

Gary, a Salesman

Gary, a salesman, sits on a park bench in the middle of what the city affectionately calls a “park”, but which is actually a median; briefcase on his lap. Click. He looks inside. Beside a half-empty bottle of Jack Daniels is a stack of neatly-placed papers. He begins to thumb through them.

"Four, no five! Fucking five!" He's always been good with numbers. He creates a summation in seconds, multiplies by point zero-five. “Forty-five thousand dollars in one night! Holy shit!” comments made by his inside voice.

Then he looks at the bottle, pulls it out of his briefcase. His stomach churns.

His clothes are disheveled, his hair, strewn with leaves. It is here that he slept last night, here because he was drunk. He was drunk again, quite a bender. He's lost count, the number of days. His health is beginning to fail. Yet he stares at the bottle. The hiccups start again. He grabs the bottle by the neck anyway, erupts forth a burp containing vomit.

Gary stands, lifts the bottle toward the sun. "For God and Country!" He takes three full gulps. A vast tremor overcomes him and a hidden heat beads sweat on his brow, but he is getting back there; a good start. Soon, he will be wasted and the cycle will start again.

By ten AM, Gary is already fully drunk. He throws away the bottle from his briefcase. “Will need more.” he thinks.

Three bottles fit perfectly in the case, with room for ten signed contracts. Gary has checked. Jack Daniels has become Gary's standby due to the square bottles. They don't rattle as much when placed carefully in his attaché'.

The kid manning the convenience store counter across from Gary's office knows Gary. Gary used to be a good guy, always saying “thanks” when he got his stuff, but Gary has changed. He's always drunk. The kid hasn't seen Gary not-drunk in weeks. Gary gets into trouble sometimes, harassing customers, trying to sell them Real Estate in line waiting to buy their smokes. He smells. He breaks things. The kid wouldn't let Gary buy his booze there if Gary didn't give him a \$50 tip every time. Every time. And he pays for the damage. Gary can do whatever the fuck he wants, as far as the kid is concerned.

After picking up the juice, Gary buys a beverage from the Burger King next to the convenience store, dumps it out and fills it with Jack Daniels. He takes a four-shot drag and starts towards work.

All he makes out on his watch when he gets to the office is that it's after ten. Workers are to arrive at 6:00. Gary can't care less. Gary is wasted. He'll sell more than anyone else in the office today. Management can never fire him. He delivers.

He walks into the office. Nick, the manager, has been keeping his eye out for Gary. Nick turns red. "I have no time for deadbeat employees." He says as he approaches. Nick is preparing to fire Gary.

Gary knows this because Nick has tried to fire Gary every day since he started his binge, at least two weeks of down-sizing attempts, none of them successful. Something is strange here. Nick would seem to have been designed, as a person, to ruin lives by ending employment, yet at least ten failures thus far. Why?

Let's listen in.

"Bleeping Gary. You are...", Nick checks his watch, "four hours fifteen minutes late."

"Oh, ok, that was a one-five. No wonder I couldn't read my watch. One and five are harder to read together, so..."

"Are you drunk? Again?"

"Yup!"

"I've really liked working with you, Gary, but I'm sorry, I can't have you coming in here every day, drunk, four hours late. You've been warned, Gary. I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to let you go."

Gary opens his briefcase and takes signed contracts. "Five last night, Nick."

"I'm sorry, Gary, it's past time...five? No, I can't have you coming in here, everyday, drunk. It's not fair to your co-workers. It's not fair to you, Gary. I'm sorry, you'll need to pack up your things..."

"I'm the best salesman ever."

"I don't think so, Gary. Five is a lot, but do they check out? What about the credit check?"

Gary takes another pull on the straw, coughs on strait whisky. Nick begins to emanate heat.

"You're really pushing it there bud." Nick is beginning to lose his PC demeanor.

"I'm the best salesman ever."

A tick, a twitch in Nick's eye, something monotone in his voice. "Five is a lot. It's more than I've ever gotten in a day. But you just can't come in here every day inebriated. Think about morale."

"Is that good enough? You not gonna fire me?"

Nick's eyes glaze. He begins to stare, transfixed, on a coat rack. Suddenly, as if waking from sleep, Nick snaps to. "I really should, Gary, but I'm gonna let it slide, just this once; do you understand me? You need to promise me that you're going to go straight home and sleep it off and that you're never going to show up drunk again. Do you understand?"

"Ah shit." says Gary. He looks at his Burger King cup, eyes welling with tears. Another burp with extras, the fluid simply spilling onto the floor. He grabs the straw between his teeth, shuts his eyes tight. Three long drinks.

Nick watches in a vacant horror. He appears taut with indecision. "Ready to pop." thinks Gary.

Slurring now, "So, Nick, I'm the best, uh, best salesman ever. K?"

The vacillation within Nick snaps and a great clarity washes over his face. "Send you home? What was I thinking? You need to get to work. Five, in one day? You're like a king!"

