

# **A SPECIAL PLACE IN HELL**

*Whenever I hear about a terrorist attack from a suicide bomber, I pray that there is a Hell. This story was written in response of a vicious attack. Unfortunately, there are so many that I don't remember which one this was a reaction to.*

Jimmy Cox felt himself begin to stir, and he realized that he was still alive. The last thing he remembered was being strapped down on the table and a doctor injecting something into his arm. He had been protesting the entire time, claiming that he had been innocent all along! He had claimed that the entire time but the only one who seemed to have believed him was his public defendant lawyer and a lot good that guy did.

He opened his eyes and looked around. It was too dark to make out anything. Weird.

On second thought, maybe that shyster lawyer Al Tachiti had come through after all. Maybe he received a last minute stay of execution.

But he could still clearly remember being executed. It was fresh in his mind. He remembered feeling drowsy and then nothing but sleep. He supposed that the entire incident was a dream. And why wouldn't he have such dreams? After all, he had been on death row for seven years and his scheduled execution day did arrive. What else could possibly be on his mind? Well, whatever happened he was still alive.

Wasn't he?

And then a sudden thought hit Cox. He had been well aware about the public outcry when he had been sentenced to death. The consensus had been that most people hadn't wanted him to be executed, whether they agreed with executions or not. No, they declared that the crime had been so heinous that he should have been sentenced to life in prison. Execution was the easy way out. He wouldn't be suffering afterwards. While life in prison, with torture thrown in as well, would guarantee that he would suffer for his crimes.

Well just suppose, thought Cox, if the people got their wish but didn't know it. Perhaps the execution was all a pretense. Perhaps the authorities had pretended to execute him where in fact they really just knocked him out. Then after the warden announced that he was dead, they removed him from the execution chamber and instead of delivering him to a mortuary, they brought him to some dungeon somewhere where they intended to torture him? And nobody would know a thing! Cox gritted his teeth. He was strong. He felt strong. They wouldn't be able to break him

no matter what they threw at him.

Cox looked down and as his eyes adjusted to the dark he noticed that he wasn't dressed. He was sure that he had been in a gown right before he fell asleep. This just kept getting crazier. Why would they undress him while he was sleeping? If he really got a stay of execution wouldn't they have just returned him to his cell? He could have been in a cell but he didn't remember the one he had been in ever being as dark as this one. Even when they had the lights out there was always a little light permeating from the guard's section and from the tiny window that was too high for him to ever look out from. This definitely wasn't his cell, at least not the one he had been in before he had been executed.

No, he had to stop thinking that way. Obviously he hadn't been executed. Cox tried to think about everything that happened before he fell asleep. He remembered everything clearly. He knew his name. He knew his age - 26. He remembered a childhood without a father and a mother who constantly drank as her escape from the real world. She was a mother in word only as she never looked after him while he was growing up. She was never there for him all the times he got in trouble in school. He couldn't talk to her when he decided to drop out of high school because he felt it was a waste of time. He couldn't make her proud of anything so in his young mind he had nothing to accomplish. Using her as an example he finally got a job as a custodian in the drugstore, figuring that it would be a good way to get drugs without having to hustle on the street. As he looked without fondness at his mother, who not once attended the trial or even visited while he was in prison, he blamed her for the trouble he got himself into.

Then he wondered if it had all been a dream. Was this the real world that he found himself in now? No, it couldn't be. Cox remembered everything too clearly for his whole life to have been a fabrication. He remembered the incident, the trial, the verdict. He remembered sticking with his story throughout the entire ordeal. A lot good that did him. He remembered laying on the gurney and being wheeled to the execution chamber. He remembered them sticking the needles into his arm although he was screaming the entire time. And he remembered falling asleep.

And the next thing he knew, his eyes were open and he was standing naked in this dark room. Or was it a room? As his eyes slowly got accustomed to the dark he saw that it was not exactly a room. There were stairs leading up and down. It looked to him like he was on the landing of a staircase. It seemed strange that the staircase didn't have a light. That was dangerous! It would be too easy to fall down the stairs because he

couldn't see where he was going.

Cox wondered what he should do. Nothing was going to get done if he just stood there and tried to figure out his predicament. He had to make things happen. It was obvious that he had to use the stairs. The only question was the direction that he should go. Up or down? It wasn't an easy choice since he didn't know where he was. If he was in a building he would want to go down to the ground level. On the other hand, he might have been in a basement and would want to climb up. He finally came to the conclusion that he was underground. It was just too dark to be anywhere else.

