

Paradise Disillusioned

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## Paradise Disillusioned Rationale

This short story is inspired heavily by Milton both thematically and formatively. The story is a modern application and exploration of original sin and the Biblical account of the fall of mankind; however, this story applies those themes to the “honeymoon phase” of marriage common to newlyweds. Their loss of pure, near-blind love for one another is analogous to the loss of perfection in the narrative of the Fall. While written in prose, “Paradise Disillusioned” attempts to mimic Milton’s heavy use of allusion, symbolism, and layered characterization, especially of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, a mirror character of which may be found within this work. As with Milton, my story, though portraying human frailty, provides the basis for future redemption and the inherent success of mankind over its faults. I also attempted to mimic, at least in parts and always to a smaller degree, the poetic language of Milton, especially in description. Altogether, the story and the characters therein attempt to present the topic of good against evil, as well as the intricacies inherent to that conflict. I hope you enjoy the story, and that it does Milton no injustice in its attempt!

## Paradise Disillusioned

A drunken haze of pure delight followed Allan and Ellen Parsons into the Paradise Hotel less than twenty-four hours after their wedding. The ceremony and reception had been beautiful. St. John's Episcopal had been arrayed in streams of gold and white reaching high into the light of the stained-glass windows, brilliantly illuminating every inch of the sacred building in divine purity. The two made their solemn, seemingly unbreakable vows, celebrated their fortune with family and friends afterward, and set out on a plane for their present destination in Spain.

The innocent lovers glided to the front door, hand-in-hand, to check into their all-expenses-paid paradise. The bell-boy took their unusually small amount of luggage to their room while a grizzled, dark receptionist handled the newlyweds' check-in. All the employees about the room exchanged furtive glances between each other and the young couple in their new environment. Everyone could smell the naivety about them, choking like strong perfume, filling the room. Old Sam, as the receptionist was known, hated newlyweds, or maybe it was their innocence and blindness he hated. Nevertheless, the other employees waited curiously for Old Sam to have his say with young couples, the first of which that had arrived in a long time being poor Allan and Ellen.

"Name, please," Old Sam grumbled.

"Allan and Ellen Parsons," replied Allan. The two looked cheerily at each other, wrapped in their pure pleasure.

"And which might you be?" retorted Old Sam with a wicked look.

Unperturbed, Allan replied with his name. Old Sam wiped his greasy, greying black hair from his wrinkled forehead and typed on the computer at his side. He looked at the screen for a moment before a crooked smile passed his face.

“Newlyweds,” he hissed.

“Yes sir! Married yesterday, or maybe even today, I guess!” Allan replied. Ellen twittered happily.

“Wonderful,” replied their host with biting sarcasm. Other employees passed closer to the front desk on their varied travels than they normally would. Old Sam continued, “Yes, we have you a suite on the twelfth floor, if you can make it that far. Here, take this,” his gnarled hands passed them a densely-packed fruit basket filled with a diverse range of fruits that neither of the young pair had even seen before. “Compliments of your friends here at the hotel.”

Old Sam passed Allan a shiny, gold door key engraved with the number twelve. Allan took the key, placed it in his pocket with the hand that did not currently belong to Ellen, and the two turned to go upstairs. As they waited for the elevator, Old Sam let out a small shout and waved them down from the desk.

“I almost forgot! How rude of me!” he then lowered his voice, painted the same devious smile across his face, and continued, “Welcome to paradise, my dears.”

Overjoyed at such a warm, clever reception, the two lovers beamed brighter than the sun in the sky and boarded the elevator, enamored by the perfection of their young lives.

Upon reaching their room, Allan placed the fruit basket down on the counter and kissed his new bride. Distracted by love, the two swayed too close to the counter, knocking the fruit basket off, causing it to break, and spilling fruit across the floor. The two separated and remained quiet for a moment from the shock before bursting into uproarious laughter. Allan began picking up fruits and pitching them gently at Ellen. The giggling young woman caught as many as she could but soon had more than she could hold and spilled several onto the floor. Out of convenient fruit to throw, Allan heaved the last available one, a large red apple. Ellen caught it

and brought it to her mouth. She had almost sunk her teeth into the delicious-looking fruit, so ripe and full of potential, when Allan caught her arm.

“We have dinner soon, you don’t want to spoil it, do you?” he asked lightly.

“Of course not dear, but the fruit looks so good!” Ellen replied.

“So it does, but if you eat it, you may not want anything else. Funny how something as small as an apple could ruin everything isn’t it?”

Ellen put the apple down and playfully slapped Allan’s arm. The two preceded to get ready for their dinner that night, which was to be a feast at one of the finest local restaurants. Fine dining had always been more difficult for the young couple, as they were both vegetarians and wanted to keep their bodies as clean as possible. They dressed in their nicest clothes, of which they had brought few, for the evening. Ellen wore a beige dress, and Allan donned a silk shirt and pants to match.

Our young lovers, radiant in all the glory of honeymoon excitement, headed downstairs, where they were impeded again by Old Sam, who contrasted the couple with his dark clothing, hair, and skin. If the Parsons were the embodiment of youthful purity, Old Sam personified the callousness and bitterness of hard-fought old age.

“Going out on the town, are we?” asked Old Sam with a false tone of interest.

“Yes! We’re going to The Garden!” replied Ellen.

