

Solitaire (a true story)

The year was 1989. Can you remember what you were doing, where you were living, how was your life going? Its not that long ago for some of us.

Gabe had just been convicted of armed robbery & sentenced to seven years in jail.

She had to be processed by the system so they sent her to Napanee (a short-term correctional facility in southern Ontario) before moving her on to Kingston Penitentiary, (Canada's oldest & harshest prison) where a cell was waiting for her anticipated arrival.

The powers that be had decided she was a risk to herself & others. By this time her drug habit was out of control & her behavior was such they needed to get a handle on it before committing her to long term accommodation in Kingston.

They couldn't figure out if she was suicidal or just bat fuck crazy. They couldn't even figure out if she was a man or a woman. Gabe was Lenny, Lenny Gabe. The authorities couldn't grasp in their heads or institutions where all this led. Gabe was an anomaly. A freak of nature that didn't fit into any compartmentalized place in their world.

Truth be told she scared the shit out of them. In her manner she was kind & considerate, compassionate to others--but the truth was there—she had robbed a bank with a gun. She must pay for what she did. Why she did it was still a mystery. So, they classified her as a woman who acted like a man & sent her for assessment, like a dog to a cage.

She's suicidal they cried; don't trust her they lied. She's liable to crack at any time was said, don't turn your back, you don't know what she'll do. She's a danger to herself & a menace to others. She's the secret leader of a cult, she's just a little girl who's never grown up, she's scheming & conniving don't let her out of your sight for a minute. They dotted all the I's & crossed all the T's & signed the papers to get a grip on this girl.

Then they threw her into solitary confinement.

Of course, they took all her clothes & gave her a coarse horse haired flour sack to wear. No underwear, no bra, no panties, blank spank naked underneath. The sack reached down just below her crotch, sorta like a jailbird miniskirt, but this one was not being worn for style. No socks, no nothing for her head. Anything extra they figured she'd use to bring about her end.

She wasn't clear what was the issue. The last thing she had in mind was to kill herself. But they knew better. They knew if they were in similar circumstances they'd be better off dead. Her skinny little legs stuck out like sticks, her ice chilled feet feeling completely numb, popsicles as toes.

They gave her an eight-inch-thick piece of foam for a mattress. Just lay it right on the concrete floor they directed. This'll keep you comfortable like a queen they sneered. No blanket, no pillow, just her on a mat, flat on her back.

They never turned out the florescent light, creaking & crackling-like eyes of a witch; never knowing if it was day or night. Her only knowledge of time was the changing of the guard & them coming in each morning taking her meagre foam mattress away, making her stand or squat for the rest of the day.

Her mattress of course didn't keep out the cold damp she was imprisoned in. It offered no comfort at all; she might as well be sleeping on a damp concrete wall.

For her dining pleasure they offered bean cake twice a day. Shoved under the thick blank black door like a hockey puck. They were so dry & bland that she used the beans in them to play 'closest to the wall'.

The latrine was literally the floor. A series of metal grates at her feet. It was here she had to piss & squat to facilitate her excretions.

No belts, no rings, no anything which could be used by her as a weapon against her mortal being or as a threat to those who were seeing to her daily needs.

They didn't know! They suspected the worst. If she was allowed a trinket, she could cut out an eye, be it hers or one of theirs.

The toilet facilities were of course non-existent. The grill in the floor made her feel totally humiliated. The hygiene concerns couldn't have been worse. Every morning after they took her foam mattress, they sprayed the cell down with a high-powered hose. She would quiver like a frightened bird in a corner of her cell trying

to make herself invisible, as the powers that be asserted their authority with their great big hoses.

When the dowsing was done, they made her strip. Not that the flour sack covered much but it did offer the minimal decorum of modesty. But this was all set aside as the team of guards & there were always three & all male-- to enhance the degree of disgrace-- standing around while she disrobed the sack & they gave her a spray & another sack fresh off the rack.

This went on for days, possibly weeks. Time took on a trance. Each moment was the length of a finger nail, each movement from one foot to the other took up enough of her life that time was a dream of the past. To be bored was a luxury, this was something new she couldn't understand. It goes without saying it infiltrates your head like an army. The terror, the torture, could all be appealed. But for this isolation there was no defense, this was dangerous like a dagger. Cutting into your mind. Making you sublime, subhuman, wearing you down like a tiny piece of sand scratching until it breaks the skin.

The subtle pain of isolation is hard to explain. It has been a means of punishing -- those who we just can't stand, or understand—since the beginning of time. It has not lost any of its effectiveness. Whether you be at the bottom of a well, or cramped up in a cell. Your minds your only hope of release & it plays tricks on you; like a slow striptease. Breaking you down one grain at a time, until-- of you-- there is nothing left. A shell to the world, empty like a vacuum waiting for something to come along & replace what was there before.

