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ONE MAN'S HEAVEN. . . .
by Dennis Pitz*

"Well I'll be damned!" E. Mycroft DeGroote's words sounded strangely tinny as he floated lightly above the scene of the accident that had, moments earlier, claimed his life. He looked at the wreckage of his automobile with the detached amazement that was so common--in fact--universal--among men who had structured their lives around the presupposition that the afterlife was a whole lot of mumbo-jumbo and that religion was horseshit.

"Well I'll be damned," he repeated as he looked through the shattered windshield at the final act of his life splayed across the front seat of the car: A wind blown page of The Wall Street Journal rattled against his crushed body like winter leaves against a cyclone fence. In his lap was a still steaming half-cup of Seven-Eleven coffee. The rest was splashed across the dashboard and was beginning to freeze in the cold air.

Oh I wish Erma could see this, he thought as he remembered the years upon tedious years of badgering he received from his father-in-law's daughter. "Blessed be the meek for they shall inherit the Earth," she would say, her lips pursed reverently. Or the thousands and thousands and THOUSANDS of "Praise the Lords" he was, over the years of his miserable marriage, want to endure. Each time it would come tumbling out of that woman he would think: Praise the New York Stock Exchange; or Praise Gommeringer and DeGroote Ltd.; or Praise the day I'm rid of you, you dumb bitch! Yes, he had to laugh at all those years Erma made her life a hell of piety while in the same house he led his life. And what difference did it make? He looked again at his robes, white and silken in the cold damp night, and couldn't help but throw his arms out and twirl in childish delight. "I'm free, home FREE!!" he shouted wildly. It was when he turned that he saw the Shepherd waiting patiently behind him.

The angel was huge; his black skin had a strange irridescent quality, as did his brilliantly white robes. Silken wings flowed in back of him like coral fans blowing in a south-set current. Moving; alive.

"Are you . . ." stammered Mycroft, caught completely off guard and fearing the worst.

"No Mr. DeGroot. I will escort you to the Hereafter." The Shepherd looked at Mycroft as one might look at a starving child; his stare was a strange mixture of pity and aloofness. "You no doubt have many questions. I will try to answer them if I can."

"Yes, I do have some questions," said DeGroot, having sufficiently recovered from his fear of who this apparition might be. "Who exactly are you?" he asked, trying to gain an advantage--any advantage.

"I, Mr. DeGroot, am Jehovah, whom you have heard referred to as God."

"Then--" he stammered, "then this is the Judgment?" DeGroot's robed shoulders quivered visibly with fear.

"No Mr. DeGroot, there is no judgment, at least not now. Any recognition of sins has--and must be--made here." Jehovah spread his huge hands to indicate the Earth.

"You mean to say that I will be sent to hell without even a chance to plead my case; to burn forever without an appeal?!" Mycroft was before The Shepherd, his hands clasped pleadingly.

"You misunderstand Mr. DeGroot. You will go to the Hereafter as do all men and women. I was merely trying to make you aware that the judgment of good and evil is a function of this plane of existence." Again Jehovah passed his hands--palms down--before him.

"Oh thank you--Thank you," groveled Mycroft. "All my life I have worshipped power and money and I see now the error . . ."

"Mr. DeGroot. The time is long since past." The Shepherd placed one of his huge black hands lightly on Mycroft's shoulder. "This you must understand."

"Certainly Lord. Forgive me." DeGroot said it without thinking, automatically. He looked up at The

Shepherd's face for affirmation.

"It is no longer needed." Jehovah turned away, apparently engaged in some other thought.

E. Mycroft DeGroote pondered these facts and shortly came to the conclusion that he was in fact safe from that fate. If I'm going to enjoy it, he thought, I may as well gain some sort of initiative. Suddenly a terrifying thought struck him.

"You mentioned that all men and women end up in The Hereafter didn't you Jehovah?"

"Hugh? Oh, yes, that's true." The Shepherd seemed momentarily confused as he again looked at Mycroft.

