

The Grandfather Clock of Dreams

Pauly Hart

Arrival

It was more like when you were reading a comic book or magazine and the illustrator drew a page turning. It wasn't really being turned. You could tell that they had drawn it there. But the idea that, somehow, the comic was aware of itself was startling to some. Not to the man in the gray suit, mind you... But it was to many. He shifted patiently, at the edge of a long and winding road. He was a very patient man.

It took some doing to move into this dream. If it was a dream... But the man in the sweater felt as if there had never been a time where he hadn't been moving into it. The man in the pullover alpaca sweater reached outside of his dream, into the white space. It wasn't really reaching out, as you would call it... But that is the closest thing that he could liken it to.

There was something like a sound-stage panel, where if you looked just right, it appeared like a normal white space... But if you turned just so - a small step here, and a left foot there, you were able to look beyond the idea of the dream from reality, and past the white space away from the dream... Into the idea behind the dream...

Out in the white space past his dream stood the large black stool, as always. He had seen it before, in passing. And just beyond that, was the Grandfather Clock of Dreams.

What he had never seen before, was the man in the gray suit.

"We've been expecting you," the man in the gray suit said. He had on a small bellman's hat and carried a pencil and a spiral notebook. He was a serious looking fellow. "This way."

The man in the sweater nodded silently and followed the man in the gray suit.

Gray Suit walked in front, and Sweater followed a few steps behind. The road in front of them was brick and paver. Old yellowed brick, the kind sometimes found on Victorian houses, and large brown pavers. It was a dreadful color and pattern combination and Sweater wondered who would ever design such a thing.

"They are remainders." Gray Suit said aloud.

"Sorry," Sweater said. "What are what?"

“The road construction,” Sweater said. “These are bits that we’ve had on hand for quite some time now... We’ve just never used them anywhere else.”

“Well thank God,” Sweater said. “They’re hideous.” After some thought Sweater said: “But why use them here? And... How did you know I was thinking about them?”

Gray Suit smiled. “To have a road. We only finished this road yesterday afternoon. We’ve never needed a road here before, but we didn’t know how you intended to travel, and a road seemed better than having no road... So we built the road.”

“Uh...” Sweater began.

“But more importantly,” Gray Suit interrupted, “is the second question. How did I know you were thinking what you were thinking.” He paused, not really expecting a response. He knew the man in the alpaca sweater intimately. He had read his entire file.

Arriving at the conclusion that no response would be forthcoming, he continued forward.

Vantage

“Many people doing many things,” Suit said, and gestured before him.

Sweater looked down at the expansive valley laid out before him. Lush and green, like two hours after a rainfall, the small dale sparkled with freshness. All around the opening were orange trees ripe with the overly large fruit. They were larger than grapefruits and brought the boughs of the trees low. In the middle of the clearing were eight foot tables, the kind you see churches buy for mass meals. They were white without frills or table cloth and set up in long rows, with breaks between every four tables.

All around the tables walked technicians with small notebooks in their right hands. They moved their pencils aptly and swiftly with their left hands, drawing diagrams and making lists. When they finished with the page, they would rip it off from the top spiral ring and throw it absent-mindedly into the air, where it would pirouette and twirl to the ground, disappearing into nothingness before it hit the bottom. Not even the remnants of paper from the ripping were allowed to touch the short soft grass.

The tables themselves had on them various stages of shadow, though some were taking form. They appeared more visibly if you did not look directly at them, but off to the side -taking in their true nature with your peripheral vision.

Suit motioned for Sweater to follow down the marble staircase, leading to the tables.

There was no rail to hold on to and the stairs were quite steep. Sweater focused on the steps themselves to ensure he did not mis-step.

“You need not even look at them.” Suit said to him, as they descended. “They were built for your hip and leg height as well as your gait.”

“How would you have known...” Began Sweater.

“We know.” Suit smiled.

They walked in and among the tables looking at this or that random black lump that wasn't anything. They were formless and translucent for the majority. Only some of them had become materialized into an actual shape.

“Is that a tricycle?” Sweater pointed to one of the shapes. Suit did not hear him however, as one of the workers was standing next to him, whispering in his ear.

