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WINTERLAND.

BY

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On a September night in Baltimore, it was. Baltimore, of course is the name some Pietist groups gave to this town when they tried to evade secular justice back in the 18th century. During my early years, I lived close to the Psychiatric Hospital, by the

name of *Pandæmonium Psychiatric Ward*, which opened up in a former apartment hotel on the corner of 6th street. It is modern fashion, as you might well know, not to arrange for the mentally ill at the outskirts of the cities any longer, but in the midst of where we all live. One should not any longer be ashamed or stigmatized over being depressed or delusional. Since I was out of light for my cigarette – I am sorry for that, but I smoke cigarettes – I ventured to see if somebody at the hospital's Emergency Room had some light. Even psychiatric hospitals have emergency rooms. The human psyche might, quite similar to the soma, need urgent attention now and then.

First, I have to tell you though, that it had been a terrible year so far, for us Baltymorians, that is. First we had that horrible storm and the flood. Then it was a dropped syringe that caused many people to flee

town. But we are brave people, and we will not succumb to misery and hardship.

Well. As soon I had entered the room, which was relatively small, and where two unlucky people sat on each of the opposite too-long yellow wooden benches available, I realized my mistake.

The one, who was a well-dressed man wearing a light blue suit, as well as a small mustache, in his forties, was quarreling with another man, a fair-haired youngster, who looked very sick: his face was pale, dressed like a biker, but probably wasn't one, and he was trembling, and saliva was dribbling from his open mouth.

"Oh, sorry!" I said. After that, both men went silent.

There was a green door at the far end of the room and by the door at the glass win-

dow, behind which a sullen nurse in a white dress sat, silently watching what was going on. Her job was to decide who should be allowed to see the doctor. I don't know.

The two men, on the other hand, were both very active, sighing and moving their hands, and now they turned to me and said:

"So? Who are you?"

They at once seemed to have all forgot the quarrel that had occupied them just moments before.

"Oh, no. I just came to ask for a light."

The one who was dribbling said:

"You look bad. That's for sure."

It seemed as if the two had been there for a while and that they, although they

were different, got along with each other pretty well. But, indeed, they also seemed very hostile to me, and I did not know why. Maybe they wanted to be alone or were worried that I might get to meet the doctor before they did.

"You sure look sick, but not that sick! More like crazy.", the man said, who was dribbling on his leather sleeve,

"I wonder if you, by chance, have a cigarette lighter?" I said in a loud voice.

I glanced towards the far end of the room, where the nurse sat, behind her glass window. She posed with her face void of any expression, and she was motionless too.

"We don't smoke.", the moustached man said.

Since I am a person with an excellent mind, a good perception, and a good education, I soon realized that I was not welcome in this place. Thus I swung around and turned to the door, toward the entrance, through which I had come. But when I reached for the handle, glancing to the door, in the midst of which was a window, through which I could see the street, where a bus ran by, I noticed, in the corner of my eye, a table, just by the side of the door, saying:

"THIS ENTRANCE is locked due to the need for protection of the people who are seeking help, care and refuge at the hospital. If you want to be let out of here, you have to talk to a doctor first."

Then I realized, for the second time, that I maybe should not have entered this place at all! It is a marvel that you are actu-

ally able to recognize things twice. It gives to life another dimension.

Actually, it is a strange condition, that one might, in the land of the free, be entering a room of your own will, just to momentarily be wholly stripped of your rights as a citizen and as a human being. But I guess this is not happening only in my country, but all over the world. If you in some way are mentally ill or have lost some of your usual happy composure, you might be regarded as someone that should be taken care of by others until you might have regained trust in your own fate.

But I can't help thinking that such an order is curious. On one hand, I admitted myself freely, and now I am stuck here! It just ain't right.

I now turned to the two men, who I presumed were in the same predicament as me. They could not get out either. Not through the door through which they had entered.

It was no swing door. So to say.

The moustache man then lifted his right arm and very earnestly looking, pointed towards the nurse behind the glass pane.

"You should go tell them your name!"

I did not like the situation. I felt not only monitored but treated like a child. The situation reminded me actually of when I was a little child. My father - who was an office clerk of lower rank - had a tight grip on the whole family, and I used to think that I had no freedom what so ever back in my early years. I actually used to think that life was not worth living because my father told us to stay home and not run

around. I now, at the Pandemion, felt somewhat the same. Neither worse nor better. Just the same.