Cox started to head to the staircase leading up when he heard a voice coming from the descending staircase. "Wrong way," said the voice. Cox looked towards where the voice came from and arising from the staircase was a guy dressed completely in white beckoning with his index finger for Cox to come towards him.

"What do you mean wrong way?" asked Cox.

"I don't think there's any other interpretation of that statement," said the man in white.

"Well I want to get out of here," Cox responded.

"You can forget that. The only thing you can do is follow me," said the man as he began to descend the stairs out of Cox's sight.

"The hell with you," muttered Cox under his breath so the man in white wouldn't hear. Not that he cared if the guy heard him or not. As far as Cox could judge, the man was a good four inches shorter than him. If he tried to oppose Cox, Cox would show the man that he meant business.

Cox climbed up the staircase two steps at a time. When he reached a landing he found the man in white waiting for him. "No," said the man. "Not the hell with me. It's the hell for you!"

"How did you do that?" asked Cox. "You were going downstairs! How did you get up here without me seeing you?" The man in white didn't respond. "Oh I get it," said Cox. "It's so dark in here that I just didn't see you pass me. But I see you now. Get out of my way before I throw you out of my way!"

The man in white sighed. "You know, part of me wants to let you go. Part of me just wants to let you climb the stairs. The thing is I don't feel like following you when I know the outcome will just be the same. No matter how high you climb, you're never going to get anywhere."

"What is that supposed to mean? If there are stairs, they have to lead to somewhere!"

"The stairs only lead down," said the man in white.

"What is that supposed to mean?" asked Cox. "These stairs are going

up!"

"They are stairs going down from above us. That's the only way you can go."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

The guy in white sighed again. "There is a midpoint on the staircase but the two halves are sealed off from each other. Everybody arrives here at some level of the staircase. The higher the level the better. We're below that point so the only way is down. The lower the level that you start at, the worse your internment will be. You, my friend, are not at the bottom. But you're pretty close."

"What does that even mean?" asked Jimmy.

"Well no one ever explained to me what it means. My own interpretation is that the lesser your sins, the more time you have to think about it and perhaps absolve yourself. If your sins are so great that there's no chance for absolution, no need to waste the time and try and change things."

One minute he had been proclaiming his innocence and the next thing he knew he was being led down several flights of stairs by a mysterious guy dressed in white. It was weird. He remembered laying on the table as a bunch of guards strapped him in and injected him with something. He had been screaming the whole time that he was innocent but the guards just ignored him. And then he sort of dozed off and when he woke up he was on this weird staircase and the guy in white had beckoned Jimmy to follow him. "Am I dead?" asked Jimmy.

"There is no such thing as death. You've just moved on to the next level of your existence."

The two reached the bottom. Jimmy yelled to the guy in white, "What did we do, climb down to Hell?"

The guy in white turned around and pointed his index finger at Jimmy. "Bingo!" he said. "Your new home."

Jimmy didn't smell any sulfur nor did he see any flames. Actually he could see very little because of the intense darkness. Suddenly a doorframe appeared within the darkness in front of him and a door rapidly opened revealing some light behind it. But with it came the most wretched sounds that Jimmy had ever heard in his life. It sounded like the wails of thousands, maybe millions of individuals all crying out in severe agony.

The man motioned for Jimmy to pass through the open doorway but Jimmy wouldn't budge. "No man, I'm innocent! You got the wrong guy!" screamed Jimmy.

"I know everything about you," said the man in white. "I know that

you entered the store where you had been fired from a week earlier. I know that you took 24 people hostage and locked them in a back room where you tied their arms and legs. I know that included in that group of hostages were three children under the age of four. I know that you brutally raped all of the females either naturally or with a broom handle. And then you sodomized all of the males with the same broom handle. I know that afterwards you slit each of their throats and that there were no survivors. Should I go on?"

"It wasn't me!" screamed Jimmy. "It was someone else who did that!"

"That's what you've claimed all along. Why didn't you just kill yourself there like most mass-murderers do? I'll tell you why. Because you're a coward. You're a little guy who only felt like he was in control when he had a weapon. You were a big shot when you could take people weaker than you and command them to do things that they would never do if they weren't threatened. You raped two people before you resorted to the broom. One was a seventeen-year old girl who just went to the store to apply for a cashier position. The other was a little girl who had just turned two that day and her mother brought her there so they could buy birthday candles for her cake. And you raped that little girl in front of her mother. Then you killed that little girl in front of her mother. Then you tried to rape the mother but the little man that you were couldn't get it up anymore so you turned to the broom that you found in the room that you had everyone locked up in. And then you killed the mother. But you couldn't kill yourself. You were such a tough guy in control until it came time to kill yourself. No, what did you do? You tell this ridiculous story that you were a hostage yourself. You were the only male hostage who didn't get sodomized and killed. Amazing. What's even more amazing was that you really thought people would believe it."

