



NEVER AGAIN THE SAME

The man turned over in his bed and stared at the pale yellow walls, and at the barred window. He raised himself to a sitting position, pushed the blankets from him and swung his legs out over the side of the bed. He stood. For a moment, he felt dizzy, and grabbed at the bedrail to steady himself. Then, taking a deep breath, he hobbled out into the corridor.

Somewhere, a radio played soft music, the kind they play in supermarkets — *and in madhouses*, the man said beneath his breath. It was not a good thing to do, to be seen speaking when no-one was listening. That was what the really insane ones did, the ones who had given up. They muttered to themselves, and the doctors would prescribe more drugs for them, to calm them, to cool out their wandering tongues. From time to time, these ones-who-no-longer-cared would scream out their anger, spout the madneses that had clung to them like wild weeds, and... they would be dragged away, tied to their beds, given stronger drugs. Sometimes, it was whispered, they were being experimented upon. In the name of science. To help provide a better tomorrow for — no, not for them — for others. But, they were never told this. This too was a part of the madness...

And if they were not so mad, if there still resembled bits and pieces left of sanity in their thoughts, and they

protested, refused the druggings — then — ah, then they would, as the inside joke went, be 'in for a bit of a shock'.

They would be electrocuted, not to death, but to somewhere beyond space and time, beyond death. They would enter a room one day and come out of it never again the same. Their angers forgotten for a time, they would walk, like vegetables; stare, like fish at the walls and at the windows; and they would try to remember.

And, they would not be able to.

The man moved along the corridor, past locked door after locked door, until he came at last to a group of people dressed all the same, looking like strange members of an unwanted family. They shuffled back and forth in front of a television set; they sat and talked, those who were able; they drank from paper cups, water for their pills. And they played cards. And they stumbled in their minds, each and every one of them that was able, stumbled on the word 'insane'. For each one of them had been labelled as such, each member of this family of misfits — fitted into one special category: they were the insane. They the madmen and madwomen. Not of this world. Not of this world.

Or so it was rumored.

The man, as if suddenly remembering this, shook thoughts of madness from his mind, and spoke, slowly,

loudly, deliberately causing the others to take notice, to stop whatever they had been doing.

"There has been a great mistake," he said, "a terrible and horrible mistake. Somehow we have gotten the idea that it is we who are ill. I say it is not we, but they who are ill."

He shifted his feet, and spoke more quietly. "There is not a man or woman among you who does not think that he alone is sane, and the rest not. There is not one soul in this room who believes any other one among us is not mentally decapitated. For I have become as you. I know the thoughts of your mind. I think the same thoughts. I think — the same thoughts..."

...

He smiled a little at his joke. From somewhere behind him, he could hear shifting of clothing, rustling of issued pyjamas, and he turned. "You wear," he said to the one who had moved, "hospital clothing. And you wear, inside your head, doctor's thinking. Cast them from you. Cast them from you."

In a corner of the room, next to a radiator, two hands clapped silently together.

Madness upon madness.

Everyone heard those two hands clapping, and it was like the sound of only one hand clapping; and only a madperson would hear. And so they all began to clap, noiselessly; and they stood, each one of them who had not too much Haldol, not too much Moditen, Modecate, Lithium, Valium, Surmontil... and the one with Tardive Dyskinesia did not move.

And for a moment, there in their nakedness, they knew, that here was a Truthful Man; the One they had waited for; and He had come; and He had told them; and He was one of them...

In the morning when they arose, nothing had changed. Iron bars, cold walls, colder hearts, needles, pills, prescriptions — all were there. In abundance. They did not talk about what had been said the night before. There was no need to speak of it; the words had taken away their fears. Now they were One; now they were One. And, never again would they be broken apart, rejected as the labelled insane.

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