I felt as though I had not, although I was 23 years old, not get out of the nursery.

I went up to the woman, in whose eyes I could spot my own face, mirrored. She slowly pulled the glass aside as to avoid making any unnecessary sound, and looked at me without any smile, and I said:

"Saulus Distery."

The woman who was a nurse scribbled my name down, and I soon returned to the two men on the benches. I sat down on the one bench, with the mustache fellow. You always sit by the sanest. I thought. The bench had a wooden surface was so well tended to that you almost could not avoid slipping off the bench and down on the

floor, no matter what you did to stay on it, It was only when I watched him attend to his shoestring, that I noticed how agile he was. The moustasche man seemed to be a gymnast or something. He could reached every part of his body with any other part of his body, it seemed to me. I looked at him with a new appreciation and somber admiration.

"So?" he said.

"Saulus," I said.

He looked at me without introducing himself. I realized that it was silly of me to do so. So I added:

"I just got confused."

Again the moustasche athlete took advantage over my wretched condition and gave me a cool and admonishing glance.

Then, as through a miracle, he broke into a burst of small laughter.

"I was just kidding.", he said, and continued in a loud voice, taking into account the presence of the third man, the biker youth:

"I am Bastian. This (he pointed at the dribble boy) is Thoma-Bob."

I gave both a smile and felt comforted.

The rubber man, and this is the name I came up with and that I will let to stick to the moustache man for a while, took out a small pocket book from somewhere and started to read somewhere in the middle of it. I saw the title "Best bride" by some Gallagher.

I glanced at my watch. It was 7 PM. Outside it was dark. I could see through the door that has refused to let me out. The window

on the door was the only window in the small corridor-like room. The walls were white, and void of any decoration.

I was both angry and sad, but I felt happier when I was introduced to my comrades.

When I glanced around, I saw a stool with a pile of brochures on it. They said: "Pandemion Hospital. A small guide while you are waiting."

I glanced at the young Toma-Bob, who seemed to have fallen asleep, with his head in a sharp bend backward over the back of the wooden sofa. I thought that this would not last long since the benches were looked for in such a way that it should be impossible to rest on them, much less fall asleep and dream.

Since I felt abandoned by my new friends, I grasped for the small folder and started to read.

"Pand©moniom Hospital is a hospital that is run by Pandemoinium Corporation Inc. The Pandemoiniu Corporation Inc. has a wide range of faciliues in the healrth cARE AND INSURANCE FIELD.

We also are deepley involved in undertaker businesss, and provide tombstones and funeral music. We specialize in Chopin music for funerals.

Furthermorer we have restaurants for people with Asperger's disease and for those who have lost direction in faith.

Welcome to the Pandemonion Club!"

I was aa little perplex. I had never heard of Pandemonium Club or anything. I am absolutely for a free market. I am not a communist. But I do not like raw capitalism.

I put down the brochure, and as I turned to check upon my two mates in the waiting

room, I heard a small noise from a door, that I had not noticed before. It was hid in the wall just to the right of where the nurse sat, while the green entrance door was on the left, from my perspective.

The door soon opened; a small well-fed man with slick black hair entered. He had a smile, and he looked at us all in turn. He had a brown jacket on which there was a small sign pinned. The jacket also had golden buttons.

It said: "Psych. Em. Room. Attendant".

He smiled carelessly around.

At this moment, a fire-truck passed by outside, with high alarm. "OO-OUUUUUIIIII". Thoma-Bob woke up just as he was about to slide off the sofa. He looked around and spotted the attendant, who was but a young lad, but had large eyes.

"Hupp.", Thoma-Bob said, " I sure slept, and dreamt. And I can say that I would not care for being any place else than this. It is cozy here. I am joking. But I am not joking."

With his left hand he waved before his eyes, as to try to remove cobweb or something.

Rubber Man looked lovingly at the scene.

The attendant spoke, sitting on the edge of the sofa, not far away from the nurse, who had opened her window about 15 cm. She gave the attendant a make-believe kiss, forming her mouth, which was dark red.