"It wasn't me!"

The guy in white shook his head. "Listen to me Cox, you're guilty. Guilty as Hell," he said with a smile. "You could deny it as much as you want but there are no innocent people here."

"What do you mean? Innocent people get convicted all the time!"

"Yes, that's true. But if you had been innocent; even if you had erroneously been convicted and executed, you would have walked up the steps, not down them."

"Mistakes can always be made."

"Not here," said the guy in white. "You're guilty. You could claim your innocence as much as you want, but if you really believe it, you're only fooling yourself. If you're here, you're guilty. Accept that."

Jimmy finally followed the man through the doorway and his ears almost exploded from the wails that surrounded him. The man explained where they were. "In this wing are the terrorists who flew the planes into the buildings on September 11. Their punishment is to be in an explosion for all eternity. If you can ever imagine what it was like to be in one of those planes when it crashed into the World Trade Center, this is what they feel every moment of their existence. Not quite 72 virgins is it?"

"And the individual suicide bombers are here also. Their punishment isn't quite as severe. The only thing they have to permanently endure is the pain of what it feels like to have a bomb constantly blowing up beneath them."

They passed through another doorway. If possible, the decibel level of the shrieks increased. "This area belongs to the mass murderers. Hitler naturally is here but he's not alone. He usually screams the loudest but it's getting increasingly more difficult to distinguish one scream from another. Hitler's punishment is to eternally endure the cumulative pain that he inflicted upon his ten million or so victims. He feels the cold that they felt when they were forced to walk outside naked. He feels his lungs bursting like their's did when they were gassed. Now take that pain and multiply it by ten million and that's what he feels at any given moment. And the pain never subsides. It's like an old episode of *Twilight Zone* only he'll never get used to it and he'll never go mad."

"Who are you?" Jimmy finally asked.

"My name is Abe Finklestein"

"What are you? The caretaker of this place?"

Finklestein shook his head. "No, I'm just another person who did something bad in his prior existence."

"What did you do that was so terrible?"

"I embezzled from the Mutual Fund that I was the custodian of."

"And for that you came here?" asked Jimmy. "That doesn't sound so bad."

"You don't come here based on the degree of how bad you were. If you did something wrong during your life, you come here. The degree of your crime is the basis of your punishment."

"And what's your punishment? Do people continuously steal money from you?" asked Cox with a contemptuous sneer.

"My punishment is just existing here. When I went to jail I had a three-month old daughter. My wife didn't want her to grow up with a convict as a father so when the girl was old enough to understand, her mother told

her that I was dead. By that time I really was dead because I suffered a fatal heart attack while I was in jail. However, the girl never learned the truth about me. So my punishment is that I'll never be reunited with my daughter. I'll never get to know her."

Jimmy smiled. "Hey, she might wind up here. You never know."

Finkelstein glared at Jimmy. "I do know. She won't wind up here."

"How come you get to wear clothes and I don't?" asked Cox.

"I don't know," said the man. "That's just the way it is. We can't question anything that happens here. There's nobody to ask."

"No devil?"

"No devil," confirmed Finkelstein. "And I'm not in a position to confirm if there's a God."

Cox didn't realize he was standing against a wall because it had been too dark to see it until he was directly against it. Suddenly cuffs appeared out from the wall and floor and encircled his wrists and ankles. "Hey!" he screamed. "What's going on here?"

The room suddenly brightened and Cox could see around him, not that there was anything to see. They were in a small grey room and he was shackled against the wall. The man moved to within his peripheral vision. He was holding what looked like a stick. Cox turned his head so he could see better. It looked more like a broom handle with spikes protruding from it everywhere.

"Before you remarked that maybe I'll see my daughter here," said the man. "I told you that that wasn't happening. How do I know? Because my daughter was in the store the day you went on your rampage. She was the seventeen-year old who was there to get a job. She was the one you brutally raped before slitting her throat."

"I hope you know that your eternal punishment fits your crime as much as possible," said the man from alongside Cox. "In case you haven't realized it you don't need to eat here. Therefore you won't need to shit any more either."

The man held up the broom handle with the protruding spikes. "But don't worry. Your ass won't go to waste."

And then a new scream joined the endless mass scream that permeated the enclave.