Lodging In The Night

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Abstract

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So this is hell. Mr. Tyro stood in front of the polished desk and stared unbelievingly at his pale reflection in the mirror on an adjoining wall. Thoughts of the night before stormed through his mind; men of wealth, of poverty, drunkards and clergymen—screaming as they descended lower and lower into hell. Hell, with its torture, its agony.

When would the torment begin? Mr. Tyro stood uneasily on the soft carpet and felt himself sinking deeper into fear and uncertainty. What was behind that pale, beige wall? How soon would he be joining the other damned souls of eternity?

"Make yourself comfortable, Mr. Tyro. Satan will be with you soon." The puppet-like intruder turned and walked silently over the plush carpet.

Mr. Tyro felt hot and uncomfortable. Little droplets of sweat formed on his forehead and he clumsily scattered them with the sleeve of his jacket. At any moment the fear of hell would be a reality. He could feel his face tighten and his throat swell, as he stood waiting—waiting.

Why didn’t someone scream at him, beat him, tell him what a miserable mortal he had been? Somebody do something—do anything. The silence, the silence—.

"Mr. Tyro, I’m sorry I kept you waiting; but then again, what’s a little waiting in eternity?"

Satan walked slowly behind his desk, eased himself into a big, overstuffed chair and looked up at Mr. Tyro with a
sarcastic smile. His spectacles were supported by a pair of soft, sagging cheeks, and his hair grew in fuzzy little clumps on the side of his pinkish head.

“What is your opinion of hell, Mr. Tyro? Is it about what you expected?”

Mr. Tyro remained silent; the pulse in his temple continued to throb with a monotonous hum.

“No, of course not, Mr. Tyro.” Satan stuffed his soft, effeminate hands in his vest pockets and slouched further into his chair.

“You were expecting to spend eternity squatting in hot coals and gagging on suphurous fumes. Humph, humph, humph,—. It’s too bad our reputation has been warped so, by a few neurotic poets.”

“What is hell, Satan? What’s going to happen to me?”

“We’re quite proud of our whole system, Mr. Tyro.” Satan adjusted his glasses and stared directly at Mr. Tyro as he spoke. “I can tell you what’s going to happen, but hell is something you must discover for yourself.”

“Tell me everything, Satan. Tell me—I’ve got to know.”

“It’s very simple, Mr. Tyro. You will be shown to your room. Shortly, another soul will be sent to reside with you.” Satan moved forward in his chair, and looked intently at Mr. Tyro. “It’s up to you to decide if you wish to live alone throughout eternity, or with the soul we select. The choice is yours, Mr. Tyro.”

“How long will I have? How will I let you know?”

“You will be told at the appropriate time. Boy, show Mr. Tyro to his room.”

Mr. Tyro followed the puppet-like figure through a door and down a narrow hallway to an open elevator. A single red light threw a mystical glow on the silent figures as they were swiftly drawn up the shaft. The room, what would it be like? Fourth floor, what kind of soul would be sent to him?

Eighth floor. The elevator door opened and Mr. Tyro was led down a well-lighted hall and into an open room. The door closed; he was alone.

A mahogany table with a vase of artificial flowers, a sofa, and a hard-back chair were the only pieces of furniture in the small room.

Mr. Tyro slouched on the sofa, and massaged his fore-
head with feverish palms as he attempted to focus his thoughts.

"Can this be hell? An eternity alone, without seeing or hearing another soul — this must be hell. Sitting on a comfortable sofa throughout eternity — staring at a blank wall? Oh God, a blank wall, four blank walls."

Mr. Tyro buried his head in his arms and sank into the softness of the cushions. How long was eternity? Memories of his wife, Marie, came back to him, and he tried to burrow deeper into the cushions. How trusting she had been! How had she taken his death?

The door clicked, and Mr. Tyro sat up and stared at an image exactly like his own. Neither spoke, but each continued staring at the other. They were handsome men—clean shaven and tall. They continued to view each other suspiciously.

"So this is hell."

The figure spoke and walked closer; his eyes inspected the few pieces of furniture and came to rest on the artificial flowers.

"My name is Mr. Harbinger. Who are you?"

"My name is Mr. Tyro." Tyro continued to stare at the figure. Harbinger looked so much like himself—the way he walked, his movements, the sound of his voice. It was like approaching himself in a giant mirror.

"Are you the soul who is to stay with me?" Mr. Tyro asked with obvious disbelief.

"Yes, I'm the soul."

Mr. Harbinger sat down on the sofa and massaged his forehead with his fingers.

"There must be more to hell than this, Tyro. What's going to happen to us?"

"We will be together for eternity. Think how much better that will be than spending eternity alone."

Harbinger began thumping his fingers on the arm of the sofa—as Tyro often did while thinking. The drumming annoyed Tyro, but he said nothing. They seemed so much alike.

"Mr. Harbinger, if we're to endure eternity together, we must become friends. Tell me about yourself?"

"You remind me so much of myself, Mr. Tyro."

He wondered what Harbinger had done on earth. At least Tyro had worked in a good solid occupation as teacher.
The pay wasn’t high, but he had lived comfortably enough.

"Before my death, I was a school teacher. How I hated those damn brats.—." Mr. Harbinger rambled on in a slow, dead monotone.

A pang of realization struck Tyro. He too, had hated them. Often, he had felt like smashing them with his fist—throwing them out of the room. They were so stupid—they never wanted to learn. Why had Satan sent Harbinger? That image—it was so much like himself.

"—she never knew; my wife always trusted me. Such a dumb, loving wife. You’d think she’d be able to smell the whores on me. Heh, heh, heh,—. I used to laugh at her simple—."

He’s laughing at her, the way Tyro had laughed at his Marie. Trusting, patient, Marie—She was always waiting for him. She never knew how he laughed at her.

"My life never had meaning, Mr. Tyro. It’s a good thing someone killed me. I hated life; it was such—." What had Tyro’s life meant? His life had been rot. Damn the rot. His life had been damned. His soul was damned.

"—heh, heh, heh,—."

"He’s laughing at his wife, he’s laughing at Marie, he’s laughing at me. He is me. The rot! I hate it; Get out of me! Get out!"

"I’m not a part of you, Mr. Tyro; you reflect only yourself."

"I know myself and I can’t change. I understand myself and I can see the rot, smell the rot. I feel the hell! It’s all around me!"

The screams were finally absorbed in the small room, and once more the room was silent.

"Mr. Tyro, you are to make your decision." Satan smiled and peered in through a small slide in the door. "If you want to spend eternity in solitude, open the door and the other soul will be displaced."

"Satan, I’m afraid. I can’t spend eternity alone; take away the soul you sent me. Bring me another soul!"

"Humph, humph, humph.—. You have your soul, Mr. Tyro."

Satan smiled and nodded with approval. A heavy door locked and all was silent, except for the jingling of his keys as he walked slowly down the hall.