"Hey, everybody.", the attendant said, " I am an attendant for cozyness and security here."

Thoma-Bob gasped. He spat in his hand and rubbed his face with the spat.

Rubber Man was occupied with his crime novel. I, myself, took my eyes off Thoma-Bob to look at the attendant, who did not receive any reaction from neither of the three of us. But he seemed to be used to hard times, because he said:

"I am Mr. Niften. We at Pandemonium always put our customers first. Our customers are at our heart. We are bleeding for our clients. We will very soon see that you will all have a balcony of your own."

Thoma-Bob tried to make himself comfortable on the bench by taking off his black skin coat and turning it up into a perfect cushion.

"Hey Niften! I love rooms like this one.", he said.

The nurse now summoned for attention. She pulled the glass window aside and spoke.

"I am so sorry you will have to wait. But the night shift has not arrived yet. Perhaps you will have to wait. It is always hard to find the doctors we need. In these troubled times. After all, we are in Baltimore."

She shut the window with a loud shriek.

I turned to the attendant.

"Pardon me. What did you just say about a balcony?"

"I didn't catch your name, sir?"

"Ah. No, perhaps because I did not tell you. But it is Salus. Saulus Distery."

"Berry Nifton."

"Thoma-Bob de José.", Thoma-Bob hol-
lered, again and again making the odd ges-
ture before his face, as to try to get rid of
something.

Another fire-truck or police car drove by
outside." OOOOUU-UIIIII."

"We have balconies, Saulus.", Berry then
said, kind of intimizing with me." That is
the primary treatment here. You know,
science has come a long way."

"I know.", I said because I knew that sci-
ence had just done that.

Rubber Man bent down to the floor to
scratch the top of his shoe.

"I always come here for the balconies.", he
said in a light tone.

I was puzzled.

Now, how do you feel?" Mr. Nifton asked, and he leaned forward.

"I am not really here to search for...."

"We know.", Nifton assured. "Anything is better than being lost and forlorn. Here is it so sweet and the saviour has let his blood for you."

"Pardon?"

"I mean, we have balconies, on the rear side, of course, that presents somewhat like an eternal piece the way Christ wanted piece to come out of the pain from his wounds. And resurrection is close."

"But you are a psychiatric ward?"

"Of course we are. We have never been more psychiatric than now."

"I see. But might I see a doctor?"

"I thought you said you came here by mistake and did not really need a doctor."

"I did say no such thing.", I said.

Now Rubber Man sighed and put away his book. He turned to Thoma-Bob, who just had tried to take another nap, probably convinced that this would solve the problem that he sometimes tried to get rid of by gestures.

"Hey, Bob! Di you think we will soon be seated on a balcony?"

Bob woke up and answered:

"I really like waiting rooms. In a lounge like this, I'd feel pretty calm. No danger here. And you cannot let yourself out either. Here it is like sitting in a bosom. You are in the hands of Mr. Nifton."

Thoma-Bob laughed and suddenly took his coat and put it on again. He was rest-

less, the way junkies are. He could not keep his hands still, and I was convinced he was on something. But I said:

"I also am very comfortable, depending on the milieu."

"Life merely is the milieu.", Nifton remarked and took out a notepad from his waist-pocket.

"Sitting in a bosom.", he murmured while he scribbled it down in a book.

Then the door from the street suddenly opened, and a tall man entered, and while he waited for the door to close behind him, he dried his lips, took off his hat, let his glasses sink a bit on his nose, took off his at and said:

"I am Doctor Norton. I will soon be tending to you in proper order. Please be seated and don't move. I will return."

He then ran past all of us, and vanished behind the door through which Mr. Nifton had entered.

"Ah, the night shift!" I sighed, glancing at Mr. Nifton.

But Nifton indulged in his note pad, where he had made a small sketch of a person seated on a balcony.

It did not take long before the doctor appeared again. He could not possibly have had time to drink even the smallest cup of coffee.

"Saulus Distery.", he said, looking at a piece of paper.

I wondered how he knew my name, but I was more worried by the fact that the doctor chose me instead of the other two, who had been in the lounge for a far longer time than me.

"It is me," I said, "but I am not...."

"WE haven't time for this." Norton said. "I am sure YOU have time for this. But WE don't. I have a job. This is a psych...."

