

PURGATORY'S CUBICLE

What you'll be most surprised to find out about purgatory is your soul is sourced as free labor to the lazy moguls in heaven and hell.

On floor four, you're data-entry. Every day you stare at a sand-colored cubicle decorated with one bent postcard of an emotionless cityscape. The computer is clean, uncustomizable, and basic. No access to funny pictures of cats or comments from friends. Just work email and Microsoft Excel. You're pretty sure you don't sleep.

You're in The Dead division, which means you separate the living from the dead. The list is long. It turns out there are only two types of people – Survivors and Angels. Everyone still breathing is labeled “Survivor,” and everyone not is labeled “Angel,” no matter if they go to hell or here, or are reincarnated as a Bodhisattva, or just diffuse away into matter and energy. The word “Angel” is a convenient genteelism, and the Higher Ups don't seem to be too concerned about where anyone goes after ultimate categorization.

You learn pretty quickly that you shouldn't actually label Survivors. It's only a matter of time before they go Angel and you'll have to reenter, and it hinders efficiency. Survivors are always in limbo, waiting to change. Angels stay Angels.

A typical day goes like this:

Unfortunately named Leslea Purvis – nothing yet
Culturally conflicted Joshua Israel Martinez – nothing yet
Ginger Jones-Barnfire – nothing, then suddenly Angel
Kimberly Irish – Angel
Loni Ng – Angel
Reverend Carl G. Shpilko – nothing
Jenny St. James Innocenzj – Angel

about 10,000 times over.

You have to double-check your work and delete any duplicates, since no one can exist more than once. Aside from that, most of it's pretty straightforward.

Elias Tarbox – Angel

Natasha Ikunamaba – nothing

You can't see above the edge of your cubicle and the neon light never changes. You don't know if the other workers on your floor do the same job. You're not even certain that there are other workers.

The only one you ever see is your supervisor, infuriatingly beautiful and impossibly blonde. He floats in once a week on shiny wings and speaks a gibbering language. You can't pick out a single word he says, but somehow you understand him. You stopped wondering how after the second month. His glow blinds you. His smile is pure white light.

You're not quite sure what happens if you screw up, but you understand the Higher Ups would be very, very upset.

Llewellyn LaCroix - nothing

Dora L.C. Curtis – Angel

Sgt. Jim “Superfang” Fang – nothing

At first, you type so carefully. The fact that Susan O'Brien spelled her last name without the standard apostrophe somehow seems weightier because she's an Angel. Jennifer Ann Smith 1979 and Jennifer Ann Smith 1980 are two distinct individuals, and it's your burden to keep them defined and remembered as such in the endless annals of everything.

Mary Ellen Haynes – nothing
Bill Hung – nothing
Martin “Rocky” Granger – Angel

After a while, you stop making jokes to yourself. When your supervisor floats by, chattering away in piccolo and timpani, you stop authoring silent one-liners comparing radioactive chemical surfaces to his face. You start to wonder if humor can exist without someone else to corroborate. Humor begins to seem extremely sad. Eventually though, you forget to be lonely. Finally you forget what the words “humor” and “sad” even mean.

Marguerite Kain – Angel
David Young Tremain – nothing
Stephanie Character – Angel

After awhile, you stop wondering if S. Rauchefort and D. Rauchefort were mother and daughter. Stop wondering if Nancy Goldman was a coffee drinker. How Bradford L. Lumming met his end. You stop noticing strange nicknames. All you see are Angels and Angels-in-Waiting. A name is a name is a name.

Your supervisor barely speaks to you anymore. Silver feathers tickle your neck when he hovers over your shoulder to check your progress. For a long time you imagined punching him in the face when he did that. Now you just keep typing.

Bobby Hsing – nothing
Trent Copper – Angel

You haven’t come to your own name. At least you don’t think you have. You can’t remember what it was off the top of your head, but you’re pretty sure you’d know it if you saw it.

Sgt. Jim “Superfang” Fang – Angel
Jorge Eduardo Lopez – Angel
Emily Day – Angel

After a while you stop squinting at the shimmer of your supervisor when he passes. His visits are so rhythmic they cease to break up the week, steady and timeless as the click of the enter key.

Francis Stewart Claire – Angel
Gillian J. Rich – Angel
R.T. Lyons – Angel
Lakshmi Rajashekara – Angel
Stan Mitchell – Angel

After a while the names aren’t even names. After a while, they’re just words. Then the words become letters. Then the letters become pixels. Then the pixels become either a one, or a zero. Presence or absence. Something or nothing. After a while, you start to see everything backwards. If being is flux and non-being is forever, then the Angels are the ones who truly exist.

After a while even the final differentiation melts away, and you forget how you used to tell things apart.

After a while the thoughts stop. Then there’s nothing but the digital scroll of The Dead growing and growing, and you stop wondering if you’ll ever move again.