"Then am I going to have to spend eternity with Erma? I mean, if I am I want out. Thirty years of that shit is enough for anyone." Mycroft figured that he had nothing to lose, so he may as well gain some advantage. But his ploy certainly wasn't based on bluff. The thought of spending eternity with Erma did scare the daylights out of him.

"No Mr. DeGroote, that will not happen. I can assure you that dear Erma will never hear from you again." Jehovah again looked down at Mycroft, only this time his lips parted ever so slightly in a fateful smile of assurance. "I believe in your words this situation is described as being 'home free,' am I right Mr. DeGroote?"

Mycroft was slightly stung by the fact that the Lord had witnessed his childish display of happiness. He could feel his ears redden.

"But like you said," the Lord continued. "That is all behind you now. We have much to do. Shall we be at it?"

"Yeah, sure." Jehovah's cordiality had caught Mycroft completely off guard. "But where is it we are off to?" Mycroft asked suspiciously.

"It's hard for you to accept that after a life of protracted sin you are not going to have to pay the debt by burning forever in hell, isn't it Mr. DeGroote? It sort of strikes at your businessman's ethic of 'you get what you pay for' doesn't it? Well if it will make it any easier, I can assure you that you will be a useful, contributing member of the Hereafter." The Lord placed a fatherly hand

on Mycroft's shoulder, bidding him to rise.

"No sir, it's not that at all," lied Mycroft. "I merely was interested in knowing if it was the Hereafter we were bound for. You see sir, I will not try to hide the fact that I did not believe while here." Mycroft shrugged nervously toward the steaming wreck of his automobile. "But now I see very clearly that I was wrong and that faith has finally come to . . ."

"It makes no difference now Mr. DeGroot," interrupted Jehovah. "What is written in the past is there forever, and in the timeless place for which you are bound faith is not an issue. Let us go." With those words The Lord passed a gigantic hand across his breast and the scene of the accident as well as the Earth itself receded as if Mycroft were looking at it in reverse through a zoom lens. The edges of objects took on a fuzzy quality and suddenly Mycroft and The Lord were floating in the middle of a room only slightly larger than an average living room. Its walls were fashioned from a curiously smooth flat black substance which made it somewhat difficult, though not impossible, for Mycroft to distinguish features such as corners or doors. By far the most striking feature of the room, however, was the thousands upon thousands of bright specks of light floating like dust in the air. Everywhere Mycroft looked his eyes were dazzled by their electric fire. Even the boundaries of his body were not immune to these cold points of brilliance. He raised a robed arm and looked helplessly through it at the lights as a leper might look at his sores.

"You are now a spirit," said the Lord noticing Mycroft's distress. "Now you are a part of the universe as am I."

Mycroft looked at The Lord and noticed at once a dull pink glow on the wall of the room behind him. It seemed to slowly undulate, rather like a jelly fish, he thought. As he watched, small portions of it seemed to leap from the main body only to be recovered again by tentacle like arms appearing majestically and gently ushering the wayward lump of glowing pink fluff back to again join the main body which covered nearly the entire wall.

"There is your home," said Jehovah, pointing to a small aqua orb spinning madly next to his head. Mycroft looked with amazement at the Earth, no larger now than a toy, and realized for the first time how foolish he had been. It looked so small and insignificant. He could now, without any trouble at all, distinguish the separate planets. He looked at mighty Saturn which resembled a florescent tennis ball with celophane rings and then back at the Earth; its clouds moving as though alive. "Hey, wait a minute!" he exclaimed as he looked at a toy Jupiter, Neptune, and Venus. "These are all fake," he shouted.

"Not all," said Jehovah drawing the Earth closer to Mycroft with a casual wave of his hand. "Look at this one closely. Look at it, Mr. DeGroote, with the wonderful vision that only the likes of you and, of course, I possess." The Lord's voice had taken on a cold somber quality. Mycroft looked closely at the Earth and was amazed to find himself able to pick out the smallest details of the surface. He wondered if he could perhaps catch a glimpse of Erma, maybe catch her with her pants down engaged in some unspeakable sin, but gave it up as not appropriate. Later, he thought. He saw people scurrying about from place to place; airplanes, ships. Huge cities fascinated Mycroft as their lights winked on and off to the rhythm of the spinning Earth. Days passed which to Mycroft seemed as brief as the pages of a book blowing in a summer breeze. He looked again at the rest of the planets, decoys floating in an empty room; lifeless substitutes so obviously placed there solely for the titilation of man's wonder.