"Please, let me leave! Let me out of here!" I pledged.

"You are here now.", doctor Norton said and took me by the arm and lead me through the door and into a sparsely lit corridor. I had no time but to wave to Rubber Man and Thoma-Bob, who both whispered in a theatrical manner:

"See you!"

The doctor and I were soon seated in a luxury office, thick carpets, mahogany desk, and ebenholtz chairs. Here was even a small window, through which I could spot a beautiful garden, where hens were walking around among rose bushes, in the middle of Baltymore.

I was stunned, and I thus said:

"I don't know, but I kind of misunderstood."

"That is the way." Norton said." Please tell me about that! About misunderstanding."

Now he looked amiable, and he pointed at a large poster on the wall.

"What do you see?"

I looked at the poster. It showed a naked lady who licked her immense breast.

"Ooh! A lady."

"That is right.", he said and lent back in his enormous chair, which almost swallowed him up." Tell me more!" he hollered.

"I did not expect to find a poster like that when seeking help in a psychiatric hospital...."

"You are in the wrong."

"No. I did not expect..."

"You probably do not know what you expected."

"I do know what I expect."

"You do now, but you have forgotten that you actually did not expect anything at all. You are having some fantasies. Delusions. If there were phantasies, that is... There are no such things as phantasies in this

world. But, if phantasies really did exist, you absolutely are the type of person, who would get them first."

Norton had a sharp gaze. His eyes were absolutely fantastic. He looked almost like a young Robert Oppenheimer.

"I don't understand.", I at last - after having looked at him, his eyes, nose and ears for a long time - summarized.

"Tell me what you want! Why are you here?", the doctor now encountered, apparently tired of the subject of expectation, fantasy and such. He did not look friendly, but not hostile either. He looked smart.

"I really came here to ask for a light. I should light my cigarette."

Norton did not change his facial expression, but he reached for the phone, which looked like a small attendant, stood on the desk.

"Do we have any beds free?" he said on the phone.

"Alright. We have a fellow here who would like to lit a cigarette."

I looked at Doctor Norton.

Perhaps it was just a bad dream.

Soon a young man came and fetched me from Norton's office and took me to an elevator, and a couple of minutes later, I was seated on a sofa in WARD No. 25.

I looked at the plastic flowers in the vases, windows that had bars in front of them, furniture that was wooden and beige, patients who looked numb and drugged, and nurses who all looked like school girls who participated in a school play, acting as

nurses. They were all wearing make-up, and lipstick, in a darkish red.

I was served some tea in a plastic cup. The girl said:

"Here it is for you."

Then Nifton arrived through the ward door, and he brought Thoma-Bob and Rubber Man with him.

They sat down, all of them round the table where I was sitting. Sun shone in through the barred window on the carpet beside us, and I welcomed them.

Nifton patted Thoma -Bob on the back.

"Now you are here, Bob!"

I must say, I hate when people are taking such attitudes to others. Who gave this Nifton the right to be so condescending? But I said:

"Poor Bob is barely awake."

Bob looked at me angrily, but then he plays along and murmured:

"Good morning."

Rubber Man took out his book and said:

"For the rain, it always rains."

Then I saw doctor Norton enter the ward.

"Oh, Oh." I said, " now comes the medicine...."

And I heard doctor Norton tell the nurses:"
Nembutal, Largactil, Prozac, Hibernol,
Truxal, Librium, Meproamat, and Disper-
sal."

Then he disappeared.

After a while, the nurses came and told us.

"You will have to line up here, for the injections."

Thoma-Bob lined up, but the rest of us remained seated.

Rubber Man lent towards me and said:

"Everything happens to me."

I glanced at Mr. Nifton, who started to sing that tune, and then I tried to come to contact with a nurse, and I shouted to her:

"Can I smoke a cigarette here?"

I was led into a small room with extra ventilation. I found myself all alone, and this room was hermetically closed, so I did not hear the song that Nifton sang. I just sat there, and the nurse had lit my cigarette, and I looked around at the walls. There were no pictures of any kind here. And I let out a big sigh, filled with smoke, and I said - while my whole life passed like in a

movie before my inner eye - in a loud voice:

"Finally. I am just waiting for my own balcony."

FINIS

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, hospitals, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental

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