

Saturdays with Satan

by tommy klehr

So it turns out that Satan is my neighbor. He lives a few miles up the road from me. I discovered this one day when I entered his house uninvited. I needed to use a bathroom. Badly. The door was open. I called. No answer. So I went in.

After an odd introduction, he offered me some of his homemade soup. Delicious, though in need of a little extra salt. A friendship was formed. He's not such a bad guy.

Every once in a while, he would stop by on his way to pick up the mail. Usually Saturdays. We'd shoot the shit on the porch. He was an angry old man. "Lousy kids," he'd say. They cut across his yard. "Like it would kill them to walk another 75 feet!"

"And those neighbors," he'd go on. "Two cars in pieces in the yard and a truck on cinder blocks!"

"What are you gonna do?" My words of wisdom.

"I work hard on my lawn. I want it to look nice. And it does, too. But when I sit on my porch, the view is terrible. My property value had dropped in half since I moved here. And there's always garbage blowing on my lawn. I mean really... do I look like I drink Milwaukee's Best?"

"No." I recalled his taste for dry red wine. Occasionally, he'd have a few beers from a local microbrewery but mostly, he drank French wine.

Satan, you see, was retired. Nothing to do now, but work on his lawn, play golf, and bitch about the neighbors and the decline of the world.

"I worked hard. I put in my time. Five thousand years is a long career. Day in. Day out. Perfect attendance. Never missed a day. Never called out sick. There was one time when I was near death and I still came in. Lots of DayQuil. I still got the job done.

"You know what you get for five thousand years of service? A watch. A fucking watch!"

He thrust his wrist out for me to see it.

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"You believe it? Like in five thousand years I didn't already have a zillion watches? I mean it's nice, but Jesus, five thousand years!"

I could tell he'd already had a bottle or two before stopping by.

"I had to get out of there," he went on. "It was getting too easy. It wasn't a challenge any more. Do you know how easy it is to corrupt someone nowadays?"

"No."

"I barely have to lift a finger." He snapped his fingers. "Like that. Some of the stuff I've seen lately even scared me. I was like, 'whoa... you guys really want to be doing that?' I mean, I used to get these awful nightmares. The stuff I've seen. My thera..."

He cut himself off. I looked at him puzzled.

"Oh, fuck it! I don't care. My therapist... yes... I see a therapist. He told me I needed to change something in my life. Anything! We talked about it for a while and I decided to retire. I still see him. Every Tuesday. He's helping me with my anger issues. Got me on some stupid pills."

I knew there was more to it, but I let him go at his own pace.

"And these up and coming little twerps. Always trying to knock you down. Trying to show you up. It was just a matter of time before one of them had my job anyway.

"Those idiots on the board started listening to this one kid. *Fucking kids*. He's been there 700 years. What does he know about the operation? I've been there since day-fucking-one. I helped build it. It was my idea. Nobody else believed I could do it, but I did it.

"Five... fucking... thousand... years. I was the only one for the first 37. Now we have a gazillion minions. Without me, Hell is doomed for Christ's sake!"

He paused. Then he smirked. "For Christ's sake! That's funny."

He laughed. He laughed so hard that he snorted. This was the first time I had seen him laugh.

He wiped the tears from his eyes and sniffed hard before the snot dripped from his nose.

"For Christ's sake," he mumbled.

"What was I saying? Oh yeah... I decided to leave before they could kick me out. Go out in style, rather than with security escorting me. Me! I saw the writing on the wall.

"You know what's wrong with Hell these days? Do ya?"

"No."

"It's too fucking corporate. Too commercial. When I started, it was about the evil. I let them talk me into converting it to a corporation 17 years ago. They said I'd be CEO and president. Forever. You can't trust anybody can you. Those fucking ivy league lawyers. I mean, who has time to read contracts? All that 'party of the first part', 'party of the second part' horseshit. And the fine print.

"It was gradual change at first. Now it's 'Hell, Inc.' All about branding. Tweeting this. FaceBooking that. Brand recognition. I mean, does Hell really need branding? No! Everybody know what Hell is!

"And market share? We're declining, yes, but it's hard for evil to keep up with mankind. The bar for evil keeps going up. We don't have the funds for R&D if they keep pissing away money on branding, advertising, and those fucking annual meetings to show how well we're doing."

He paused for a moment.

"Eh.. Listen to me going on. I'm retired now. I don't care anymore. Let them do what they want. I'm done. Just gonna work on my golf game and keep up on the yard work. Take it easy for a while. Maybe volunteer at the library. Catch up on shows I've DVR'd. I've got the whole last season of *Breaking Bad* to watch."

He paused again. I noticed him glance at his retirement watch.

"Oh, shit! I really need to get back. Sorry I went on." He started to leave, then turned around.

"Ummm... I'm going to be out of town next week. I was wondering if you would pick up my mail for me?"

"Sure."

"Thanks. Oh... and I have someone lined up to check on my pets. If he doesn't work out, can you check on my snakes for me? Feed 'em every other day?"

"What's involved?"

"Oh, not much. Toss in a few rats. I have a bucket of 'em near the pit. Remove the shed skins. Simple stuff. Any moron could do it."

"Sure." How can I say no to him? And am I not better than any moron?

"I'll leave a note with instructions in the kitchen. The key is under that heart-shaped rock by the back door. Thanks. I owe ya!"

And then he was gone.

