

How Long?

How long had it been since I'd been home?

Three years? Perhaps four? It couldn't have been five, could it? No, not that long. Five years ago I would have been getting home from work and hugging my wife. My daughter would have been sitting in the kitchen... or was it the living room? She always sat in the same chair, but where was it...?

Well nevertheless, she would have gotten up and given me a hug, as she did every day.

I wonder if she still sits in that chair. Doubtful - one thing I do remember is that she welcomed change, and she loved to remodel. She would have a new chair now. The old chair, along with the memories of her sitting in it would be long discarded. Out with the trash, as they say.

I wonder how much had changed. Maybe they didn't even live in the same house or the same town. I hope they had gone, perhaps they realized something had gone wrong and they'd left... but again, doubtful.

The sound of a door opening shook me back to reality. My eyes opened to stare at a cold dark ceiling. There was a light hanging over my head, but it was turned off. The bindings made my legs ache, but it was a constant pain that I had grown accustomed to. The metal cuffs binding my wrists to the wooden table bit into my skin, causing old wounds to reopen and start to bleed, but I barely felt it. Once more, something I had grown used to.

Footsteps echoed down the hall. I felt the vibrations through the floor as he marched closer to my room. And yes, I knew it was a he because I could tell the difference between the guard's footsteps. There were 3 of them, one female and two males. Today's guard was the younger male. The lightest, which was how I distinguished him from the others. The door opened, and the lights slammed on. I felt the familiar rush of heat as the scorching lamp shone down.

I always did forget to appreciate the night's cool air. By the end of the day I would be sweating and burnt from the lamp.

The heat reminded me of the hot summer days back home. When we would go to the park... or was it at our cottage...?

Wait, it couldn't have been at home because it never got that warm... or did it in the summer?

I closed my eyes again and sighed. My biggest fear, even after everything I'd been through was not the pain, or what might happen to me in the end if I continued to refuse them. My biggest fear was that the shocks would take a toll on my mind, and my mental state.

For the past few years I have been held hostage by an internal terrorist group that is an immediate threat to my country. I worked for the FBI before I had been captured, and I knew information that could turn the tables on my government. I spent the first year assuming that I would be rescued, until I discovered that the FBI didn't even know I had been captured. A sympathetic guard told me the story of how I had been caught... and it cost him his life. He told me that a letter of resignation had been sent to

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my office, and a note had been left for my family. The note said that I was leaving, and I didn't know when I would be coming back.

I hope they didn't believe it, but truth be told, they had no reason not to. I was at work far too often to have been a good husband and father, and at work the stress had been so much I had confided to an FBI psychologist that I had considered leaving it all behind. Not that I ever truly would have left... but the thought of spending time with my family had been nice to ponder. However, as much as I regret it, my work had been my life, and they know that it's a life I would rather give up than tell the enemy what they needed to know.

I have spent at least 3 years being tortured for information. They started off easy, assuming that a simple beating would force me to talk, but I stood strong. They then turned to weapons, like knives and hammers. I won't give you the details, but let's just say I have a few less extremities, and a few more scars than when I was taken. Even through that, I held strong, for the safety of my family, and my country. They used a variety of ways to attempt to make me talk, but when they failed time and time again, they turned to a more consistent form of torture.

I have spent over a year strapped to this table. I am allowed off for 10 minutes a day, and during those ten minutes I am allowed to walk and move. However, after spending so much time in the same position, the act of walking is almost unbearable.

I receive 1 meal a day. I do not know what it is that they feed me. Only that it tastes worse than it smells, and I'm sure it is not meant to be eaten.

I spend approximately 5 hours a day with electrodes attached to my skull, and the guards will ask me questions. When I refuse to answer, electric shocks are sent through my brain. It is the worst pain I have ever experienced, but of course I do not tell them what they need to know. Instead I picture my wife and my little girl, and how much safer their lives are, so long as I keep my mouth shut.

And though this, of course is hard to deal with, the fact that the memory of my wife and daughter fades further and further away each day, is harder than all else. Their faces get a little more blurred, and even their names a little harder to remember. The shocks have been affecting my memory, and I fear that one day I will forget why I keep my mouth shut all together.

I feel metal pressed to my skull, as the guard sticks on the electrodes.

"First question: what is your FBI system access code?" the guard demands. My mouth remains shut, and the volts are sent surging through my body. I convulse on the table, until it stops. He repeats the question.

Beads of sweat start on my forehead, and the tiredness already begins to set in. I attempt to retreat into my mind as the next surge of electricity shocks my body.

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I picture my house, my home, and my family inside it. The walls are still clear, but the photos hanging on them are blurry. My wife and daughter smile at me, but I know that their smiles are not the same as they had been. I think back on their voices, their movements, and the way that they would laugh. It all suddenly seems just out of reach. I wish I could recapture the memories I'd lost.

What I wouldn't give to see them again - it had been much too long. Three years? Perhaps four..?

Remind me, how long has it been since I'd been home?

TEST CLOSED APRIL 15TH, 2019