

THE WAITING ROOM

By India Eddy

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Cast of Characters

PAUL: *male, 40's or 50's*

JACQUES: *male, early 20's*

ADMINISTRATOR: *either, no age*

Place

A Waiting Room

Time

If Only We Could Tell

ACT 1
Scene 1

Setting:

A waiting room, day... or, at least it looks like it. There are no windows. Three chairs are lined up in a row. On one chair sits Paul. There is a door: it is locked. Motel art decorates the grey walls, a false picture of homeliness. Next to the chairs is a small table with a large collection of magazines. Against the wall is a water dispenser with a stack of paper cones. It is silent.

At Rise:

Paul stews in his own company for a moment, entertaining himself with nothing, staring forward directly into the audience. This goes on for just a beat longer than is comfortable or necessary, then enter Jacques, not from the door. The door is locked.

Jacques takes a seat far from Paul, sitting as still as he can for as long as he can... it is not long. He looks to Paul, who doesn't look back, he looks to the room, who does. A pathetic little dance ensues as Jacques attempts to find something to entertain himself within a room specifically designed to be nothing. He quickly lands on Paul, the only thing in the room he thinks might talk back. He waits until the silence is too loud to speak, maybe a moment longer. Stretch this silence for as long as necessary and then some; discomfort is the goal.

Jacques looks between Paul and the audience for a moment before he leans forward onto his knees and examines his hands.

JACQUES

What're you in for? (Paul *doesn't* answer.) Kidding...

...

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Can I ask you something?

(No answer)

Do you have, like, a weird tingly thing in your chest?

...

See, I can't tell if it's some kind of side effect of being dead or if I just have the tingles.

...

PAUL

The tingles?

JACQUES

Yeah, you know, when you get all tingly?

PAUL

No, I do not know.

JACQUES

Oh. Well. It's just when you, like... get tingly and stuff. But I can't tell if this is that or a new thing.

PAUL

I do not have the tingles.

JACQUES

Well, that's that, then.

...

Can I ask you something else?

(No answer).

How did you think it would feel?

...

Because I was dead wrong. I thought it would be like before I was born. Like nothing. But this is definitely not that. You?

(No answer).

...

...

...

Can I ask you another question?

PAUL

Are you going to do it anyway?

JACQUES

How did you die?

(No answer. The silence somehow gets thicker).

Too far?
Sorry.

(Jacques waits just about as long as he can without speaking).

So how long have you been here?

PAUL

...

I don't know.

JACQUES

Do you want me to stop asking questions?

PAUL

Desperately.

JACQUES

Too bad I'm already dead so you can't do shit about it.

PAUL

I can't...

(Paul looks ominously to the door.)

JACQUES

What?

(He follows Paul's eyes to the door).

You think someone's watching us?

(Paul shrugs).

What?

PAUL

All that I know is that someone holier than you or I is in charge of deciding where we go from here. And I know that they are sitting behind that door. And I know that that door is not soundproof.

JACQUES

So I'm not already in Hell? Because you could've fooled me.

(Paul only looks at Jacques).

Okay. Sorry. So, how do you know that what we do in here counts?

PAUL

I don't.

JACQUES

I tell you what, that is fucked up. Even in death I can't get a moment of peace from people telling me I'm screwing up.

PAUL

You really should watch your mouth.

JACQUES

You're not even a little mad about all this?

PAUL

No. I see no point in getting angry.

JACQUES

Okay, and I see no point in not getting angry. Even if the shit we do or say or think in this room does matter, which you don't know it does, how much is that really going to change? I mean, I don't know what you got up to in the land of the living, but I bet I could rescue a bus full of puppies in this room and still get sent to the slow cooker.

PAUL

You never know where you stand.

JACQUES

Yeah, well, sometimes you do. Sometimes you've already fucked up so much that all you can think is "hey, one more can't hurt!" Sometimes, you're screwed.

PAUL

Sometimes, you're not.

JACQUES

What, were you a therapist before you kicked the bucket?

PAUL

No.

JACQUES
(an excited gasp).

An answer!
(to the door)

Did you guys hear that, he answered my question!

PAUL
Quiet down; I am sure you're bothering them.

JACQUES
(sarcastically)
Sorry, Dad.

(More silence).

How *did* you die?

(Paul looks at him).

PAUL
A car accident.

JACQUES
Shit, I'm sorry man.

PAUL
It's alright. We're both dead, aren't we?

JACQUES
You got me there. I, at least, was sick, though. I saw it coming.

PAUL
I may not have seen it coming, but I was ready... Were you?

JACQUES
What, ready to die? Shit, man, of course not. I mean, I thought I was, but really? I had no clue...

PAUL
I was ready. I did everything right.

JACQUES

What do you mean, did everything right? *(No answer)*. Like church and stuff? You say a prayer before every meal? You give up masturbating for Lent? You know Jesus doesn't like when you tickle your ween.

PAUL

I really wish you would have more respect for this whole process.