Sweater waited for a moment and considered waiting for Suit to finish talking to the person. His curiosity piqued even further when two of the people working walked over to the tricycle, touching it here and there with their pencils. It was forming into actual matter where they touched it, from the shadow-like substance. The tricycle took color and matter slowly, with a shimmering blue that dissipated off of it like blue dry ice. They continued touching it here and there as he approached and finally it was finished.

It was in poor condition, the front wheel was almost bent in on itself, and the paint was chipped away here and there. One of the pedals was missing all of the rubber foot supports.

“This...” He said as he reached the table.

The two technicians turned towards him and smiled. They looked familiar somehow. They could have been twins.

“This is...” He muttered, slowly reaching his hand out to the trike. He noticed his hands shook a bit.

“This is my sister's tricycle.” He said.

Objects

Suit had come up behind him and touched him on the shoulder. He felt his hand there and suddenly the memories came flooding back, like it was yesterday.

His mother and father had bought a farm out in the countryside away from the city. They had lived there happy and free with their neighbors and friends. The farm was massive and each and every day the children after school, would go exploring the land. Missouri was beautiful and it was their own private kingdom. There were fishing holes, swimming hollows, tiny mountains, rugged plains and vast stretches of meadows. There was no lack to the imaginings of the children and their games they would play. Knights and dragons, cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians were a must. Tag, freeze tag, hide-and-seek, and others along with every sport imaginable.

When his father and the other men who lived near and around them had finally built the inroad to the property, it was exciting. Around the same time, one of his father's friends had come home with a truckload of old bikes. After days of tinkering, many of them had their own bikes and were learning how to ride them. As soon as they got up to speed on their bikes they began to race each other on the road. It was a gravel and asphalt mix so it was bumpy, but they navigated the smooth parts in their races and would go back and forth for hours. Eventually they made off trails with their bikes and the real fun began.

They borrowed shovels and some of the men helped them build little ramps here and there in the woods for an off-road track. Some of the bikes weren't made for the track, but lo and behold, not a short time later, another truck with six new BMX bikes was delivered. It was madness. The children who had the shabbiest bikes were given the new ones and some of the 10-speeds were cannibalized to make miniature monster bikes. His father had helped him build his. It had the frame of a child's BMX with the wheels of a mountain bike and the gears of a 10-speed. He loved it.

Being the oldest of two, his little sister wanted to follow him everywhere he went. He was almost nine years old and she was only five, and didn't have a bike of her own, just her tricycle. Her father changed out the wheels on it and tinkered a little, making it almost into an actual full child's sized machine. He spray painted it pink and she called it: "Thelma-Lou" for whatever reason. She said it was her chariot.

He hated having his sister follow him around on that thing. He had resented her presence and often it was his chief goal to get out to the racetrack after school before she could get her bike and chase him. It was on such a day that he and the other boys raced off into the woods after school let out. Math class was the last subject of the day and he was really good at it but his sister wasn't. So

when the teacher rang the bell on her desk and school was over, sometimes his sister was still working through some of the problems at her little desk.

“Smell ya later, alligator!” He called to her as he and the other boys zoomed off into the woods. It was the last thing he had said to her. After she left school she disappeared. Her bike was found later the next day, down at the end of the road, where it met the highway. It had been hit by a car. Her body was never found.

He looked at Thelma Lou there now on the table. The pink paint chipping away, the front wheel almost bent in two. Tears fell unbidden down onto his alpaca sweater. He turned to Suit and fell into his open arms, weeping.

Discovery

The man in the alpaca sweater sat on the small wooden stool, near the end of the large yard where items were appearing more and more often on cheap plastic tables. Here was his mother’s favorite mirror, there was his dad’s pull saw. There was his stack of Avengers comic books. His parents had made him throw them away one winter’s day after a long talk. On every table appeared one object. The workers were all... Maybe clones... They were all the same person. There were more than twenty of them so they couldn’t be related in any way. And they scribbled away, all left-handed, onto their notebooks, drawing, itemizing, categorizing -whatever. Over the course of minutes, another object would appear. Each object attached to an important memory from his childhood. It was unnerving.

He could see many of them from where he sat, but could not see the ones in the distance, on the far side of the clearing. Every single table that held a solid object, he had to process. There would be a Sony Walkman and he would have a flash-back of laying by the lake with his girlfriend, stretching out the headphones so they could both listen to Don Henley’s “All she wants to do is dance.”

