

The Last Day In the Life of a Passionate Roman Animal Keeper

By E. Sadler

As I looked into his eyes, he let out a strangled noise that was so horribly defeated and wretched that it seemed to lacerate my very being. The din of calls that filled the air seemed to pause, and all I could do was watch as his legs buckled beneath him and then listen to the sound of his body crumpling to the ground. All I could do was watch because a wall of metal stood between us. All I could do was watch, for he was a lion. All I could do was watch, because I was a man.

But it was in that moment that I asked myself, how could any *man* call himself a man when his task day in and day out is to starve animals who have no way to stop it and even less of a say in the matter. How could anyone be okay with the idea of chaining a hyena to a zebra and letting them loose in an arena of killers so that a bloodthirsty, malicious crowd can cheer as they're ripped to pieces? These beautiful, beautiful creatures. They're dying by the thousands. Oh, how I want to help them but what can I do? I have to starve them. I have to watch them die.

I knelt before him, looking through the bars.

"I am sorry, *leo*, I am sorry."

His massive head rested on the stone floor. He was so thin that I could see his rib cage poking through his matted fur. The air was thick with the scent of big cats having marked their territories. The more I looked at him, the more I realized that I had to do something. Then I remembered having seen a bucket of some sort of meat on my way in this morning.

I began making my way back to where I'd seen it through the dimly lit tunnels, nodding to other keepers and passing dozens of cages holding animals of all regions of the world in all colors of the rainbow. I finally found it, right where I'd seen it, and breathed a sigh of relief when I had the handle in my grasp. I started back with the meat.

"Cameric!" Came a call from behind me, and I felt my blood run cold as I realized who had said my name, he made his way over to end up walking at my side, and soon we were back at the lion's cage.

The other keepers and I had always talked about our block leader who seemed to really enjoy his job. A few of the others recalled seeing him kicking wounded animals, and rumor had it that he even watched fights in the Colosseum above us and placed bets.

"You thought you could feed them?" He questioned, and his voice seemed to drip with malevolence.

"I uh, yes, yes, I was just he-" I stuttered.

"Don't let me stop you then. As you were."

In one fluid motion, he whipped the door of the lion's cell open and I was thrust inside. I was caught up thinking that I'd never been this close to any living thing quite this large.

As I looked into his eyes, all I could do was let out a strangled howl. All other noises seemed to pause, and I saw the cold, emotionless look in his steely orbs as he tore into me. My legs buckled beneath me, and I crumpled to the ground. I couldn't even watch. I was dead.