

21:00

20:51. Nine minutes before the Hour of Slumber. Four minutes before taking the customary Peace Pills. The ideals of Lael had long influenced the people of Newton. They lived only to serve Him, and in turn believed to have helped their city thrive. For 12 hours they worked in the offices of consecrated buildings scattered around the city, each dedicated at strengthening His name—writing, advocating, and extending His words—instilling upon Newton citizens a laborious stupor doomed to preserve an established glory. And at exactly 21:00, everyone, with the aid of their Peace Pill rations, sank deep into provisional rest that was meant not only to replenish the fundamental need of a working man, but also to eliminate the lassitude of the past. An entire past leading up to the rise of Lael. So that when the world opened once again, the workers of Newton were ready to serve as if it was their first day—spirits filled with hope and gratitude, uplifting the necessary ingredients of an absolute society.

Typewriters lived in their own quarters at the Building of Writers. A migration that began on the night before their first day. 500 employed to write scriptures that presented laws, history, and wisdom of their immaculate leader, Lael. Their words sustained His identity and protected Newton's supreme code of conduct. To the city, they were esteemed soldiers of peace.

Barry Banterford, one of the more enthusiastic and motivated typewriters, walked out of the elevator with imperious felicity knowing that he catalyzed a substantial improvement on the Book of Lael's Heroics. Maybe a little too eagerly. So much so that one of the Newton Officials had to remind him of the important hour of 21:00.

Entering his designated bedroom, his body instinctively knew where to lead him. He sauntered to his bed that was attached to the left wall where in just an arm's length, a working desk laid unkempt. It was a confined room with no windows—like every room on the 14th Floor,

Typewriters Billet—and a single lamplight he didn't bother to switch on. Despite his enthusiasm, he did work for 12 hours. So any sort of leisure other than hitting the sack wasn't in store to possibly alleviate fatigue.

Barry scurried and took off his clothes save for his underwear, and threw them heedlessly on the floor adjacent to the working desk. A cold breeze came through the air-conditioning unit mounted on the wall, carrying a fresh scent of lemon. 20:51. It was too late to catch the 20:30 Time of Bathing down at the second floor Bath House. On the bed, leaning back against the wall, he smiled, reliving over and over again the tenacity and perseverance he had shown during his first day. 20:53. What a promising future. What a promising world. He stared at the ceiling as if surrounded by the vast and star-filled night sky.

Suddenly, tears poured down his crude and bearded face. He rubbed his eyes, startled that despite his unrelenting euphoria, he was strangely uncertain if they were out of rapture or grief. And as if wiping the dirt stains off a glass window—overlooking a luminous garden—the bedroom gleamed with a somber and alarming clarity from the hallway lights seeping through the door's gaps, as empty water bottles and heaps of notebooks stood on top of the working desk. He gaped at them with sheer curiosity. Then the triumphant memory rushed to his head once more—different in that instance—like a lashing gale that surged with no foreboding. It no longer pleased him. How did he set foot into the threshold with such familiarity? Like it was a constituted fact that his working desk was always stuffed with these things. And that his hands knew where to throw his uniform.

At that queer instance, he stared as if seeing them for the first time. It was the beginning of his service as a full-fledged typewriter, and only at that moment he reckoned, ogling at the topsy-turvy desk, that he was probably in someone else's room. But that supposition didn't totally make sense. It was everyone's first day after all. 20:55. This confusion, along with the depleted

tenuous adrenaline that granted him both the desire and appetite to serve, finally gave his eyes a coarse and teeming weight he could hardly bear. 20:56. Barry Banterford fell into slumber without the Peace Pills.

A voice echoed through the room, rousing Barry. In fact, he woke up simultaneously with the call. It was 7:00. “A peaceful greeting from Lael.” The words came from the speaker above the door, and with its message harmonized a calm yet vigorous rhythm of music that was enough to awaken any person engulfed by prodigious rest. “The time has come for you to serve, and on His behalf, I wish you a prolific first day,” the voice continued, “To Newton. For Lael.” The brief speech ended as the music slowly trailed off. They certainly had to end with the city's exalting shibboleth—a reminder of everyone's rightful purpose.

Someone snuck in the night before, because at the foot of his bed, Barry's uniform sat—neatly folded. The officials must've sent a housekeeper. They did the same thing yesterday. With cordial instincts, he put on his comfortable slacks, his copper vest; under which a tie with the same color, laid over by an olive green blazer. He turned the doorknob, then looked over his shoulder to see if the water bottles were still there. Before leaving the room, he paused. “‘First day,’ did I hear that right?”

He walked along the carpeted hallway—embroidered and organized all over the straight path; a book, the cover of which adorns the emerald green initials of Newton, which kept reminding him of the morning call. It had to be some sort of glitch. Was the message pre-recorded? Did they play the wrong tape? That wasn't the point. What really mattered was his incredulous conviction that today was his second day. Certainly not his first. Certainly.

Amidst bewilderment, Barry trembled, and for a moment, didn't notice the opening elevator. Inside, a poster hung on the wall with the sign, “Think not but serve,” beckoned him like a seductive

letter, a persuasive command, for these were some of the words of Lael that effectively evoked everyone of His compelling and reputable charm. He shuffled in and pushed the 7th floor button.

So far, the routine from yesterday carried over. But this time something was off. He didn't grin at the shibboleth recital. Upon reading the message on the poster, he twitched his tie as if the words choked him. He only pushed the 7th floor button once with a strange lack of fervent desire to speed up the descent. "Think not but serve." Those damn water bottles. He didn't need all that yesterday. There were more than 20 of them, and he barely even drank six bottles as he rather worked his ass off at the mercy of Lael's bestowed grace. How long has he been in that building?

Wiping off the sweat dripping down his temple, he gasped—struggling to suppress the lump of tangled thoughts that leaked and struck every crevice of his body, including his soul. It was only his second day and he might've already lost one of the most imperative virtues of a Newton citizen. And it bothered him because that moment of desperate lucidity felt like the most hideous sin he had committed against himself. Against Lael.