“It’s about gun running.” She smiled at him.

He had kissed her then. It was their first kiss. There had been others and eventually they had given each other their virginity. They had loved each other then, but they were young and didn’t know much but thought they knew everything.

He looked over at the man in the gray suit.

“Every single thing?” He didn’t need to finish the thought.

“Yes. Every one.” Suit said.

“But...” Sweater began.

“Why?” Suit finished.

“Yes.” Sweater said.

“This is your preliminary discovery before bargaining and trial.” Suit said.

“My wha...” Sweater began.

“Mind you, there may not be any petitioning or motions. There may not even be a hearing. There is this and then there is trial. During discovery there will be no deposition, interrogation, or subpoena. There are simply the objects and yourself. Your soul, being removed at this time from your spirit and body, is located in another realm. You are strictly, in this form, your... How do you say? Your mind? Maybe not exactly that, but it is the thinking you... The feeling you... The willful you... It is everything that is not your regenerated being or your dirt being.”

Sorting

The man in the alpaca sweater sat with his jaw hanging open, unable to fathom the words coming from the man in the gray suit.

After some moments, his mouth began to work, but before he could mutter any sound to accompany the movement, the man in the gray suit began speaking again.

“Now, before you begin the process of anything legal, you need to know your position and what is required of you... At least, this part of you. You are not required to give any information to me, for without council of your other selves, it will avail you nothing. What your chief requirement is, is cataloging and finding impact on this ‘you’. If the object has no impact, you are free to move it to where the brown tables are, there.”

He pointed in a direction that had not been there moments ago, and there was a great number of tables. They were brown and rugged, made of rough cut wood. They looked sturdy enough to hold an elephant. There were hundreds of them.

“If you do find that an object has had an impact on you, for the positive or for the negative, you are to move them to the tables on the opposite side of the white tables.”

He pointed again and on the opposite side of the white tables stood tables stretching towards the horizon. They were of all colors imaginable, yes, even more than one could imagine for there were tables there that were in a color that no one had yet invented.

“Those tables are for the objects that you do find important, and you may set them on any table of any color that you deem it to be upon. All colors are not represented, however, and if you wish to change the color of a table, you may ask one of your assistants to do so and she will. Mind you, you are not able to see her color palette so it might be somewhat challenging at first to change the color.”

One of the assistants came to him and strapped a notepad to his right arm and handed him a pencil.

“But I’m right-handed.” Sweater said.

Suit smiled. “Try it.”

And he did.

It was the most natural thing in the world.

“Your dirt being is right-handed. More often than not, most of you are left-handed.”

Suit thanked the assistant and she walked back to what she was doing.

“So, if I need to move an object I just, what, write it down and it moves?” Sweater asked.

“You catch on quickly.” Suit said and smiled.

Sweater walked over to where his beat-up blue Honda Civic sat on a table.

He wrote something and it floated up into the air and dropped unceremoniously onto one of the wooden tables.

“I’ve always hated that thing.” He said.

Quick as a whip, Suit scribbled onto his pad and the car came back to the white table.

“Hey!” exclaimed Sweater. “I thought you said...”

“Ah ah ah!” the man in the gray suit said, stopping him. “If you hate it, think... Hate is important, yes? It had an impact on your life. It may be impactful, yet not in a positive way.” He let that sink in before continuing. “Let’s say, the shredded papers you ripped up when you wrote all those angry letters to the mayor and police commissioner and others about the incident on Tuesday, April 11th, in 1998. That is not important. But you will find that computer on row 34, column E6. Coincidentally, you also wrote some very impactful blog pieces about love and forgiveness from the very same device.”

The man in the alpaca sweater was silent. Shame had been fleeting, for indeed, everything here had been laid bare. Shame wouldn’t be useful now, but he could *use* the shame.

“Indeed. You can use your shame then to move the item into a color best suited for it. And note, the whole rig is represented by just the CPU box, screen, and keyboard. But it acts as one ‘device’ unit.”

“First off, please stop reading my mind. If I want to project, I will use my mouth. Secondly, why not a mouse?”

“Not relevant. But I see your concern. No. The mouse is not another object. But from now on, I will have them write in all accompanying devices to the one object. You have a valid concern.”

