

## NIGHTMARE

The pungent smell of gasoline burned quickly through my nostrils and settled deep into my throat. Coughing to the point of vomiting, I desperately fought to keep myself above the fluid surrounding me. On all sides as far as I could see, icy golden liquid moved hypnotically in wavelike patterns that crashed fiercely with each

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roll. The devastating sound of each swell, louder than anything I could ever recall, pierced my ear drums as I felt warm liquid flow from each ear. Now, in utter and eerie silence I found myself alone in this demented sea of chaos.

As I, again, brought my head to the surface, I began to feel the waves calm, and the putrid smell was replaced with an aroma of what can be best described as a sugary mix of sweet bread and warm chocolate. The bitter coldness of the liquid also began to warm to room temperature, allowing me to float almost effortlessly in its midst. Still unable to hear, I watched as two large cylindrical pillars rose from the sea and ascended as far as I could see into the red vapor atmosphere above me. In the center between the columns rose a marble stairway that was shaped much like a cubed maze in pattern. From the very top there shone a reddish metallic light that beckoned me to approach it. I couldn't explain the overwhelming desire to reach the light; I only felt that somehow it was drawing me toward it. I lifted myself from the watery pit and began to climb this maze, one

block at a time.

Higher and higher I ascended, until the yellow sea below became like a small puddle. As I neared what appeared to be the pinnacle, the light from above began to grow dimmer, and the environment shifted once again. A bitter cold wind blew from all directions at me, as if some force was trying to throw me from the staircase.

Just as I was about to lose my grip, a small angelic being lowered its tiny hand toward me; I desperately grabbed on to avoid what would have been undoubt

## Walker's Vale

edly my death. As the being pulled me to the surface where it stood, I could see that it was neither female nor male by appearance and was eight or ten-years-old. It had one of the most beautiful and otherworldly expressions I had ever seen. Its beautifully formed face sparkled with tiny beads of sunlight and its flowing bronze hair seemed to float effortlessly above the shoulders.

I stood in its presence, awed by the majestic quality it radiated. As it glided around me, guided by its large powerful wings, the creature carefully examined me from top to bottom. It hovered behind me for what seemed like seconds, and without warning, the being made contact by gently touching my ears. A sudden rush of electricity flowed through me as I began to hear childish laughter from behind. As I turned to face my healer, the angelic entity began to transform before me into a distorted, hideous monstrosity. It laughed at me with an insane ferocity and lunged at me with pincher-like claws, obviously trying to tear me into shreds. Thick black smoke poured through the monster's mammoth fangs, which reeked of poisonous, decaying elements.

I yelled at the top of my lungs, "Jesus, help me please!" in absolute desperation.

At once, the creature lunged backward and began to twist its body into a serpent-like coil. It released a piercingly loud howl as if in extreme torment while it continued to writhe and convulse its body. With nowhere to go, I decided the only way to escape the beast was to jump off of the ledge. With the demon now disoriented, I leaped from the edge back into the red mist and fell swiftly through the haze, turning end over end.

As I began to accelerate rapidly toward the liquid bottom,

I again was overcome with the intense smell of gasoline. I tried to reach out to grab either of the pillars, only to see them crumble into the sea below me. What was before a shimmering yellow ocean was now a black moving tide of insects and vermin. I could do nothing to stop myself as I fell directly into the cavernous pit. Spiders, centipedes, and other forms of bugs crawled on and inside me until I could no longer breathe, and I started to sink further into their abyss. I continued to fall deeper while I gasped for some oxygen—helplessly covered in crawling blackness. Until...