bored too.

We got exercised in the yard. It was a huge expanse, the prison ran in a great ring of a building around it, in the centre there was a fat and short tower that looked like it was thousands of years old. Guards were in and out of it though, doing who knows what. I could only tell there were other prisoners because it was clear they were using the yard too. At least occasionally.

My arms felt like dead sacks of meat, but at least they weren't killing me with pain any more. Felt like something weren't quite right though. Still annoyingly tingly. I could start moving them again though, and the fingers too. And that's something, ain't it?

Turns out Lemmy was a stalwart companion when things came down to it. The capture racks disturbed him, I know that, he has nightmares, I probably would too if I'd been conscious. But one the guards told me how Lems badgered and harassed those unloading him till they finally got their on-base surgeon to have a look at me. I imagine I was pretty close to dead, since I was blacked out for three days. At least and some sort of work had been done on my arms. I got a whole nice new set of stitches

on each shoulder.

Lemmy may be skinny, but heart is was actually matters. Something Roddy never understood, and never will.

### **Lemmy**

A whole month and a half we'd been in the jail here. It wasn't till after the first week till we saw anyone but guards. Eventually though, they started letting the other prisons take exercise at the same time as us. I met some unique people out in the yard, and some absolutely frightening ones. Most though were prisoners that were problems for the rulers, not society. Which meant that there were all sorts here, and many more nobles than one would expect to find in a prison. That's one dark secret that seems to get kept. I suppose it's too much of an embarrassment and danger to admit your uncle or cousin was arrested in the middle of the night by the Imperial Guard.

The other guests led me to believe that the stay here was more or less a one way ticket. However such exits were not in the way one would expect, like at the end of a short rope or some other gruesome final prospect. They told me people do leave the prison, but not back to Vereign, or any place 'back in the world' as they put it. They weren't very clear on what happened or where, just 'down into the tunnels, you see.'

I think I made a good bet on Owen, despite our initial meeting. He's quite handy to have around the yard. Even in his weakened and damage state. It's his presence more than anything else. I think people respect him just as a being. He may not be talkative but he still knows how to manage to get along. I wasn't so worried about our safety in any case. Strangely this feels like one of the safest places one could be. The guards didn't tolerate anything remotely untoward, and the prisoners knew they had no future they could alter.

Anyhow, I had a guess where we would end up, because I knew something the rest of the prisoners did not. Our final destination was somewhere at the feet of that Fassogen character, with whom we had somehow got caught up with.

So when our turn to head into the tunnels came I was not surprised nor fearful. And, thank God, there was none of that business with the 'capture racks' as Owen keeps calling them.

### **Owen and Lemmy**

Owen and Lemmy were led into the Loveless tunnels. The tunnels were connected through some rather perilous physical backstops, including and inexplicable chasm underground to a facility just South of the Imperial prison. It was actually a relative hive of activity. That being 50 or so slaves doing various tasks And when they got there they were forced to join that activity. Leather rings riveted around their necks, with ropes that could be run up to rails or other fastening points. They joined the other slaves.

Neither Lemmy nor Owen could, at first, figure out the nature of where they found themselves, but it was immediately apparent, this was the last place anyone should end up. The air reeked of magic, and spilled fat. And Lemmy again saw the creature he said took them in the boat across the river. Here with no disguise to it's long, disturbingly human shaped limbs. It wore a mask similar to the one we had seen on Fassogen. When it came two slaves went with it and weren't seen again. A few day later two more replaced them.