

Waiting Room

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As the man sat in the nondescript room, confusion and bewilderment stole over him as the minutes ticked silently away and he tried to ponder his situation. Finally an audible click diverted his attention to the doorway and he watched as it opened to admit a man dressed in a long, white coat. Still a little overwhelmed from having come to find himself in this position, he stared blinking at the new arrival for several moments before figuring he must be a doctor come to look in on him.

The man dressed in white regarded him briefly before turning his attention down to the clipboard he held, then bringing his eyes to rest on him once again. "Donald Kemp?" he asked, the tone of his voice suggesting his utterance was somewhere between a question and a statement, affirming his identity as if he'd been expected.

"Yes..." the man in the chair responded; the fog in his mind slowly clearing, he added "what's going on? Where am I... and what am I doing here?" his voice relaying his confusion.

"Certainly you must remember..." were the other's only words, minimal, but they were enough to cut further through the haze of Donald's thoughts. Glancing around the room, as if noticing his surroundings for the first time, he realized that although the room was spartan, holding little more than the chair he sat in, it could also not be called exactly plain. For the walls, though a solid and uninteresting white, had a certain radiance about them, in a subdued and subtle manner. Even the chair he sat on, while also plain, held a certain soft glow to it, as if a thin aura hung about the room, permeating every possible surface.

At the same time as he was becoming fully aware of his surroundings, Donald's mind was also busy trying to dredge up the memories which lay so tantalizingly close to the surface of his consciousness. As bits of the iceberg broke through, flashes of understanding rippled through him. "Something happened... it was raining... could barely see... the truck..." his mouth forming the words even as he tried to piece it together.

Then looking at the man in white, his eyes focused, his memories solidifying, he began to see him as he truly was. Blinking his eyes at the first sight of the haziness hanging over the man before him, the apparitions started to coalesce, taking form. Where moments before had only been brief outlines, mere suggestions for the imagination, the faint glow around the man had found substance. For now before him stood not a doctor in his garb of antiseptic cleanliness, but an angel wearing a softly-flowing robe, his large wings tucked neatly behind him, his soft aura adding to the room's subtle brightness.

At this Donald's memories sprang to complete light, a horrible image frozen before his mind's eye, etched there by a flash of understanding. Overcome with his realization, he could only stammer "no... the accident..." With the angel silently regarding him, he managed to add "then I'm... dead?" the last word falling from his mouth in a lifeless echo.

His face barely changing expression, the angel answered "not quite Mr. Kemp." Then consulting his clipboard once again, he finished "you see we have a bit of a problem here..."

His composure breaking, Donald then began to cry, tears of the realization of his loss washing over him. "Please... don't let it be... I've got a wife... my kids... don't make me leave them... please," burying his face in his hands.

At the touch on his shoulder, he looked up to see the angel staring directly at him, his gaze commanding, and Donald found his sobs dying down almost abruptly. Looking to meet the angel's gaze, he listened to the heavenly messengers message.

"You didn't let me finish Mr. Kemp. You see we have a bit of a problem here. According to this," holding up the clipboard, "our records show that you shouldn't be here now... there must have been a mistake."

"But the accident... I remember it now, I was hit head on by that semi... there's no way I could've survived," the tone of his voice betraying the ray of hope he held because of the angel's words.

"Raising an eyebrow ever so slightly the angel retorts "that be as it may, this still shows that you aren't supposed to be here yet. A mistake has been made and we need to fix it."

"So does that mean I'm not dead after all?" Donald's face brightening immensely.

"It would seem that way, but we need to act quickly to set things right. This sort of thing happens occasionally, which is why we have rooms like this set up for just this sort of situation."

Seeing Donald's look of concerned confusion, he added "You see Mr. Kemp, right now you are in sort of a state of flux, caught between two planes of existence. You have been prematurely released from your mortal coil, but we can't allow you to pass into eternity, not with the state of things being as they are. So instead we need to keep you here, in a kind of stasis, while we work to set things right."

"But how long will that take and what am I supposed to do, just wait here like this? Why can't you just send me back now?" his voice becoming more nervous and urgent.

"Mr. Kemp, these things take time. We need to find out what has happened and then work at returning you to your life. Try and understand, we must keep you here for your own safety... if you were to leave this room, your soul would lose the last grasps it has on your body, and you would be relinquished to the afterlife before your time. As I've said, we can't let that happen... you must stay here while we get to work."

"But what if you can't send me back, what if it's too late? You don't even know how long this might take you..." his voice becoming even more unsteady.

"I'm sorry Mr. Kemp, but that is all I can tell you. Things will be handled as quickly as possible, but you must be patient with us. I'm sorry this happened, but now that it does all we can do is work to rectify the situation, and until then you must stay here... for your own good." At that the angel turned and left, with only a curt "good-bye Mr. Kemp" before closing the door, leaving a confused and bewildered man sitting alone in the room behind him.

With the door closed, the scenery outside the room flickered, the brilliant aura dissolving like mist, evaporating from the fiery glow it had been shrouding. As the heat of the oppressive,

sulfurous atmosphere blasted upon him, the fine material of the angel's robe was instantly blackened, crumbling to dust at his feet.

Then as sparks landed on his alabaster skin, they smoldered and burned his tender flesh, his skin boiling away as the feathers of his brilliant wings erupted in flames. The fires enveloped him, claiming their prize, burning off the layers of his illusion. Striding through the smoke, the red scales of his body glistening, he flexed his leprous wings, and turning his gaze to a fellow demon guarding the doorway, a malicious smile crept across his twisted and malformed maw. "I just love making them wait..."

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