"Are they all like this?" asked Mycroft chokingly. After all, he did own large blocks of stock in the Aerospace Industry. Imagine, he thought, what a nose dive it would take if this got out.

"Every one," said Jehovah, drawing a few stars nearer to them for closer scrutiny.

"What about other galaxies, those beyond these walls?"

The Lord looked at him as if puzzled. "Beyond these walls? There is nothing beyond these walls. Here, let me show you." Jehovah ushered him to a wall and asked him to

press his ear against it. The Lord then went to the opposite wall and rapped soundly on it with his knuckles.

"See?"

At first Mycroft did not appreciate the meaning of it, but then it hit him in a cold wave of understanding. "The walls run onto one another," he said, more in shock than in wonder.

"Yes, I'm afraid that is as near a conclusion as I can come to also. At first it was horrible, awakening to existence in this bubble," Jehovah said while looking about in resignation. "But then this--this idea formed within me. I was completely helpless against its onslaught and in the end I began to perform much in the way you see me now. Of course I first had to seed the Earth, but that was more or less automatic, much like a bird building a nest. But once that was going it became a rather self-perpetuating thing. Oh to be sure, in those first years I poked and prodded my creation; I guess you could say I experimented with the ways of these men." Jehovah indicated the Earth, now spinning merrily in the middle of the room. "But that quickly became old as I began to be more and more preoccupied with the meaning of all of this." At his gesture Mycroft too looked about the room, its corners littered with shallow lumps of cosmic dust, its stars twinkling smoothly on.

"But all of this. . . embedded in. . . no way out?"

"Yes, it would seem that that is exactly the case, Mr. DeGroote. Here forever from my dim beginnings to. . . well, your guess is as good as mine."

The walls seemed to press in on him. He wanted to block it all out, to no longer have to see anything. All he had ever thought--true, he hardly believed it--but in the back of his mind there was an image of buoyancy and spaciousness that spoke of the Hereafter. Mycroft was overwhelmed. He just wanted to go somewhere--anywhere--to think in peace. He tried to close his eyes and discovered to his horror that he couldn't. He could look anywhere he wished but he couldn't close his eyes. But no matter where he happened to gaze the walls pressed in, smothering

him with fright.

"How do you stand this," he gulped while pulling at the collar of his robe with a trembling finger. "I mean, do you get used to it? And what happens if it--, surely there must be tremendous forces out there?" His eyes were darting madly from one wall to another.

"You simply learn to cope," said the Shepherd. "I too find it difficult at times to accept this as being all there is." He again held his large black hands wide. "But if it is possible to conceive of the huge, does not that also imply the miniscule? At any rate Mr. DeGroote, life goes on." He smiled ironically, irony that was as lost to DeGroote as star sapphires are to orangoutangs. "And we too must be off."

"Hugh?" grunted DeGroote, still looking at the walls with his shoulders hunched up around his ears.

"We must be off, Mr. DeGroote. There." The Lord turned and with Mycroft looked searchingly at the undulating fluffy pink cloud on the far wall.

"But, what is it?" asked DeGroote, now immensely interested in a feature of the place that had until now been nothing save a curiosity to be gotten to only after the other horrible and fascinating aspects of this place had been totally understood. "It seems to be moving."

"And it is, Mr. DeGroote. Constantly spinning, and seething, and churning. Always reclaiming its own. It is what we have referred to as The Hereafter." Jehovah indicated the cloud with an over-the-shoulder thumb as he again began to drift off into preoccupation

"But--but what about this," Mycroft shrieked. "All of this. What in hell is all of this!" He indicated the room, the stars and his gowns in a helpless demand for understanding.

"No, this is not the Hereafter. This is what you might call a waiting room. Your kind are sent here to understand the workings of it all. It's imperative that you understand, for if you should not, then this all becomes pointless sham."

