

Personal Hell - I'm Not Scared, Just Disappointed

by Lavinia Ludlow

I figure there's a lot of walnuts in brownies, beatboxers, old Asian men clipping their toenails in public, and guys wearing sunglasses at night who accuse me of being a lesbian after I reject them. I'm guessing the joint is made up of three neighborhoods: the DMV, the US Post Office, and United Airlines customer service counter that is never staffed. The only law enforcement are meter maids and bored cops who write me tickets for j-walking. All arguments and civil lawsuits are settled with karaoke sing-offs and beer pong.

The atmosphere reeks of a mass retailer's employee break room: a fusion of boiled cabbage, wet dog, uncircumcised dick smegma, and old man aftershave. Citizens have pot and airhead levels of intellect and manners, everyone texts at the dinner table, on first dates, during funerals and sex, and while driving. Girls openly talk about their periods and PMS, women graphically describe post-birthing hemorrhoids, placenta-eating parties, and how they aren't ashamed to breast-feed in public, and guys alternate between three actions: checking themselves in a mirror, saying bad puns, and pressuring people to high-five and do jäger bombs.

There's a twenty-four hour all-you-can-eat gluten-free buffet of cottage cheese and rice cakes, 100% cacao chocolate, warm German potato salad, garlic ice cream, and cake pops so dense and wet that I can taste the oil from the fingerprints of whoever manhandled it into conception. The only beverages options are cold hazelnut-flavored coffee and lukewarm low-carb beer in flavors like "margarita" and "strawberry daiquiri."

Not only do telemarketers, Mormons, and plastic food salesmen interrupt dinner, but tree-hugging tech nerds riot in the name of free-trade, environmentally sustainable organic produce ethically-sourced straight from the farmer. And the angry Molotov cocktail-hurling mob isn't complete without a pro-lifer waving around a pictures of dead baby parts.

The only machine at the gym is a tortuous Stairmaster and the only TV channel streams a 24/7 split-screen of FoxNews and CNN. If I am actively seeking out entertainment, my only choices are:

- 1) listening to audio tapes of Nicolas Cage doing an Italian accent,
- 2) Facebook-ing with my dad who posts Throw Back Thursday pics of me in awkward stages as a kid (when I had bangs, a perm, and wore culottes),
- 3) attending destination weddings where I'm required to be a bride's maid and shell out \$500 for a hideous dresses in colors like "papaya" and "avocado." On top of all the engagement and bridal showers I have to plan, pay for, and execute, I have to buy a gift for every party and the couple registered for items in the \$200+ range, and I have to stay at a resort spa that runs \$450 a night and requires me to tip everyone including doormen and elevator operators.

On my way to and from work in a dimly lit office of cubicles arranged like a laboratory mouse maze, I have to ride public transit where perverts grope my ass, tall dudes elbow me in the face, and nobody has any clue about "standing to the right" on the escalators leading in or out of the station. During my walk from the station to the office, I have to see immediate family members kissing on the lips and dog owners French-ing their pooches with a heavy exchange of slobber. Rich housewives stroll down the sidewalk in perpendicular lines five-wide so my only option to bypass is by

stepping into oncoming traffic made up of garbage trucks. Labor unions roam the lands like inner city seagulls relentlessly trying to convince me to sign away 20% of my paycheck to them because they have my best interest in mind. If I try to avoid the hustling by taking my car to work, the streets are filled with old Asian women who drive with their blinker on, go twenty miles under the speed limit, and incessantly jam on their brakes when there's no one in front of them.

Every day, including weekends, I'm forced into indentured slavery as a copy editor for multi-volume fantasy, sci-fi, and fan fiction novels where every character is a vampire engaging in tentacle porn. I can't get anything done because I'm chronically interrupted by pop-up ad videos, the kind that I have to watch for an agonizing 30 seconds before I can click "skip," and when I do, three more pop-up ads infest the screen with content based on my previous life's embarrassing browsing history like "Plan B Pill" and "personal massagers." If I do manage to hack through the pop-ups, I'm bombarded by email threads of "reply all" messages with follow-up bombardment of people replying-all with "QUIT REPLYING ALL" mixed in with trollers replying-all just to piss off those shouting at everyone in all caps to stop replying all.

My paycheck is consistently shorted and the only way to fix it is to visit HR, which is its own universe of Hell and not worth the suffering. Most of my money is eaten up by taxes that go toward social programs I'll never use like social security, disability, and unemployment, and whatever discretionary income remaining after the destination weddings, is auto-donated to the pink bow people, who after decades of infiltrating consumer product lines, claiming the month of October as its own, and billions of dollars of donations later, they've yet to be any closer to a mother fucking cure.

Satan is a wide-eyed Pollyanna mime who communicates with a ventriloquist dummy that corrects my grammar, speaks in internet

acronyms, tells me that I'd be a lot prettier if I just smiled more and lost fifteen pounds, and nags me about how all my problems will be solved if I just accept Jesus Christ into my heart. Against my will, I'm arranged to be married to that ventriloquism dummy, and after co-signing a San Francisco mortgage in the amount of \$1.2 million for a two hundred square foot micro condo with a \$1,200 a month association fee that goes toward communally-shared outhouses, he turns to me and says, "My divorce hasn't gone through yet, but she's getting 65% of our communal assets plus the house. On top of having to pay a lifetime of alimony, I have two teenage daughters that I'll have to pay child support on till they're eighteen, and although I originally told you I was open to having kids with you, I really just said that to get you in the sack. I got a vasectomy twelve years ago and I absolutely do not want any more kids."

The only furnishings our demonic HOA will allow us to have are United Airlines middle economy seats with sticky tray tables and broken armrests. If I somehow get comfortable enough to jerk off, just as I orgasm, I get a Charlie horse in my calf and the most elderly and conservative family member walks in on me, shrieking that I'm going to fry in hell for "interfering" with myself.

Although this is how I envision my personal hell, I have an inkling that I'll get downstairs and find nothing more than a windowless institutionalized room where my dad's reading *The Economist*. He'll listlessly inform me that the Antichrist had to work late at the office, but promised to plan something the next time I'm banished to Hell, and she said that if I so much as think about throwing a tantrum, I should remember how I've spent my entire life idealizing everything and setting myself up for disappointment, and I shouldn't have assumed Hell would be any different.

Originally published in Knee-Jerk

Magazine: <http://kneejerkmag.com/2016/03/my-personal-hell-i%E2%80%99m-not-scared-just-disappointed-by-lavinia-ludlow/>

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