All around the plain, more assistants sprung up from the earth and began scribbling furiously.

“Will you help me with this task?” Sweater asked.

“I cannot. And I must not stay longer than necessary. I am but one of many.”

“Will you answer my questions then, before you go?” Sweater asked.

“I will answer as many as I am allowed.” Suit said.

“Thank you.” Sweater said.

Answers

“Why don’t I have a name?” The man in the alpaca sweater asked.

“But you’ve never had a name.” Suit answered.

“I’ve had a name my whole life.”

“But you are no longer alive.” Suit answered.

“I’ve come to understand that. How did I die?”

“You didn’t die. Your dirt being died.” Suit answered.

“How did he die?”

“It is not for me to say.” Suit answered.

“And you won’t tell me his name?”

“His name is David.” Suit answered.

“I’m David?”

“Your dirt being’s name was David.” Suit answered.

“Good enough for me.”

“Anything else?” Suit asked.

The man whose dirt being was formerly named David stood up. He walked a couple of steps towards the tables. He looked down at the thousands and thousands of objects on all of the white tables, then beyond that to the ever-growing colored tables.

“Why are there more colored tables than white ones?”

“We may have forgotten some that you wish to add.” Suit answered.

“How long will this take?” The man in the alpaca sweater asked.

“Until The Word comes.” Suit answered.

“And then?” Sweater asked.

“Then you will go to trial.” Suit answered.

“What about you?”

“What about me?” Suit answered.

“What will happen to you?”

“Oh, I’ll continue working. I have another appointment in a few minutes.” Suit answered.

“With another dead person?”

“Well. Not the actual person. Just the mind.” Suit answered.

“And you meet them out on that road.”

“Oh, the road is always different. We try to make it as ugly as possible.” Suit answered.

The man whose dirt being was formerly named David laughed.

“What? Whatever for? That seems ludicrous!”

“We used to make them out of gold, because it’s so cheap, but it gave too many people the wrong idea, so we just used the ugliest bricks to the person coming as possible. For you the idea of old recycled flag-stone and aged yellow brick was the most repulsive. Yours was actually fun to build.” Suit answered.

The man whose dirt being was formerly named David smiled.

“Cute.” He said.

“We try.” Suit answered.

“So, you just go on and do this all day long?”

“Oh no! Just since He rose again until He comes in the resurrection.” Suit answered.

“That’s... Still a very long time.”

“Not from my perspective.” Suit answered.

A pause. Both men looked at the surroundings.

“The oranges? I didn’t suppose I would get hungry here.”

“For life and purpose.” Suit answered. He winked. “They are very tasty.”

“How about loneliness? That’s got to factor in.”

Suit motioned for one of the assistants. She came over.

“Joy, meet David. This is your brother.”

Another Beginning

After the man in the Alpaca sweater finished hugging his sister and wiping his eyes, He looked at the man in the gray suit.

“You don’t know your sister now as you would have. This is the Spirit being of your sister. Her dirt being’s name was Joy. Her Spirit being has no name now, but one day will.” Suit said. “Now mind you, she cannot assist you in any way during this task. And really, she does not understand or know the things that a mind-being will understand. She does not remember things as a mind-being will. She volunteered for this task, however. Spirit beings are ever present in the hands of The Creator Elohim, yet when they wish, they may travel out of time. They must first walk past the beach, by the Grandfather Clock of Dreams, and then may visit any portal they choose.”

“That’s... That’s really crazy.” Sweater said. “So can I go visit her as well?”

“Unfortunately, no. And I am not allowed to even tell you the path to your dirt being. For some in the past have entered into their beings and been the cause of much trouble back on the physical plane. But for you to know that you three will reunite during the resurrection in the twinkling of an eye, and then judged before all the evidence you have placed into their categories.” Suit said. “Think - Lazarus and the rich man. You reap what you sow.”

“I thought karma was a myth.”

“It is. There is no perpetual circle. And this is not judgment for a resurrection. You will be resurrected. This is more of a payment plan. Every action that you performed echoes through eternity. Now we’re just sorting it all out. You’re already blood-bought, redeemed, sanctified, and a bride of the Risen Word of Yahuah.”

The man in the Alpaca sweater cocked his head a little.

“Well, yes...” He began.

