

# Statue

I stand, as I always have, above the Vltava river in the city of a hundred spires. The old, sturdy stone bridge that is dedicated to King Charles IV has provided me with a place to rest my feet for as long as I can remember. The famed Clementinum lies to the right of me and the Church of Saint Nicholas a few ways to my left. This bridge of mine is very popular in that there are many passersby that I see every day. I see so many of them each day that they all start to look the same to me.

It is hard to put to words the feelings I have when I look at these people, almost as if it was a feeling of longing, of jealousy. It makes me think of the wonderful lives they all must live, lives that all intertwine for a single moment as they walk across this bridge of mine. Thoughts of their lives quickly turn into thoughts of mine, yet the folds of my brain are unable to come up with a history for me, let alone a future. But, I think, at least I have the freedom of thought and a pair of eyes to observe these people with and think of all the marvelous adventures they must go on after they leave this stony pathway behind.

At the very least I can watch the ducks that swim ever so peacefully along the river and I do soak it in as much as I can until my despair catches up to me. I say despair because deep within me I feel this yearning for a life like the people before me. I do not know why as it clearly has not been meant for me yet still I remain hopeful despite this unmovable, unbreakable husk within which I lie, trapped and alone.

Before I was first placed upon the pedestal I now stand on, I have very fond memories of the trip here. It took eight men to carry me so I must be quite heavy even though I feel it not myself. On the way here to the Charles Bridge, I was carted through the old town. It has been long since I saw it last and I can only dream of how beautiful it must have become over all these years. Indeed, dreaming is all that I can do and it is how I keep myself busy during the seemingly endless nights and days of motionlessness.

I do have friends that stand beside me, they have been carved into images of various saints of times past, few of which I even recognize! Saint Francis Xavier, the missionary known as the Apostle of Japan, Saint Ludmila who was a local saint and Saint Ivo of Kermartin, the patron saint of lawyers and abandoned children. These people, long dead, have been my dearest friends during these long, dreary years. Although they cannot speak out loud, I like to pretend to hear what they are saying and have endless conversations with them. Every morning, I wish them well and inquire about their night as when it gets dark I cannot see them. Every morning they answer, albeit in my mind, and these daily conversations are a part of what keeps me hoping for better days.

There are times where I wonder what I am, but as I am unable to come up with a realistic or satisfying answer, I tend to stay wary of subjects like these. This does not deter my friends who like to tease me and ask me about it constantly. In times like those I like to shift my gaze to the calming waters of the Vltava and observe the ducks and boats that float by and just be thankful for at least being alive, unlike my stone-faced friends who have been gone for long enough for people that pass by to talk about their deeds in ages past.

I do have some theories as to why I feel like I do, trapped and helpless, and I attribute it to the strange pain I feel. This constant, dull, gray pain in the crease of my elbow and I find it very curious as I have never had pain anywhere else on my body yet it is always there. It is this pain, however, that keeps distracting my thoughts and drawing them towards theories in which I am alive just like the people who walk by me each day, but deep down I know it cannot be true. If I was a person, how could I still be alive after all these years? It simply makes no sense. Perhaps I am a saint myself, or maybe the soul of one that trapped in this miserable shell made of rock.

I have never eaten anything or drank anything and I have no feelings of hunger, thirst or any other biological need. I also have never smelled anything during all of my existence. Despite all of these things, I still have memories of all of them. I remember the creamy taste of Kulajda with mushrooms and vinegar, I remember the soft, earthy flavor of Pilsner Urquell and most importantly I remember the smell that would experience standing on this very bridge. I cannot explain why I have these memories as I have no context for them. I do not know when I would have had these experiences but I do have a memory of their properties.

There are times where I want to scream as loud as I can yet I cannot. There are times when all I want is to hear someone speak to me. Sometimes there actually is a person who stops right before me, looks me directly in the eye and says something with a smile, yet I cannot hear it. If I could shed even one tear, my eyes would constantly be overflowing as I replay my distant memories of having these senses I no longer have, or perhaps have never had. I feel resigned to existing like this, confined solely within my own mind, unable to call for help and unable to even be recognized as a cognitive being.

As during most of my nights, I do not sleep. In fact, I cannot be certain if I do sleep at all as days and nights blend together in an endless stream of people and lights flashing before my eyes. If I do sleep then I do not dream as I have no recollection of anything out of the ordinary that could be attributed as a product of a resting brain. So instead, I stand here in my spot on this bridge I was carted to many years ago, guarding it tirelessly. I have witnessed theft, kidnappings, even murder, but each and every time I have been unable to do anything at all except watch as these horrors unfold before me. I know every detail of each of these wrongdoers as I keep swirling their faces and actions around in my mind during the long days and nights. If only I could hop off this pitiful pedestal and search for help, but I cannot.