"But you said the Judgment was on Earth!"

"And it is. When the last drops of mortal life dripped from you, you relinquished your chance of repentance. It is as lost to you as a mother's breast is to her fully grown child. It no longer applies, Mr. DeGroote. What is, ever shall be."

"But I still don't understand," said Mycroft quickly, childishly, trying every way possible to prolong going any nearer to the pink blob than he had to. Surely, he thought, it must be an evil place. Now that he knew his eternity would be spent there it certainly had taken on an evil cast.

"It is the balance," the Lord said soothingly.

"I owe no one," Mycroft implored, completely misunderstanding the Lord's comment.

"Don't you? I think in a few moments even you will look with a different light on the question of obligation." The pair had begun to drift toward the cloud. Once near to it, Mycroft was aware of a faint buzz emanating from the cloud, not unlike the buzzing one hears coming from a honeybee hive. Mycroft, even in fear, had to admit that it was quite an experience standing alongside of the Lord and beholding a Hereafter that looked to him like the remains of a cotton candy vendor's cart that had suffered a direct hit from a 105mm Howitzer. Try as he might he could not quite grasp the sense of it all and--he reflected--as long as he didn't understand it he was, presumably, safe.

"I know what you are thinking, said Jehovah. "They all go through it. But you will shortly have to admit that the simplicity of the system completely rules out misunderstanding."

"Nothing has changed, Jehovah. It still looks like a lot of horseshit. You haven't been able to clarify it so I'll just stay here a while," he said, settling back into his robes. He had to admit they were becoming rather comfortable.

"Oh, it's not me that will cause you to understand. Behold." And with that comment the Shepherd indicated the cloud again. To Mycroft's amazement a shape of a man was materializing and coming towards them.

"No, Mr. DeGroote," said Jehovah reassuringly, "it is

not Satan. Who it is is not important. But he is part and parcel of what this is all for, as are you.

The spirit advanced until he was literally within inches of Mycroft. He was looking at a point in the room slightly below and to the left of the Lord's face.

"Such happiness I feel that you Lord should beckon the unworthy likes of me, sir!" The spirit was obviously in a high state of excitement.

"Who in hell is this?" asked Mycroft, jerking a thumb at the newcomer and looking to Jehovah for an explanation; demanding an explanation.

"I have a charge for you brother," said the Lord to the spirit, completely ignoring Mycroft. "He is a poor mute spirit that has been placed in your charge in order that he may in time find our ways and again be able to preach the gospel."

The newcomer nodded eagerly and blindly reached a hand in Mycroft's general direction.

"What's this 'mute spirit' batshit! I'm as able to speak as you are."

"But that's the point, Mr. DeGroote. You are only able to speak to me. This spirit," the Lord indicated the newcomer still smiling blindly, unaware of the lull in the Lord's address, "is only aware of you as a presence, and it will be his happy duty to preach the gospel to you forever. He will go on as a well-oiled machine as unable to hear you as clams are to read poetry. And that Mr. DeGroote is the simplicity of it. I can see now that you understand that this spirit and all others like him have never seen the way it really is." Jehovah indicated the walls and the stars. "To them it stretches forever, and there is no way possible for you to communicate what you know to them for they can't hear you. But you can be at peace with the knowledge that without you, Mr. DeGroote, this would all be meaningless."

The self-composure Mycroft felt in his ignorance faded from him leaving a horrible understanding of the simplicity of the system. But to find condolence in being an integral part of the system was wasted on DeGroote. He was never

quite able to stand a loser.

Mycroft tried to flee but found to his horror that he was bound by gossamer threads to the blind spirit. Together Mycroft and the blind spirit plunged headlong into the seething mass of praying, preaching, debating fluff, amid a recitation of the scriptures and a lively debate on the feasibility of other gods in other universes.

Once Mycroft looked back over his shoulder to plead again to Jehovah for mercy, but the Lord was on the far side of the room tapping the wall and listening intently.

Tapping and listening.

E. Mycroft DeGroot tried not to look again.

* Honorable Mention in the Annual English Department Writing Contest, Creative Writing Category.