“That’s why you even have a third part!” Suit said.

“And... The third part is... Their spirit being?”

“The ones without the third part never separated from their dirt beings!” Suit almost raised his voice. “They remain connected in death. For its appointed for men to die once, and then the judgment.”

“They’re asleep.” Sweater sussed. “Actual dead. Ashes to ashes, and all that. Like Cain. Just two parts. Dirt and mind.”

“Mud-balls and spare-ribs.” Suit said, smiling.

“Huh?” Sweaters eyes grew round.

“Never mind. Unless you are earth born as well as spirit born, then you cannot see the kingdom.”

“So those who do not have the third part... The spirit part... They will be judged just once during the Great Judgment?” Sweater asked.

“Yes.” Suit said. “For they obeyed not their conscience within them and rejected their Creator. It is only they who will go back to sleep for eternity, never again knowing life.”

“So... But I’m safe right? I get to go to heaven, right? Wait! Is this even heaven?”

Suit laughed. “Similar. Before your spirit being gets your real name, joined back with your other selves, then you are graded on your life. What you did, why you did it, where you went - every single second of every single day of every speck of your time on the plane of earth is being sorted... By you. It is at that point that ‘heaven’ is decided for you. For many people, heaven is a spot on the lake. For some, ‘heaven’ is being a guard on the wall of New Jerusalem. Others simply never leave the throne room.”

“Oh yeah?” Sweater said smiling.

“It’s a test. The last test. But it is one you cannot fail.” Suit said. “Come now, mind of the former David. Then what is all this?” Suit asked.

A long pause and then he answered:

“This is like... a job application?”

Suit clapped his hands, smiled, and disappeared.

End

Tuesday July 19th, 2022

Around five minutes after writing the last lines of this story, I went outside to take a break and to enjoy the sunshine. I had used the tricycle story from my mom and her older brother, Richard. I didn't know why I had put it in there, but I thought it fit well. She never went missing, but she did crack her head wide open. I thought a lot about my mom writing this story. I got the dog on the leash, sat down in my chair and I looked down at my phone to a text message from my Stepmother, Linda.

“My mom passed away last night. She's with Jesus and my Dad now.”

Doris is my last remaining grandparent. Though she's Linda's mom, I still consider her my Grandmom, just as I consider Linda my new mom.

Calling her, we talked of how wonderful Doris was and how she'd had a good run at age 92, going into the great hereafter, leaving a glorious legacy behind. I shared with her the way I had come about working on this story today. “I just had some sort of a premonition that I should finish this story. I didn't even know it was about eternity until the words appeared on the page as I typed them. It just all seemed to fit. My stepmother Linda told me the story of something strange that happened to her just in the last few days.

Normally she works just two months out of the year during July and January doing housing appraisal batch summaries for very large companies. If you thought finding house comps were grueling, try finding subdivision comps for other subdivisions. Such is her job. It's massive and it takes all day for a month, twice a year.

So, randomly, when her old assistant came to town to sell their car it was just chance. But then having the car burn to the ground in their driveway overnight was impossible. But then the insurance totaling it and then paying them more than they were selling it for initially was beyond impossible. And then Linda calling her when Doris passed to ask if there was any possible way she could lend her a hand in the next few days was a one in a trillion.

“Sure... But you're not going to believe what just happened to me...”

Oh. Strangely enough, we just might.

I called my wife Jennifer to tell her the news of Doris.

“Wow! That's so weird! Do you remember me telling you about my nightmare? It was about someone in your family dying!”

The connections do not end there.

The entire reason I got up today was to watch TV. I was going to watch yet another waste-of-time science fiction movie that would accomplish nothing for me as a person but might tickle the writer's mind in me.

Except that this morning I got a message from Noel Joshua Hadley, another writer friend of mine, who asked: “When am I going to get the next Pauly Hart short story?” He had sent it on the 15th, and I’m just seeing it now.

Some call it Kismet, some fate, some the will of the divines. I know it’s just one thing - “My sheep know my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” I do follow The Word made flesh, and sometimes... I don’t know... Writing weird stories, or in one instance, the burning of a car... He works all things out for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

It is with a happy hope and a smile on my face that I dedicate this story to Doris Saylor. May her life’s legacy shine to those who never even met her.