

## Checking in to Check Out:

*By Eep Spectre*

The keycard scraped into the slot, grinding against bits of dirt, grime, and lord knows what else. It didn't matter. He wasn't there to paint a scene or make a memory. He was there to do what needed doing.

"Just get it done" he muttered to himself repeatedly, as the light on the lock turned green, and he twisted the long bar of the door handle down and pressed against the door.

***THUMP! Beep.***

The lock beeped as the light flickered from green to red as the man's face struck the faded blue door.

"Piece of shit. Just fucking open!"

He pulled the keycard back out.

"God-damnit." The man muttered, as he continued fumbling with the keycard.

After what seemed like several moments, the door finally swung open, and the sterile smell of commercial cleaners wafted through the opening.

The man walked in and dropped his small grey suitcase on the bed closest to the window and plopped down beside it. He dropped his hands over his eyes and began to rub his face. *Yeah, this will do* he thought to himself. In truth, one place was just as good as another.

"Alright Geoffrey let's do this. We don't want to chicken out again, do we?" said a husky, deep voice.

Geoffrey thought about the time in the bathroom at his small three-bedroom home off 20<sup>th</sup> in Midland. The taste of the cold steel and carbon replayed itself over his tastebuds. The faint smell of sulfur teasing his nostrils. His finger trembled on the trigger that day, in fear, and in anticipation. The fear of pain, and the banging on the bathroom door had stayed his hand, but there would be no interruptions this time.

"Are you going to do it, or not?" the voice called impatiently.

Geoffrey fumbled with the zipper on his suitcase, fingers yet again trembling. The sound of the teeth unclasping as the puller followed the journey around the case served to bolster the man's wavering resolve.

'*Not this time*', he thought to himself. The lid flew open, and he thrust his hands into the open suitcase, rooting around for the instruments needed to complete the mission. Fingers

flipping through slacks, paper, until finally striking his target; a smooth plastic cylinder, holding a months' worth of his pills.

He wrapped his long slender fingers around the bottle, and ripped it from its bed, nestled in the sloppily folded clothes. After dropping them carelessly on to the bed, he began rooting for the next and final tool.

"Oh, something to wash the medicine down with, eh?" asked the voice. "Good. Don't chicken out again. This time they'll put you away and not just medicate you. Then you'll be stuck with me, and with your misery."

"Shut the fuck up." Geoffrey replied. "You think I don't know? I'm going to end it all tonight. My escape will bring a better future for them. They won't be trapped like me."

"Do you think I won't find them? Your blood courses through them. So too do your *problems*." The voice chuckled menacingly, its voice echoing loudly in Geoffrey's mind. "You're a coward Geoffy boy. You won't do it. You'll keep the cycle going, just like your mama, and her mama before her."

Darkness began to swirl and coalesce on the bed until a tall slender shadow rested beside the man. Yellowish orange eyes peered through shadowy lids, while pale blue lips parted, unveiling the sharp pointed yellow teeth it kept sheathed in its mouth.

Geoffrey peered at the figure and rolled his eyes. "If you're not going to help Mel, go away. You and Al have done this for years, you heckle and deride me. Then you try to goad me into following whatever desire you have. Why don't you disappear like Al did?"

"When have I ever bowed to a human? Not from the beginning, and certainly not as you decide to end your life" Mel sneered, pointedly ignoring the remark about Al. It had been over a decade since Melek had communed with the other demon, Alastor. The last time they spoke, Alastor decreed that he would attempt a ritual to become human and was never heard from again. Melek could only assume the other demon had been destroyed in the process

Geoffrey grabbed his phone and thumbed through his playlist. The discordant sounds of his favorite metal songs began blasting through the speakers, driving Mel from their reverie.

"If I'm going to die today, I may as well go out listening to my favorite bands. Finally, I'll escape, and so too, will my family."

He unscrewed the top of his hydroxyzine pills, dumped a handful in his mouth, and drowned them with Wild Turkey Rye, flushing the bitter pills down his throat. No more hesitation, Geoffrey repeated the process until both the whiskey and pills were gone. Sweet escape awaiting, the fuzzy darkness reaching as the pace of his heartbeat quickened.

He looked to Mel and flashed a twisted droopy grin.

“Seeya in hell demon.” He chuckled halfheartedly, as his breathing became more labored and his heart struck his chest like the drums from “Psychosocial,” which was one of his favorite songs.

Mel scoffed and shook its head. Eyes aglow, the demon rolled to its feet and stood over the stupid human.

“I will give you one gift human. One chance to change your decision. This will be the only time I give one of your kind this gift.” As Mel spoke, it raised its shadowy clawed left hand to Geoffrey’s forehead. “See your life, what has been, could be, and would be. Choose.” Melek shook its head, waved its hand over Geoffrey’s phone and began to fade from existence. After many years of feeding on Geoffrey’s emotions, and soul, it had become fond of the human. Normally the demon wouldn’t violate the natural order, however, this one time, for this human only, Melek would break the code, and give the human an opportunity to save its soul.

With a final look to the human, it dissipated, following its tether to the abyssal realm where it would wait and drink Geoffrey’s final moments. Hoping that perhaps this human would show potential and break free from the cycle.

As Melek disappeared, its words echoed in the back of Geoffrey’s mind. He felt so tired. His body had become heavy under the weight of his anxiety medication. The fuzzy darkness wrapping itself around him like a chilled blanket. His pounding heart beat to the sounds of Slipknot while the drumming reverberated in his skull.

The feeling in his mind playing the black and white static, buzzing like on an old tube TV. Colors swirling around the screen, forming blurry pictures. A small boy pushing a toy bubble mower, giggling. “Daddy wook! Bubbews!”

The picture fast forwarding, disjointedly flashing back and forth between present, past and presumed future. On the screen, lines zigzagged, like jagged teeth. **Beep. Beep. Beep.** The line flattens, a long, never-ending beep resounded, as the screen shows a different small boy lying on a small, infant sized hospital bed. The boy’s skin blue, eyes closed. **Beeep. Beep. Beep. Beep.** The screen zipping forward again, showing the same boy, much larger, reaching out of the screen.

Image, after image, a stream of movies unfolded before Geoffrey’s eyes. Children giggling, people smiling and laughing. Geoffrey watched; tears flowed from his eyes. The music drowned by the echoes of his memories as the movie continued forward.

A tall boy, stood before a coffin crying, *‘mommy, why isn’t daddy moving, why isn’t daddy talking. Daddy, daddy. Please daddy. I want to play with you.’* The boy screamed at the coffin, stomping and begging for his father to wake up.

Melek’s words echoed in the back of Geoffrey’s mind again, *‘Choose’*.

*What did Mel mean* he wondered? The weight of the darkness choked him as the visions continued playing as videos.

“Do I die here? Will it really hurt them?” He asked himself, slipping further into the darkness.

*Choose...*

Geoffrey gripped his phone, his numb fingers stumbling to punch in the unlock code. As the darkness reached its icy fingers to grip the final remnants of his consciousness, Geoffrey punched the call button and faded into darkness.

“911 operator, please state your emergency”