

JACK
by Diane M. Dresback (© 1/22/15)

The door closed behind Jack with a click. The room was completely dark with the exception of a slit of yellow light that pushed through a crack in the door.

A voice whispered, "Where have you been?"

"You don't want to know," said Jack with a shiver in his voice.

"Yeah, I do. Did you go to the...Vat?" There was silence. "Again?"

Jack exhaled an embittered breath, "I hate the Vat."

The voice agreed, "Me too."

"You've never been there," said Jack coldly.

"I've been there," the voice protested.

"No, you haven't!" argued Jack.

"I have, I swear!"

"Shut up," spit Jack.

Silence filled the virtually dark room. The space felt cramped, claustrophobic. Jack tried to stretch upward but his arms bent up against the low ceiling.

"Have you been watching?" Jack asked.

"Yeah," replied the voice.

Jack moved close to the crack in the door, squinted and tried to make sense of what little he could actually see. "Something's going on," he said as he saw hands shifting items around on a counter. "Something bad."

"What's happening?"

Jack watched as a powdery substance poured into a container. If only he could see better through the crevice. He pushed closer pressing his head against the door frame. A hand began making a stirring motion.

"What are they going to do?" asked the voice with a worried tone.

"Poison us," Jack said flatly. "We shouldn't trust them."

The voice agreed, "You're right. We shouldn't trust anyone else. Only each other."

"Yeah, only each other," Jack echoed quietly.

More silence ensued as the movement outside disappeared. Finally, the voice asked, "When will they poison us?"

Resigned, Jack replied, "Soon. And, probably you first."

"What? Why me?" asked the voice suddenly filled with concern.

"Because they never let you out. Don't you think it's strange that they never take you to the Vat?"

The air felt heavy. And Jack sat back against the wall and stared into the darkness.

"What happens in the Vat?" the voice asked bemused.

"I've told you before, I don't like talking about it," Jack said feeling a chill run up his spine. "It's brutal." He heard a noise from outside and pressed his face back up against the crack. A shadow passed by the door. "You'd better get some sleep. I'm going to keep watch."

Exhausted, the voice conceded, "All right."

Jack attempted to observe the activity occurring on the other side of his blackened world unsuccessfully trying to decipher muffled conversations. Despite the fight, eventually his

eyelids became heavy and fell shut and he immediately found himself in another of his terrifyingly vivid dreams.

Through a partial blindfold, he could see water swirling around his naked body and could feel the water bubbling and boiling around him. Jack struggled to break free from the strong grip of someone submerging him deep down into the treacherous liquid.

Suddenly, he awoke with a frightened audible grunt. Cold sweat beaded across his forehead and he gasped for air as his heart pounded in his chest. In time, he fell back into a deeper sleep.

Jack's face was crammed up against the crack. His eyes opened wide searching desperately to see what his captors were preparing at the counter. He felt imminent fate approaching.

"Today is the day. I won't be coming back," he said. "I can feel it."

"Don't say that," said the voice. "I won't let them take you alone."

Surprised, Jack sat back from the glowing sliver of light. "You'll go with me? You always refuse."

"No, no. Not this time. I'll go with you," said the voice.

"I don't believe you," Jack shook his head then peeked out the slender opening once more. Footsteps rhythmically grew louder as they made their way towards the door.

The voice insisted, "No, I will go, too. I swear!"

Jack backed away from the crack as a man stopped outside the door blocking the strip of light. "They're here," Jack whispered in horror.

"Jack?" a man called out. "It's time to go."

"No, no!" the voice screamed.

The door opened, light flooded in and Jack concealed his eyes. There was a struggle. "Leave me alone," he cried out. A second pair of hefty hands joined with the first and after a scramble, a blindfold was forcibly placed across Jack's eyes.

The first man breathlessly said, "Let's go," and they firmly yanked Jack from the room.

Jack shouted, "I won't go alone. He must come with me!"

Then, there was the expected abandonment. "I can't go. I can't do it," said the voice quietly.

"You coward!" screeched Jack as he was dragged down the hall. All he could see from the bottom of the blindfold was his own feet shuffling along a pale yellow linoleum floor. The torture was coming. His heart pounded rapidly. Sweat rolled down his inner arms and formed on his brow. His mouth dry as a bone.

Jack suddenly saw the floor transition into small white tiles with patches of discolored grout. He could smell the humidity in the room. He was close now. Close to the Vat. From beneath his blindfold he could see its sterile white base. His body began to shake uncontrollably in pure terror.

"All right, Jack," said the first man. "You know the routine. Come on."

Jack pulled back, "No, I won't get in."

"You have to get in," stated the second man.

Unable to control his desperation, Jack pleaded, his voice filled with fear. "No, please don't make me, please! Let me go."

"You have no choice," stated the first man as he stripped off Jack's garment in one fail swoop.

Then the resistance became physical. The men picked up Jack's flailing body and lowered him into the Vat. Jack struggled and screamed but he was unable to stop the boiling water from burning and engulfing his body. He gasped for air attempting unsuccessfully to draw enough into his lungs.

Impatiently the second man yelled, "Hey, knock it off!"

Jack yelled back, "Just finish it!"

"Finish what?" rebutted the second man sarcastically.

"I'm not stupid," Jack screamed hysterically. "Just do it!" After only a few more moments of struggle causing water to splash everywhere, Jack finally stopped moving. He fell silent and limp in the men's grasp.

"Jack?" the first man said cautiously. There was no response. He checked Jack's carotid artery.

"What happened?" asked the second man.

"No pulse. Must have been cardiac arrest," said the first as he removed Jack's blindfold.

The two young interns dressed in white coats supported Jack in a porcelain bathtub. They shook their heads and lifted the body from the bubbly tepid bathwater.

"I can see why the doctors kept him in solitary," said the second man.

The first man responded, "Let's get him out of here."

Meanwhile back in the darkened room, the voice whispered, "Jack? Jack?"

THE END

As illustrated in JACK, perspective can run our lives. It can also ruin our lives. As humans, we make evaluations of things that happen to us and to other people. Then we set out to justify those evaluations as truth. Everything we experience or see is jumbled around, molded and shaped to validate our own conclusions and beliefs.

Is something true? Is something false? It depends on our perspective. And, what we determine to be truth...IS truth.

How to make sense of such things.

No wonder we all feel a little like Jack sometimes.