

In the afterlife: A comedy of errors cont.

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The Pendulum

"Alignment of the world? Okay! That's it!" Rick said looking at Stanley and then at the light way up at the top of the judicial bench in front of him. "What the heck is going on?"

"That's to your left," Stanley said pointing to the long hallway to the left.

"What is?" Rick asked looking down the way Stanley pointed.

"Heck. Well, we call it Hell here; it's to your left. But don't worry, I don't think you will be going there."

"Hell is down there?"

"Yep."

"And heaven is..."

"At the end of the hallway to your right. You see, right now you are in a kind of middle zone where souls are arraigned. The head angel Gabriel processes your case and then sets a date for your trial."

"My trial?" Rick asked rubbing away a headache that was forming at the base of his skull.

"Yeah, the honorable Gabriel tells you when to come and go to the main court room to see the really big guy."

"Who?"

"God."

"And God does what?" Rick asked walking over to a door besides the elevator. Inside, dozens of people moved about drinking coffee and sitting on couches. Most of them were just sitting and staring at the wall, but some were talking to each other.

"He decides if you go left or right. Oh, that room is the waiting area. Everyone in there are souls that are waiting for their trial."

"Are you finished or should I just sit back here and wait while another couple years go by?" Gabriel asked from above.

"Look, what do you mean while a couple of years go by?" Rick asked.

"Well you see Rick," Gabriel began, "time here is different than that on Earth. To you it seems like only ten minutes have gone by since you were on your bike. But to the real, physical world you have been gone for three years."

"Three years! Three years! You have got to be kidding me. This means I'm..."

"Yep. Dead and buried," Stanley said. "You're compost, my friend."

"I am going to kill you," Rick said grabbing Stanley by the throat.

"Hello, genius. I'm already dead," Stanley said pulling Rick off of him.

"Then what am I supposed to do?"

"Well, there is one thing we can do," Gabriel said as a bright light engulfed Stanley.

"Oh come on. Please sir, not that. Anything but that," Stanley pleaded to Gabriel.

"I am sorry, Stan, but it has to be this way," Gabriel said as the bright light got stronger and stronger until Rick could not see anything else...

In a bar a man looks up from his drink and stares at the fellow drinker who had been telling this strange story.

"So you are who? Are you Stanley or are you Rick?" the man said in a slurred voice. He knew he was drunk, but he figured the guy who told this tale must really be plastered.

"I am Stanley."

"And Rick, what happened to him?"

"He got my job. And he will have my job until this body that I am in dies; then we switch."

"Excuse me?"

"You see, when I die, Rick will come to take my soul. But instead of taking it he will rejuvenate this body, and then he will take over it while I go on to be the soul messenger, ushering every soul from this life until the next until he dies. Then I will take over this body again."

"Why don't the both of you just become these soul messenger things?"

"Too many of us already. Union rules wouldn't allow another one of us. So we have to share. Well, I gotta go," Stan said putting down his drink and paying the bartender.

"Hey buddy," the man said watching Stan leave, "I come here every-night. Why don't you stop by tomorrow? If you got another crazy story, I would love to hear it."

"Oh, I'll be back. But if I remember correctly, it's... well... it's been nice knowing you, Fred."

"Hey, Jimmy," the man said to the bartender, "Did I tell that guy my name?"

"I didn't hear you tell him, Fred."

"Never mind. I'm probably just too drunk to remember. Hey, give me another beer, okay?"

The years go by, and Stan's

body begins to age. He tries his best in life, but it had been such a long time since he was a part of the real world that he has forgotten how to be a success in modern society. The best Stanley can make of himself is a small time bus driver in the city of New York.

"I can't believe this is all you have done with yourself in fifty years," Rick said waking up a very old and tired Stanley.

"Well, it's about time. Man, Earth is such a bore."

"About time?!" I have only been on for about one day. I was just about to get a hang of things when they said it was time to pick you up."

"Yeah, well that's how things go up there. So let's do it," Stanley said as a bright light filled the room. It radiated brightly until the whole room was drowned out by its brilliance. Then it died down suddenly, and the old man was gone. Now a young man of about twenty stood in his place.

"It feels so good to be human again," Rick said staring at his new physical form. "I missed it."

"Yeah, well it feels nice to one of the spirits again," Stanley replied staring at his own ghostly appearance.

"Well, I'll see you in ninety years, Stan."

"How do you know, Rick? You could die tomorrow."

"No. I took a little look into Gabe's computer before I left. I am going to live for a long time. And I am going to make myself a better life than you ever had."

With that, Stanley disap-

peared, and Rick continued in the land of the living. For ninety years he traveled the world, became a successful movie star, and was rich and famous. The newspapers adored him, and the whole world mourned his death. That's why it came as such a surprise when a young man who looked exactly like the famous star hit the streets as a bus driver.

(Jonathan Rutan is a first-year student from Winston

Salem, NC, who has had his works published since third grade.

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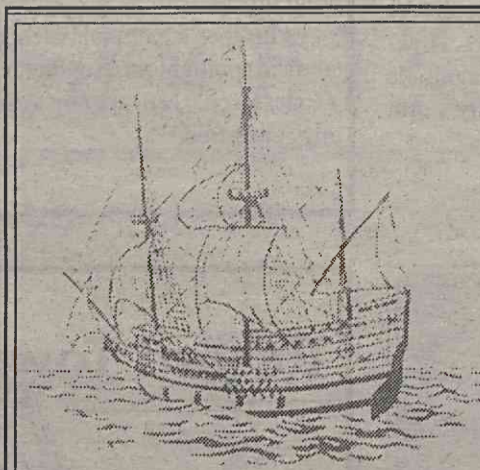
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