This day in particular has been pleasantly uneventful. No tragedies have taken place at least on the Charles Bridge and as that is all I can see, that is all I worry about. There was a young man who walked past me like he does most days, but today something extraordinary happened. As he went to pass me by, he slowed down and turned his head towards me, as if he could hear me somehow. I stared at him, begging for him to talk to me or free me of my misery, but he was just staring at me, completely still now. I am no expert in reading lips as I have had no opportunities for practicing but I could swear he mouthed "Otec", father with a questioning look on his face. A few moments passed by that felt like an eternity, until he shook his head with a melancholic half-smile decorating his face before continuing on with his tasks for the day.

That night my thoughts were disturbed by a figure that I could barely recognize as a man in the dimly-illuminated darkness. He came extremely close to me, where if I could feel or hear I could have done so with his breathing. My eyes started to see areas I had not seen in years and years and I felt extremely dizzy as the ground came closer and closer in my vision. The evenly placed stones turned into finer gravel at the seam of the bridge as my eyes raced along the ground. I felt so free but could not help but be afraid of what was going on. Feelings of freedom turned into panic as I was rolled around so my face was pointing at the night sky. I had never seen this much of the beautiful star-speckled canvas and in a sea of distress there was a short period of awe.

Suddenly, I saw multiple faces looking down at me but their features were all blackened by the shadows in the night. The roofs on the buildings in the edge of my vision started to pass by and new ones would appear. I was moving! But where was I moving to and who were these people who were helping me move? I started to feel anxious about this situation as I had no way of knowing where I was being taken to. I remember some of my friends being vandalized by being covered with toilet paper and clothes, or had their toes or fingers chipped out. Perhaps these were vandals who aimed to hide me away to cause commotion. Either way, I felt scared but slightly excited to see new parts of my beloved city.

I was lifted onto a platform that I assumed to be a cart, as all I could see now was the starry night sky that was partly covered with gray clouds. I slowly counted the minutes that passed by and after thirty of them had passed my cart stopped as all trees and buildings were now still in my vision. I was lifted off the cart and carried inside a building. My eyes were pointed at the ground now but I noticed the lighting change drastically and it was now as bright as day so I must have been inside somewhere. The ground also changed into a floor made of cement that looked gray, cold and somehow uninviting. All joy of being taken away dissipated and all I could feel now was fear, yet I could not call for help or even turn around to see who was carrying me and could only think of what would happen to me.

I was pushed upward and I could now see that I was inside an old barn but there was no hay or animals, instead shelves with strange equipment made of metal, glass and plastic on them that littered the scene. Out of a door on the right end of my view came an official-looking man, dressed in a long white coat, like a doctor would be. He looked at me and gave me a wide, toothy grin, revealing his perfectly white teeth. On his nose rested a pair of glasses, blocky in shape and they enlarged his eyes to unnatural size. His hair was an even brown, combed to both sides with a partition in the middle. He gave me a look that I could

only interpret as friendly and kind and I could feel my mind calming down as I told myself that he would be my savior and he would break this cast I've been trapped within.

He tried to speak to me but I could not understand him. However I felt comforted by the way he was expressing himself with his posture and hand movements. Then he turned around and walked to a shelf at the end of the room, picked up what looked like a chisel and a sturdy hammer and turned to walk back towards me. This is it, I will finally be free, I thought to myself as the man went to work. Multiple minutes passed and the man was out of my view but my vision kept shaking periodically and rhythmically so I knew he was chipping away at me. I felt no pain or anything at all as time passed by.

Before long my vision went dark and then all became clear again and the man was holding a head, my head, in his hands. He showed it to me and I panicked but he calmed me down with his words. His words! I could hear! I understood him perfectly but when I tried to speak, nothing came out. I could not even feel my mouth moving. I thought to myself, what am I if what he is holding is not my actual head. The man told me not to worry and that it would all be over soon and I could go back to my life. All I could think of was what my life would be now, what would I do, I only knew the bridge and my duty to protect it. Before my imagination was let wild completely, I was interrupted by this man who now told me he would put me to sleep so he could remove the rest of my "other skin" as he called it. I looked at him, begging in my mind not to do it as I wanted to experience it all and be ready to walk away from it all, but suddenly my vision started fading to darkness.

As a bright source of light shined into my eyes right above me, I realized that I was now awake and swiped my eyes with my hands. I froze in place as it dawned on me what I had just done. I moved the hands further from my face and looked at them. They were extremely pale and thin and covered in little dark hairs on one side and visible blue veins on the other. They followed my orders and there was no mistake, these were my hands. I slowly started to move other parts of my body and soon I realized I had all the limbs that a whole person should have and that I could move my head and neck to look in different directions. I tried to speak but nothing came of it and my sense of smell was nonexistent. I had no time to mourn though, as I was far too busy with moving my toes, my fingers, my arms and legs. As I was flailing my arms around and watching them in awe with a zany grin on my face, I noticed a bruise on the crease of my elbow. This is the same arm I've had pain in during my entire existence. From the bruise I could see a tube coming out with a needle stuck into a vein in my arm. The tube led to a bag of fluid that was not labeled in any way but the liquid was transparent with a slight hint of brown color. I thought it must be medicine of some sort to help with the pain as it had dissipated almost completely now.