“Oh, The Garden! That’s quite a nice place, it is. You wouldn’t want to go out without an umbrella though, looks like it may drizzle,” said the old man with a grin. The young couple looked outside and, to their chagrin, saw dark clouds forming. Allan, gallant gentlemen as he was, volunteered to go back to the room for an umbrella, while Ellen waited downstairs in the presence of Old Sam.

“Say there, young lady, that’s a fine young man you have there,” said the old devil, baiting the woman.

“Yes, he is quite fantastic!” she replied.

“And very true, I’m sure, very true.”

“Honesty is one of my favorite things about him.”

“Funny thing, that honesty.”

“How so?” the girl asked. The employees began to draw closer again.

“Oh, nothing to concern yourself with, my dear. It’s just an old man’s ramblings.

Honesty’s just funny is all. It’s not honesty we want, it’s the appearance of honesty. Nobody really cares if someone tells the truth or not, as long as you never find out they were lying.”

“Yes, but my Allan is always true,” replied the girl somewhat defiantly.

“Oh, yes dear, of course. I don’t mean to offend. I just mean that even if someone, not your Allan of course, were to be an uncommonly good liar, and you never found out about their lying to you, well that’s about as good as the truth, isn’t it?” asked Old Sam.

“Maybe, but I would still prefer the truth.”

Old Sam smiled. “Of course, dear, of course. Shame we can’t know everything, isn’t it? I guess some things are just left for the Man Upstairs.”

“That’s right, and we shouldn’t pay too much attention to things that don’t concern us. I wonder what *is* taking Allan so long.” Some of the usual ecstasy had dropped from her voice.

“Oh, I’m sure its nothing at all, my dear, nothing at all. He probably just misplaced the umbrella, that’s all.”

“Yes, prob...” but here a coughing fit overtook Ellen, starting lightly but soon becoming great whooping rattles. A slight tickle in her throat caused her to cough even worse each time she

tried to make it stop. Eventually, the coughing subsided slightly, just long enough for Old Sam to quickly hand her a cup, the contents of which, in such a miserable condition, she readily accepted. Her coughing stopped, and her throat was at ease. The rain poured down outside.

“Thank you! What was that?” Ellen asked of the grinning old man.

“No problem at all, just some apple juice I had here,” he replied.

Ellen’s demeanor fell, but she knew not why. Maybe the incident wherein Allan had warned her against the fruit in their bedroom had made her cautious to anything of the kind. Nevertheless, a tinge of guilt bubbled its way up from her belly to form a lump in her throat. Before she could think about it much longer, Allan came out of the elevator, and, for only a brief moment, Ellen saw him laughing along with a strange young blonde woman. She blinked, and the two were separated. Her husband walked back toward where she and Old Sam remained close to one another.

“It took me a while, but I found it!” he proclaimed, brandishing the umbrella.

“Wonderful,” replied Ellen, obviously less excited than before, “But I think I’ll go up and get a coat as well.”

Ellen disappeared into the elevator, leaving Allan alone with Old Sam. The miserable old man again seized his opportunity.

“Lovely young lady, that one!” Old Sam said.

“Oh, yes! My Ellen is the best! Practically attached at the ribs!” replied the naïve Allan.

“To be sure, to be sure,” retorted the old man, waiting to strike, “Funny about women, how they always keep one waiting! But your young wife wouldn’t, no doubt about it.”

Allan grew cautious at this indirect blow, but he did not argue either. His youthful love for Ellen still shielded him from the old man’s suggestion. However, he checked his watch.

“Well, in the meantime, let’s have a drink, shall we? No, no, don’t look at me that way, nothing alcoholic, dear boy! Just some old apple juice I have here at hand. It can’t hurt a bit, can it? The lovely lady already had one while you were away, and she suffered no harm! It’s only fair that you should indulge alongside your partner,” suggested Old Sam, holding the cup of swirling, golden brown liquid to Allan.

Allan made no response. He simply stared at the cup.

“We’ve got time, don’t we? The lady still hasn’t returned yet, has she?” pursued the tempter.

Old Sam continued to push the cup toward Allan. The young man again looked at his watch.

“Well, if Ellen had one...,” he whispered. He took the cup and swallowed it at a draught. Though the juice was gratifying, it settled with an inexplicably guilty feeling.

The elevator arrived, and Ellen trudged out wearing a shiny green raincoat, another held in her hands. She and her husband always matched. For a moment she paused, eyeing her husband holding the empty cup from which she had also drunk but a few moments prior. Her husband, her hero, had also surrendered. It was only juice, but somehow everyone in the room knew that it carried more weight than that alone. Ellen’s one burning question was what it had taken to convince Allan to drink the cup.

“I brought yours as well,” she said, holding out the green jacket, “I figured you might be wanting it.”

“Thanks,” he replied. He donned the jacket furtively. “Let’s go. We’re late.”

The two walked out of the Paradise Hotel with a space between them. Allan focused solely on the time, and Ellen on the other women of the room. Neither thought directly about



each other, or that their own individual thoughts were somehow related to the conduct of their spouse.

Old Sam stood darkly in the background, laughing silently at the two from whom he lifted the veil of newlywed bliss. The other employees also gathered around with silent, perverse smiles. However, they all knew deep down that the fun only lasted for a short time. Though things would never be the same for Allan and Ellen, in time their former bliss would return, if only in a different way.