A White Hell

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NOW, THIS next one, Sir, is called the White Room.
This is used primarily on the Indifferent sinners, usu­
ally for the first hundred years or so, before they're moved to
the pit. We find it very effective.

Yes, Sir, I’ll be glad to. If you’ll just look through this
little hole. Now, you’ll notice that the room is entirely
white—floor, ceiling, walls. This white radiates a very severe
degree of heat, and generally proves to be very irritating to
the eyes. Now, the idea is this—it is supposed to represent
the blandness, the total indifference that they exercised in
their lives. You see, by allowing them to keep their human
characteristics, and weaknesses, such as the need for sleep,
and robbing them of their memories, we, in a sense, let them
torture themselves with their own sins.

Well, thank you, Sir, we thought it was clever.

Yes, of course you may, Sir. Just look through that small
hole. I think she's coming out of one now.

Leah was pressed against the corner, squatting in the
pool made by her tears. Her hair was matted with the sweat
that ran from her skin. Wrinkled hands tried to hide the
little-girl face whose eyes burned from the whiteness.

They were closing again. She jerked them open, wildly
staring at the white until the irritation was too great and
then she let them almost close before she jerked them open.

She was so tired. Her body ached and her head was
throbbing from the whiteness. If she could sleep. If she
could close her eyes and sleep. Her body tensed at the
thought even as her eyes shut, and this time she didn’t try to
open them.

A haze, a softness of colors swirling behind her eyes, her
body floating, and then she was awake . . .

Sitting in the airport, waiting. A girl is walking towards
her. Small, beaten, sad. She stops and holds up a boldly
printed card. Leah reads it hurriedly. “I am an unwed
mother. I must support my child. Please give me what you can. Any donation will be appreciated. Thank you.”

A dime is shoved into the pale hand and then a glance at the watch signals dismissal. The girl moves away, whispering the printed thank-you. Leah leans back and closes her eyes.

Tears forced them open. Sobs racked her body as it lay stretched on the floor, exposed to the whiteness. Her mind was trying to remember why she was crying and frustration made her scream until her throat was raw.

She leaned against the wall, slowly turning her head from side to side, her mouth moaning. The tiny face was puffy with red soreness, and it was a moment before she realized that she was rocking herself to sleep. She jerked her head still and held it tensely in position. But her neck ached and soon her muscles were relaxing and the tides were slowly closing, shutting out the whiteness.

A haze, a softness of colors swirling behind her eyes, her body floating, and then she was awake . . .

Sitting in church, waiting. People slowly drifting in. Leah sits in the back, alone in the pew. An old woman slides in beside her. She sits too close. Her body smells of powder and her head shakes like a leaf held by the stem. Leah is repelled by the withered hand that lies in the printed lap. She carefully moves down the pew, until the smell of powder is gone. She can feel the hurt stare but she closes her eyes to it.

Tears forced them open. She was staring at her withered hand, knowing the pain of each wrinkle but not knowing why. The tears were dripping from her cheeks and she lay on the whiteness, yielding to the heat. Her eyes were closing but she forced them open.

Oh, yes, Sir, it is—very frightening. But we in Torture feel that it is just. After all, he would want no less for her. Didn’t he say something about it one time in one of his speeches? If I can just remember it . . .

“I know all about you: how you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other, but since you are neither, but only lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth.”