I tried to get up but I was unable to do so and I assumed it was because even though I could move my limbs around, they were much too weak to actually hold any weight. I was not too disturbed by this though, as with time I could train myself to walk and talk and do all the things I've always dreamed of. I was mesmerized with my new-found abilities and hours must have passed as the small window in the otherwise empty room gave out less and less light as time went on. Strangely enough I still did not feel hungry or thirsty or in need of anything else. I was very much content in getting accustomed with my body.

As the night crept up on me, I could finally hear footsteps in the room next to mine and I turned my head towards the only door in my current room as it opened slowly and in came my savior who looked less happy to see me than yesterday. I gave him a big smile but still I was unable to speak even though I could move my lips. The man walked close to me and told me that today I will be going back home. Before I could question where home was, he explained that my place was on that bridge and I should get back as soon as possible in case something happens there. I could feel a shiver go down my entire body as I froze in fear.

The man's true nature started to show through his facial expressions as they became madder and madder as he kept describing how he would sedate me with an intravenous drip, consisting of a plethora of different chemicals, none of which I can remember anymore due to the blood pounding loudly in my ears, in addition to my head that kept spinning in confusion and fear, making it difficult to hear. These chemicals would lead to me being unable to hear or move anymore, just like before. And just like before, he would again cast me into an unmoving, expressionless statue. In his words, this would free me from being a slave to my emotions just like he is to his. He tells me that he is my savior and that I should be

thanking him for keeping me away from all the evil in this world of ours. If I could muster up the words I would curse him and demand to be set free and tell him what an amalgamation of evil and insanity he is.

He then went on to explain in excruciatingly intricate detail the process he went through when he first captured me when I was younger and then experimenting on me to find the perfect balance of chemicals to keep me sedated but still conscious. These details that he conveyed to me I do not want to repeat or even think about as doing so would only make all of this seem real. Up until now I have been telling myself that all of this is just a dream, much like those strange lucid dreams I would have on my bridge before snapping back into reality. Thinking about it brought me a strange feeling of hope, that at any point now I would blink my eyes and see the blue, slowly moving water of the great river and my friends on my sides and opposite of me. However, the more time passed the less I was convinced that this was all a dream. As this crazed man kept looking into my eyes while his mouth flapped on and on about his deranged ideas of being my savior and doing me a favor, all I wanted to do was purge the contents of my stomach if the muscles required to do so worked, but all I could do was lie on the cold examination table in horror as the man told me what he was going to do to me before getting to work.

As the man started the process of wrapping me in a sheet of plastic, preparing me for my new "skin" as he called it, I couldn't help but wonder of my old life and why I could not remember anything of it. The man told me he kidnapped me when I was younger, but how young exactly? How long was I allowed to live my life until it was taken from me for some deranged, mad experiments of a clearly unstable man? All I wished for right now was the ability to remember even a small bit of my previous, normal life but nothing came of it. Next, the man and the other people who were, for some inexplicable reason, helping him, lifted me up inside a cast and started pouring cement between me and the cast, slowly filling up my eternal cage and most likely resting place after my soul leaves this cursed world.

I noticed the pain on my arm had dissipated but I was not sure if it was due to the man experimenting with another mixture until I noticed I could move my arm again. It was then that I noticed that the drip was not attached anymore; it must have dropped while these fools were lifting me! I mustered all the strength I had in me and was aided with an enormous surge of adrenaline that filled my blood and lifted my arm up and grabbed one of the men who were now just looking at me and laughing pitifully. I wanted to snap his neck right then and there and managed to move and grab on with my other hand as well. All this happened in an instant that felt much longer due to the adrenaline in my system, but I could squeeze this man's throat with all the gripping strength my hands still possessed and I could see him struggling as the other men approached me to stop me, but I could hear the crazed experimenter order them to halt. I could hear him cackling and admiring my efforts as the man I was choking turned red in the face, then purple, then gray as the light in his eyes shut off and I could feel his body go limp as his consciousness moved on to eternity. For a moment I could not move my hands as I was so tensed up in rage but once I realized what I had done, I let go and the man's lifeless body collapsed on the ground.

I could feel a single tear form in the corner of my eye and gently slide down along my face as the man approached me and grabbed my hands by the wrists so I could not fight back. This single feat of enormous strength had drained me completely and I was gasping for breath, too weak to fight back and I could not help but listen, helpless, as the man congratulated me on attempting to get justice but it would be in vain and that now was the time to go back. He apologized for the drip falling off and being so careless to not notice it and assured me that everything would go smoothly from now on. My rage built up more and more but it was no use, the man was incredibly strong. This madman kept talking and finally he said that he would help ease my pain by wiping my memory clean with his new mixture before putting me back into my place. After he was put the drip back into the crease of my elbow I could see everything slowly fading to darkness as my blurred mind had a final thought of terror. What if my loyal friends on the bridge had suffered the same fate as me, what if we were all victims of this horrid man? I screamed out in my head, trying to fight this feeling of utter exhaustion that was forcing my eyes shut but it was no use, my mind was drifting into darkness and I could not fight it.

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