
The Revolving Door

Henrietta's father worked in a factory making steel beams, that is, until one of them fell on him. An awful incident. Quite upsetting. Some of his co-workers needed counselling and both of his legs needed amputating. At least his spirit had remained in good condition - although there wasn't much money in that. Nor was there in being a housewife which is all Henrietta's mother knew. For weeks, plates went without food, beds without warmth, but the family's hardships seemed finally to be waning; Henrietta had just got herself a job.

High in the old Axle House building, Henrietta's heels clacked down the increasingly long corridor of Level 14. At one end was Mr Belchum's office, where she'd just been interviewed, and at the other was an elevator. She didn't pause to wonder if she had even arrived by elevator or where all the other rooms on Level 14 had gone. Everything for her was forwards now, ever forwards, and Mr Belchum watched her as she went. He stood at the window of

his office door, his face above his own name, his expression through the textured glass, upsettingly jagged. Henrietta had no cause to look back and see this frightful image. Moreover by the time she did finally reach the elevator and turned around, his office had gone dark. She didn't spot that either though, too preoccupied by daydreams of a future, happier, employed, self.

Henrietta's parents would be beyond relief. Their debts could be paid, the broken wheel on her father's wheelchair replaced. It was with a certain guilt, though, that Henrietta's thoughts strayed from her parents and onto the lap of the doorman she had met earlier, Marcello. Perhaps she ought to invite him round for dinner, one made with all the nice groceries she could now afford. She boiled and mashed the potatoes of her mind until the elevator's gate opened and she was seemingly back in the foyer. No sign of Marcello though. No sign of anyone.

A great deal of marble was all that met Henrietta. The foyer was roughly as she remembered it except for one thing: each chandelier appeared to have gotten brighter. They hadn't, of course, rather there was no longer any sunlight to compete with. Where there was once glass and morning sky existed now only brick. Very nice brick, but brick. And on that brick was a golden banner reading: 'Semper Vigilans, Semper Ostiosos'. Perhaps fortunately the only Latin Henrietta understood was that of the nearby EXIT sign which led to a revolving door. There was no other way in or out yet Henrietta hadn't any memory of entering via such a contraption. This was doubly strange because it wasn't one that could easily be forgotten. The revolving door was just too big.

An architectural oddity. Despite this, it was somehow compelled to turn on its own without needing to be pushed. Electricity was the only sensible explanation but then it wasn't a very sensible sort of thing. As far as it was possible to guess, there were at least a dozen compartments - maybe two dozen. Each one was partitioned by gilded panes of mahogany which were very handsome but had the disquieting effect of hiding the outside street. Henrietta considered limply wandering to find an alternate, more inviting, egress but didn't for fear of looking aimless in front of all the people that weren't there. Alas, after an interval of thoughtless hesitation, she resigned herself to the spinning doorway.

There was a relative Henrietta would occasionally have to see; a father of a cousin, of a cousin, of someone. Whoever he was, he seemed to delight in firmly swinging his arm around her shoulder to pull the two of them into an embrace. More recently he'd also taken to kissing her head and indulging in a good sniff of hair. Henrietta was reminded of him as she approached the revolving door. The swing of the coming compartment seemed overly keen and her politeness was all too ready to oblige it. A few regretful steps. A whimper of air as the mahogany partition crossed the door's opening and sealed her inside. *Just keep walking*, Henrietta thought, *within her dim chamber, the street will appear any second*. But a second became several, became a minute, and the street never showed. This carried on for longer than made intuitive sense. Surely the foyer should have at least reappeared. She made it through five full rotations before her quiet panic became loud.

Henrietta called for help but was responded only by the immediate and mocking echoes of her own voice. Pushing into the handrail at the edge of the partition, she tried to resist the door's turning but it had an old inertia which was not so easily persuaded. Composing herself a little, she then went about looking for logic within the vacuum of reason. Perhaps there was a seam or opening somewhere. After all, walls don't just change shape. But there wasn't. They had just changed shape. She took a lipstick from her bag and painted an X upon said wall in rouge frustration. Sure enough, a couple of minutes later, she came back around to that same marking. And again after another couple of minutes. And again. And again. She wasn't certain if this was reassuring but she had at least exercised some control over things and this kept her going for a time. But it wasn't long until that X became a grim reminder of her situation, a cuckoo-clock beside a deathbed. She wiped it away. She sighed. She hoped that Marcello might emerge from some hitherto unseen vent and carry her to safety. But Marcello didn't exist where she was now, and he may as well never have existed, and he never really did. She kept walking, for hours.

Tiredness and hunger came to distract Henrietta from panic and despair. Out of her bag she took a piece of stale bread. It was wrapped in yesterday's newspaper, the ink thereof had tattooed the crust with various morbidities. A bite reading "Economic Decline Inevitable" was particularly vile, moreso than she could bear. Henrietta slumped to the ground and let the door push her along as she wept. What was to happen? Her father would insist on

starting a search but he'd never make it down the apartment stairs; her mother would not be strong enough to help him but she would be stupid enough to try. The mixture of worry and bad bread boiled in Henrietta's stomach until it found its way out of her mouth, lumpy shades of beige, faint headlines still legible in the slop. She stood up to evade this mess but the door's spinning began to varnish it across the entire floor and, after a full rotation, it was unavoidable. *No good, no good at all - indecent.* In her job interview Henrietta had suggested that *problem solving* was one of her skills. Well, if she couldn't deal with being trapped she could at least find a way of avoiding her vomit.

A hammock. That's the solution Henrietta settled on. To this end she took off her coat and tied its sleeves to the handrail at one side of the compartment. It clearly wasn't going to reach across to the other railing so she then removed her blouse and skirt, lashing them to the coat as well. Still just short. There was only one thing for it, and yet, even after having been so very alone and so very enclosed for so very many hours, Henrietta hesitated when she took off her underwear as if someone were watching. Holding up the pieces of her little craft project, she walked a while before doing anything else. She needed her new nudity to become familiar and was surprised by how quickly it did. *There's work to do*, she thought, *no use in being coy.* Henrietta added her underwear to the hammock and, with that, it finally bridged the compartment.

Being made from her own clothes, the completed bed was a bizarre self-portrait - flatly unflattering, all monotone. Henrietta checked the

structural integrity and found it to be serviceable. She took a seat, kicked away her shoes, reclined, and, for an absurd moment, was pleased. She'd achieved something. It was comfortable enough too, certainly moreso than she had been for a while, and the pattern work on the ceiling of her revolving doorway really was rather pretty. This pleasure could not last though. The smell of her vomit and the shame of her nakedness would, at random intervals, snag against the weathered grain of her dignity. She would get hungry again and consider eating the bread which she knew would make her sick. Worry would be spent on people she could no longer help, herself most of all. Herself, kept awake by the shuddering of the door and lulled asleep by it as well. A half-sleep of aching muscles, bones, broken by dreams of waking up.