

## God's Hand

Margaret was an angel of a woman, and it was her day to ascend.

She had just finished her sixtieth prayer of the day, a blessing of health on an old man whose name she did not recall. Outside, Margaret could see the eternally clouded sky parting as God's hand reached down, casting radiant colours throughout the town.

"Has it been a year already lass?" the old man asked.

"Yes sir, today is Ascension Day."

"I suppose that means you won't be coming by anymore? Well, if anyone should ascend it's you. I can't tell you how much I appreciate you working longer just so you can spare a blessing for me and the others on the outskirts. You'll be missed," the man said, grabbing his chest.

Margaret pasted on a smile by instinct, the same smile she wore for most of her life. Her facial muscles ached as she held the grin.

"You're too kind sir, bless your soul. Maybe one day I'll see you up there. Until then, I'll miss you too."

He made a move as if to initiate a hug, but was interrupted by his own coughs. Margaret staggered back, her face turning red at the thought of the man's disease flying at her. She was glad, however, that his cough struck when it did.

*Appaling!* She thought to herself. *Does he want to get me sick? He'll never ascend with repulsive fits like that.* With a quick goodbye, she exited the old man's home and savoured the walk back to the city proper where she didn't need to smile.

Up above, God's wonderous hand floated down toward the garden. The divine appendage that would lift her up to Heaven. Years of extra work, baking goods for neighbours, always

helping others with anything they needed, and smiling that damned smile would finally be over. She was chosen. Only those who act with absolute kindness could be chosen by God to ascend, and none worked as hard to be as perfect as her.

*After all, Heaven is a reward, and I've earned it.*

As she finally walked into the garden she could see the hand resting palm-up on the grass.

As she turned around, half the town was standing there watching her. *How piteous.*

“Be safe everyone! Love each other and be good and maybe we’ll meet again!” said Margaret, cheer riding her every word.

With that, she stepped out and onto God’s waiting hand.

*May I never return.*

The hand wriggled, then rose.

The force of sudden upheaval crashed Margaret flat against the palm. The surface was warm against her cheek. She could not move or speak or think.

The rising speed was violent. Wind pressure held her still against the flesh of God’s hand. Her lungs and stomach were being crushed as if some enormous, unseen entity was stepping on her organs. Wind whipped against her skin and dried out her eyes as she suddenly realized that she could not breathe. She gasped for air. When she looked up, she saw the clouded, hazy sky falling towards her rapidly.

As the wall of dark clouds hit, she blacked out.

Margaret awoke at the bottom of a glass jar. As she tried to stand, her knees buckled and she caught herself on a wall. As she caught her breath, Margaret felt something wet and cold drip

onto her neck from the lid of the jar. She ran a hand along the spot and was shocked to see pitch-black ichor that smelled of charcoal and rotted fish. Margaret rubbed her hand against the glass, and repulsed to the other end of the jar. A measly five feet.

Tears pooled in her eyes as she scanned her surroundings beyond the jar. The space felt enormous, and she was on a stone shelf, lined with other jars. Only those jars were completely black, save for the one to her left.

A man with a torn shirt and scraggly unkept beard stood in a pool of the same black ichor reaching up to his chest. He wept as more trickled from above. He pushed and punched against the front of his jar with fear and shock in his eyes, to no avail.

“Help me! Someone get me out of here!” screamed Margaret. Ichor continuing to drip, drip, drip from above.

She looked down beyond the shelf. An ancient, crypt-like floor bordered a pit filled with the clouds that had filled her town’s sky. She didn’t look at those clouds for more than a second before she saw the doorway on the other side of the room.

The gate was massive, large enough to fit a giant, and on the other side was a beautiful, glowing city. In the infinitely far distance she could still make out the men and women flying with feathered wings. It was gorgeous and it was so, so close now.

The room began to shake, and for a moment, her jar shook with it, imbalanced. A gigantic figure slowly emerged from the pit of clouds. A humanoid shape, but with three eyes gleaming with something unknown. It stood up straight, revealing the tentacles that lined its body, like an eldritch imitation of body-hair. Everywhere looked alien save for its right hand, which looked identical to God’s.

The creature didn't even look at her. She crouched in the corner anyway, hoping the shadows would hide her from its view.

*Please leave me alone. I'm not supposed to be here.*

It reached a hand out to the shelf above Margaret, picked up a black jar, and opened it. Black ichor spilled into its sharp-toothed mouth. It did the same to three more jars before crawling back into the clouds.

The moment it was gone, Margaret stood up, wiped tears from her eyes, and slammed her body weight against the jar.

*Heaven's right there, and the door is open.*

Each time she crashed against the wall, her jar scooted an inch closer. Each attempt accompanied by an increased dripping of rancid ichor. On the twelfth try, her jar hurtled over the edge of the shelf. She braced for impact, knowing this may kill her, but to her surprise the floor prevented any kind of immense impact, preserving the jar itself.

On her side now, she began to push her weight forward to make the jar roll along the crypt floor. Margaret's legs burned, but she pushed her thoughts away and dashed for the door.

Minutes passed, and she was almost at the doorway.

A half hour, almost there.

Two hours. Three. Four. Five. All the while, the ichor never ceased falling, slowly but surely.

"Why? Why isn't it moving! I'm here, I'm right here!" she screamed.

But nobody answered. She gazed back at the pit of clouds. She considered for a moment. Remembered her town. Remembered all she did to help them.

Then she looked back at heaven and kept moving.