

ART ALIVE

Heaven

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the pockets of his jeans. "Yeah, heaven used to just be heaven, back in the day. I wasn't around, then, of course. You can go over to Ug Drive and check it out if you want to, but I wouldn't recommend it. They're pretty nasty brutes-always hitting people with clubs and stuff. But it wasn't too long after that that real religions started popping up all over the world, and it became pretty clear pretty fast that they couldn't all stay in one place. So as each new deity gets created, another piece of heaven gets sectioned off and developed." He grinned cheekily at her. "It's lucky for us that heaven's infinite, or we'd have run out of room millennia ago! Pretty crazy, huh?"

"Y-yeah...crazy..." She laughed weakly.

"And you wouldn't believe all of the crazy religions that pop up-like Satan Lane, for example. There are a few sections that only have one or two houses, even!"

"What does everyone do?" She asked.

"Whatever they want." He shrugged. "Heaven's what you make of it, they say. Some people go on like they never died in the first place. Some folks party all the time-the Babylonians have a crazy orgy every Friday. And lots of folks go back to Earth-I'm due to leave next year, in fact."

"What're you going back as?" She asked.

"Not sure yet." He said. "I was a

rabbit thirty years ago, and a prince a few centuries back. It's just the luck of the draw, really. Not a lot of Christians try it, but you should!"

She couldn't help but laugh at his enthusiasm. "Maybe I will."

"Definitely!"

"Can we see what happens on Earth?" She asked.

"Sure. There's a big-screen TV in most places that picks up a crazy number of channels." He smiled brightly. "And we don't have to deal with bills or weird break-up signals, either!"

"It is heaven." She pointed out.

"Now you're catching on!" He slung an arm around her shoulder. "Say, we should hang out. Yahweh won't mind if you come hand out at Om Street every once in a while."

"Yahweh?" She repeated.

"Well you can't really call him 'God,' can you?" He laughed. "You'll catch on, Judy. Besides, everyone's pretty laid back, here. Nobody will hold it against you if you mess up every now and then."

"Right." She said.

"Here we are!" He said, coming to a stop in front of a huge, pearly-gated community. "Pearly Gate Way. Would you like me to call someone for you? Or I could go in with you, if you like. I stayed here for a few years after my third life."

Judy shrugged.

He laughed again and pressed a button, calling for someone to come take her in. Standing there in silence, they waited. Taka began rocking back and forth on his heels and Judy tried

to process all of the bombshells she'd been hit with in the past...half hour?

"Say, Taka?"

"Yeah?"

"If you've gone back to Earth...does that mean your name's really Taka?"

"S my favorite name of the ones I've had." He said. "One of the easiest, too."

"Is my name really Judy?"

He shrugged. "Who knows? You'll start remembering your past lives, soon, if you have any. And if not...well, you can always fix that!"

"You really think I should?" She asked with a smile.

"You've got eternity, y'know." He said, smiling back.

She bit her lip shyly. "Think I'll meet you in my next life?"

He threw his head back and laughed. "That's always a possibility!" Then the gates started to open. "I guess that's my cue to go! I'll come pick you up on Saturday; should give you time to get settled in and all. We'll have lunch, and I'll fill you in on all of the joys of reincarnation!"

"We'll only have a year." She said.

"Time's arbitrary around here." He said. "Besides, I can always put it on hold 'til you decide to come with me."

She nodded, blushing, and allowed a pretty teenaged girl to lead her inside.

Taka waved.

Judy died on a Tuesday.

She started living on a Saturday.

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