

The Room

By Woody Schneider

The room was well suited for its purposes. All the devices (and there were a lot of them) were adhered to the walls with stiff metal brackets, painted a matte black, so as to be unobtrusive. And in this they were very successful, owing largely to the fact that there was only one source of light in the room: a bulb sunken into a cylindrical opening in the tiled ceiling, which cast a blurred circle on light whose edges just barely extended to the place where the wall met the floor. Any light that was incident on the devices was reflected from the wooden floor and revealed them only as evil looking silhouettes with spindly arms and the occasional unblinking LED eye.

In the center of the room-- and the circle of light-- was the chair. It was the kind of basic wooden chair --somewhat wobbly, somewhat speckled with paint drips-- that one makes a mental note to replace, but never actually does. And the mental note reminding one to do so persists, dangling in a darkened part of the mind, visible only as a spindly silhouette with an unblinking LED eye.

Martin Boldshallow Henswright graduated from a custodial trade-school which awarded very handsome diplomas. They were made of thick yellow paper, marbled with white. The ink was also thick. It shined warmly and one could easily feel the up-welling of the letters when caressing the diploma. When Mr. Henswright was first handed the document, letters bulging and glowing like ripe fruit, he instantly became one of the most elite custodial personnel on the planet, a member of the custodial special forces. This, among many other major lifestyle improvements, had a splendid and instant effect on his posture.

Currently, the diploma is in a plastic sleeve, laying on an expanse of felt, in a metal safe deposit box, one of many set into a wall in a dim room. It shares this cell with some envelopes, tucked up against the back side of the container. But it is evident from the placement that the diploma is the most important thing in the box. This gives the diploma what is perhaps an unrealistic, inflated sense of superiority.

Devon Milhorn Sewintoggle was eaten by the room in much the same way that a toyota is assembled, piece by piece, by a team of one armed robots, only backwards. Before he was eaten, he was alive and doing things. One of the things he often did was stand up from his desk, walk to the kitchen, take a glass from a cabinet and clink three ice cubes into the bottom of it, then make a whiskey and cola. He would then leave the kitchen and return to his desk, only to come back some time later and repeat the process. On the day that he was eaten, though, he was unable to make it to the kitchen. All of his appliances wondered why he did not come home to clink ice cubes.

Martin Boldshallow Henswright pushes a wide broom. A smooth wave of soapy water piles up at the front of broom. At the end of each push, a perfect crescent-shaped wave arcs outward across the floor. He then steps to his right and repeats, methodically herding the water towards a drain. While he does this, his gaze remains fixed on the floor, examining the patters of interference between the waves and noticing the intricacy chaos of disintegration when some part of the arc passes over the drain.

It does not occur to him that there may be some very small pieces of Mr. Devon Milhorn Sewintoggle floating in the water. He is fortunate, because it is not in his interest to be burdened with the moral calculus of such things. He continues to push, head down, while his mind wanders around the edges of what he concedes it acceptable to think about while "on the job". When there is (to reasonable approximation) nothing left to sweep into the drain, he places a tight iron plug over the hole and and replaces the old chair. He makes a mental note that it has probably reached a sufficient dilapidation to warrant replacement. But chances are good he will not pursue the idea further. The wheels of his bucket whisper and grind their teeth, while the LEDs look on and glimmer shamefully.