JACQUES

Let me ask you one thing: is this what you thought it would look like? This rip-off dentist's office?

PAUL

...
No.

JACQUES

Then maybe we were both wrong.

PAUL

You seem to be forgetting that I lived my entire life by the virtues of God. I did everything right.

JACQUES

Yeah? Then why's this taking so long?

(Paul falls silent again, turning back to face perfectly forward again. The silence continues to drag on. Jacques anxiously bounces his leg. He looks past Paul to the magazines on the table.)

Pass me one of those?

(Paul tracks Jacques' eyeline to the magazines. He hesitates.)

What? You think it's some sort of test? That I'm supposed to just sit in this room and not touch anything and that's how they know I won't leave fingerprints on the walls Heaven? Just shove it.

Okay?

(He stands up and snatches a magazine from the stack. He storms back to his seat and opens the magazine, revealing to the audience a Playboy cover. He storms back to the table and slams it down where he got it.)

Okay so maybe that one was a test. But I think my point still stands. I'd rather make the most of whatever life I have than kill myself trying to obtain whatever ridiculous standard of perfection the big man upstairs might want from me, wouldn't you?

PAUL

No.

JACQUES

You're an idiot.

PAUL

Okay.

(A long, long moment of quiet).

My faith is not what killed me.

...

JACQUES

...

No, I imagine it was a car.

(Paul is amused, then it is silent. He goes to the fountain, grabs a paper cone and tries to fill it. It's empty. He puts the cup back and sits back down. Jacques chuckles.)

JACQUES

Fitting.

(They're silent for a moment.)

Do you feel like that too?

PAUL

Like what?

JACQUES

Empty.

PAUL

Just the regular amount.

(The room becomes silent again. The awkward silence becomes thick again as Paul stares straight to the audience, and Jacques looks anxiously around the room. After what seems like too long, a voice cuts through the silence. The voice is coming from the door, but also not from the door; from everywhere and nowhere at once.)

ADMINISTRATOR

Paul Holman.

JACQUES

Oh, thank God.

PAUL

Yes. Hello. I am Paul Holman.

ADMINISTRATOR

Hello, Paul Holman. Heads or tails?

PAUL

Pardon me?

ADMINISTRATOR

Paul Holman, please select one. Heads or tails?

PAUL

Uh, heads.

ADMINISTRATOR

Paul Holman, heads. Jacques Monroe?

JACQUES

Uh, yes, yeah, yes. Yes?

ADMINISTRATOR

Jacques Monroe, heads or tails?

JACQUES

Oh. Can I- uhm. I guess... tails?

ADMINISTRATOR

Jacques Monroe, tails. Thank you for your cooperation. You will hear from us with your assignment shortly.

(The voice stops, the awkward silence returns instantly.)

JACQUES

What do you think all that was about?

PAUL

I try not to question God.

JACQUES

You really still think God is listening?

(The silence returns, somber and heavy instead of awkward this time. After a while, the voice cuts in again.)

ADMINISTRATOR

Jacques Monroe. *(Jacques stands.)* Congratulations, you have been admitted to an eternity in Heaven. Thank you for your patience and we hope you will enjoy your stay. The door will open for you momentarily; please step inside and welcome to your future. *(The door opens.)*

JACQUES

Jesus. Really? Okay, I wasn't expecting that one. *(He walks to the door.)*

PAUL

You never know where you stand.

JACQUES

Hey, Paul? It was good to meet you. I'll keep an eye out for you, okay?

PAUL

Alright. Thank you.

(Jacques walks through the door, closing it behind him).

ADMINISTRATOR

Paul Holman. *(Paul stands.)* Unfortunately, we have determined that you do not meet the qualifications for entry into Heaven.

PAUL

What?

ADMINISTRATOR

The door to Hell will be open shortly. Please feel free to take a complimentary cup of water with you. It's hot down there!

PAUL

No no no. Wait a minute, I don't understand.

ADMINISTRATOR

Your case was a difficult one, Mr. Holman. It was not easy to come to this decision.

PAUL

But I did everything right! There must be some sort of mistake, please check again. Whatever you do back there, run it again. There is some sort of mistake. Please.

ADMINISTRATOR

Your case was a difficult one, Mr. Holman. We hope you can understand.

PAUL

Oh, bullshit. My case was difficult? What about that other guy? Why is he going to Heaven and I'm not? I did everything right. I did everything right! What did he do that I didn't? What!

ADMINISTRATOR

He won the coin toss. *(A beat.)* The door to Hell will be open shortly. Please feel free to take a complimentary cup of water with you. It's hot down there!

PAUL

(Quietly.) It's empty. *(Paul stands still for a moment, then the door opens. Paul stares at it for a moment before he takes a look around the room. He crosses to the water fountain, grabs the stack of cups from the top, and carries it with him as he crosses to the door. He stops in front of it for a moment before he goes through, closing the door behind him.)*

The room stays lit for a moment too long before the light fades into a blackout.

CURTAIN