You remember what you previously forgot. Everything fills your head with dread of dead; yours & everyone else's. For some romantics it makes you think of what great thoughts could be thought in your isolated world. For others of a more practical vein, it could be the tipping point that drives you insane.

The sheer horror of your situation is overwhelming. You remember you were once free & now all you've got, is to squat & pee through some metal grate in the floor.

What happened, how did it all come to this. The fear of the unknown smothers you like a blanket which provides no warmth.

The routine, the time, the essence of life becomes the only thing you can count on to exist. The movement through your own body of the beancake is the only indication you are still alive.

Why were they doing this to me. Sure, I had robbed a bank with a gun, but it had all been in fun; I didn't shoot anyone. Surely no one took me seriously. I was whacked when I did it, what was the big deal. I wasn't crazy, I wasn't dangerous. I was a party girl who got a little bit carried away. They're the crazy ones for locking me up alone in here. Trying to torture me; for what? I have no secrets; I carry no knowledge which could be of any use to anybody. I was as sane as any one of them, why was I the one getting punished like a heretic during the Spanish inquisition.

Long days & longer nights, ticking by one thought at a time. Her whole being shaking in fright from the cold infiltrating her bones, like in a slow freeze. The feeling of cold, like an Arctic explorer looking for the pole without a tent. Standing, icicles dripping from his beard, as he gazes into the vastness of the absolute unknown. Gabe's gaze of course restrained by-- icy to the touch-- concrete cell walls. So, she had the cold without the view.

The draining dampness of her situation brought on an eternal shiver. At times she couldn't stop shaking. It did divert her mind from her desperation. Taking from her mind any sense of living & focusing on just striving to survive. The constant shaking jellied her bones. Her toes froze, her fingers numb. The lower part of her back feeling like it was a piece of meat in the freezer at a Dairy Queen.

They finally asked if she wanted to see a psychiatrist. They felt they had beaten her down to such a degree, that they had her now like a fish thoroughly hooked. Lying helpless in the boat, flippers flapping. Eyes bulging in absolute fear.

But she wasn't beaten. She sure enough was damn mad. Her anger & hatred was brewing like a typhoon picking up water over the sea. Ready to rage complete chaos upon the unsuspecting human species.

When she saw the shrink, he asked her what he could do for her-- like a hotel clerk. She was sitting on a wooden chair on the other side of his government standard desk. Still in her flour sack, she couldn't stop shaking. Guard waiting outside the door. The gaze from her eyes would have frozen the devil himself. The

psychiatrist totally missed it. He had other patients to see & diverted his eyes back to the papers on his desk. He wrote something down with a fancy pen. It took the power of all the demons in Hades for her not to jump his desk & savagely rape him with that fucking pen. Fuck him up bad. The thought crossed her mind like a strong breeze across a flat pond. She let it pass with the first smile she'd had in weeks. At least for that flash she'd got back some power, something that was only hers to think.

Instead of jumping the desk & raising a stink, she reached out for something simple,

'I need a blanket,' she said, like Oliver asking for another helping of gruel at the wayward home for youths.

The shrink put down his pen, lowering his glasses, he looked up absent mindedly from his papers.

'That can be arranged, dismissed,' he snarled like her presence was disturbing him; cutting into his me time. He pushed a button hidden under his desk, alerting the guard to come & get her.

I sat there in shock. My mind frozen in disbelief, my body was still shivering. That was it, you gotta be kidding, fuck em then. Not that I had any high hopes when I first heard I was going to see a psychiatrist. But I had a spark of hope he might be able to help me in some way. Certainly, I expected more than just getting me a blanket. What is he a fucking maid.

The psychiatrist was really not an ogre. He'd been around for too long & seen them coming & going. His was not a healing practice. His was a practice of convenience. He had no inclination to become attached to the convict's solitary situation. His job was to see & assess. Make a note that the convicts been seen & offered assistance. This was all that was needed to cover the asses of those in a higher pay bracket than his. Those, who made the decision to legalize this form of barbaric incarceration-- needed it recorded-- in case the convict somehow managed to harm themselves or others. We did all we were legally obligated to do-- they'd tell --you-- the public-- we followed procedure, give us more money.

So, the guards took her back to her cell. Not a hint of concern could she feel from the vacant blank stare in their eyes. They pushed her through the door & told her –sarcastically-- stay well.

After an hour or a day or a period of time undefined, the cell door cracked. A thin blanket, no more than a sheet, was silently tossed into her solitary cell.

She wrapped it like a shawl around her bony shoulders. Disappointed it was so small it didn't even drop down to cover her legs. The material was a thin cotton fabric. It looked like they'd just got it off a sleeping mat in the guard's common room; where they went for a nap during their breaks.

She shivered no less. She quivered in fear, was this her fate to freeze to death right here. In this devil's den, where the air was thick with urine & shit. No windows to see the sun, the floor sloppy wet from the condensation, the walls mocking her fragile frame; her never to be the same. How in the world was she to survive.

She paced.

Finally slumping down in a corner of the cell, knees to chin. Eyes hollow black, her body going thin. What the hell happened she thought again, how can somebody do this to me she cried. She started shaking uncontrollably. The harder she shook the harder she held onto her knees, till she felt like she was transforming back into time when all was primeval; nothing was one. All that was everything that existed were hydrogen atoms crashing into one another & she was lost in the collision chaos of evolution. All she could feel was like she was in a freefall; to where who cared.

She was going crazy. She had nothing to grasp, her mind was out of control, with unsolicited imagination of the worst kind. She felt like each cell in her body was on ice burning with fire. She had no mind, no past, no present, no future.

She lost her grip on her knees & tumbled over onto the floor, lying like a fetus in the womb. She was in a cage of razor blades for bars, closing in, coming at her in a furious frenzy, slicing her up one piece of skin at a time. Her eyes were going blind. She lost control of her bladder just as her consciousness stepped in to save her; she passed out.

She didn't know how long she was gone. To a world of black, no dreams here, just vacant voids. To dream would be an insult to the emotional pain which existed within. To dream, to hope, just made her a dope. More despair for the drain, where a deluge of self expression & freedom remained.

She came back from that empty hell. Back into her body, back into her cell. More determined than ever that whatever they threw at her she'd catch & throw back. She wasn't going to lose her beauty of being free & alive. Even though she was caged like a beast & existed on bean cakes & shit through a grill & wore a horse haired gunny sack which barely covered her crotch, augmented by a thread bare shawl that just made things worse. Her determination cemented, her strength to survive fermented.

After another few days of sheer horror, the walls had started getting wider. Her mind became a breeze blowing everything astray. A scented mint mist-- caressing as a kiss-- bringing her relief during the day, that this will all go away.

But it didn't & the guards, all three, watched her like a hawk all day & night, preventing her from physical flight & harming herself. They started to notice the blank stares in her eyes & her body sombre like a statue frozen cold in ice.

They all watched—all three men—as each day she disrobed her sack & washed herself down with the dirty cloth they provided. Realizing now the hose was just a little bit much they opted for a more delicate touch. So, as she wiped, they watched & waited. Her shame should've showed-- but fuck em she thought-- as she cleaned her crotch & the hair growth underneath her arms. Then turning around & displaying a moon as she for a last, wiped the crack in her ass.

She's gone over the edge they concluded. It was decided to give her a bible.

Now this is supposed to be the point in the story where the heavens opened up, a sign was sent from above; redemption was at hand. The mind finding peace & a past life was resolved. All was forgiven & she would see the futility in resistance & give her soul over to the lord.

Well in real life it doesn't quite work that way. Gabe flipped through the bible pages as a distraction to her misery. The bean cakes kept coming, her cell getting even colder (if that was possible) & horror of horror she was getting used to the stink.

The soothing verses of a two-thousand-year-old book were anything but. The mysteries & exaggerations & the who begot who, were just worthless words to a mind already mad; that if there really was a God --up there-- how could it allow to exist, this misery she was forced to endure to subsist--down here. Any God anywhere had forsaken her a long time ago. The proof was in the pudding of this miserable cell & tortured life that was punishing her. God might exist for the enlightened she thought, but these are just people walking peacefully on the sidewalk avoiding the cracks. For ones like Gabe, she liked to step on the cracks, like walking a highwire. The reality of such an omnipotent being just doesn't fit into the mould of the life she's living.

So, fuck em for thinking they can just give me this trash & I'll kiss their ass. Start thinking like them & believing in an entity which has never done a damn thing for me, except bring me pain & shame.

She threw the pages down through the grill stained in shit. Stuffing them in after she ripped them out & used them to wipe her bum. Printed words from genesis, john & psalms floating away underneath in streams of piss.

The whole bible thing made her mad. Brought back the hate which had been set aside by desperation & humiliation. This hate she knew. It felt familiar. It gave her a line to live her life. She pulled herself up slowly through the abyss of hell where she'd been surviving & started to swell with the renewed invigoration of bringing this familiar feeling-- of hating all things straight-- back into her existence.

This was the true reason for her surviving this ordeal. She'd renewed her hate, brushed the dust off, like on an old duvet sitting silent on the couch. Her blood started warming & her brain started storming the restrictions imposed. They were all just physical impositions that she would overcome, because she truly sincerely hated them all.

Fuck you she started screaming in a meditative chant, sitting like a buddha in the middle of her cell. She repeated this mantra forever, or at least until she fell over asleep. The next day when she woke, she started up doing it all over again.

Outside her cell the guards were changing shift. 'Anything going on,' one asked the other. 'No everything's quiet,' was the stark response.