"Thank God", thinks Gary. Out loud and quickly: "Lell me cut you off there, Nick. Can you, uh, process thess for me? I'll need a check by end of business."

Nick weeps at touching so many signed contracts. He literally tears up. He back peddles, overcome, not wishing to part from Gary's presence. "So cool...", under his breath as he wheels towards his office.

"Maybe a bit too much, that one. Hope he doesn't build a shire." Gary thinks, chuckling at his own joke.

It's time I explained a bit about what's going on. You'll probably meet Simon, he works with me, but you will never understand unless I give you some background.

Simon gave me a "gift." His job, it seems, other than working at a Real Estate firm, is to give these "gifts" to people and then nourish himself on the anguish caused by them. That is, he eats pain, or something to the effect. I can't say I really understand it.

I don't know if Simon is literally the Devil or if he was more of a embodiment-of-evil-type malevolent being. Really, Simon was no proof of anything. He's never blown fire or corrupted unwilling minds or anything of that sort. He is actually really really personable. There is some force, though, that Simon controls, and that force is decidedly not "good."

Brian, a co-worker, once complained about his love life. Simon said, "I can fix that for you." Brian, though knowing full well that Simon spawned vile things at every opportunity, was drunk. He took Simon up on his offer. Sure enough, a woman, or some semblance of that, approached Brian and the two had sex.

A few weeks later, Brian had not had sex again and felt that Simon had reneged on his offer. Simon suggested Brain go to his doctor. Sure enough, Brian had AIDS.

Brain was, understandably, annoyed. Simon respond, "Thou hast not seen with eyes aware. Thou has thy gift, and it is what thy wish'd for." Simon occasionally speaks like the Old Testament God of the King James Bible. "Seriously, check out some support groups."

Brian joined a support group for AIDS patients and discovered that it was a great place to pick up on women. He was having the most sex at any point in his life. That is how Simon works.

I was drunk one night. Simon was around. I complained about my lack of sales. He fixed my problem. Now, I can sell anything to anyone, as long as they can somehow afford the product I'm selling. The cost, I have to be drunk in order to make sales. The more drunk I am, the better I sell. Nick thinks he made a brilliant management decision. Instead, it was a power of extreme discord which inhabited his brain that saved my job so many times. I was drunk enough to sell him on being the best salesman. Got it?

Nancy, an accountant at Gary's work, knows Simon. She was convinced to take his gift. No one knows exactly what she complained about. The result, however, is that she always shouts, cannot speak at anything but a shout. The screaming should be annoying, but, for whatever reason, Nancy is the most compelling person Gary has ever met.

"ALL FIVE CHECK OUT, GARY. YOU'RE LOOKING AT QUITE A COMISSION. \$47,428. DRINKS'ER ON YOU."

Gary doesn't laugh. Instead, he takes a bottle from his briefcase. Nancy, playing along, pushes her coffee cup towards him. He pours in a few shots. He'll drink from his Burger King cup. They toast.

"You know, Nancy, I don't even like to drink. I only used to do it sometimes. Now I hardly remember what it feels like to be drunk. Not to be drunk."

"THAT'S SO SAD, GARY. WELL, BE SAFE."

Gary goes back to his desk. On the way he throws out the cup, now empty. "Sales-a-plenty", he thinks.

Simon swings by on his way out. Simon is pretty much a dork. Grace is the most alien of all concepts to him. He wears a long-sleeve button up sweater, very much like Mr. Rodgers, but his is yellow. It is occasionally fashionable to wear such a thing in these modern times. This is neither the intent nor result, though, for Simon. He looks closer to Mr. Rodgers than a hipster.

Simon's voice fits the mold. It is nasally, high-pitched, and about as annoying as a human voice can be. It grates Gary to hear it, but one simply does not comment on a voice attached to a being of seemingly infinite power. Gary deals.

"Gary, bro, hey. I'm going to be at The Tree Lounge around ten. You should stop by. Lots of opportunities. Sales. Are you listening to me? Gary? What, are you drunk?" Simon laughs, then blows his nose. "I will buy your drinks, Gary, just be there."

"Boundless monee Simon. Yeah. Ok. Lounge-Tree. Sure."

"The Tree Lounge. Be there or be square." Simon trips over a waste-paper basket. He's able to right himself without plummeting towards the floor. "Well, adio. I must venture forth. The winds doth call upon me, my sail, gorged with air. Catch you guys later." Simon makes his way towards the back door without other mishap.

Gary sits back in his chair, leans his head back and stares at the ceiling. He snorts loudly. "Wife," he mutters, takes out his cell phone, nearly toppling at the weight transfer.

That's right, Gary is married. It may be here, only, that the present tense becomes strange. Gary is married with three children. How, with the drinking? Sleeping on park benches?

But you see, Gary is smart. He told her everything, introduced her to Simon. She got drunk with him and now she lactates at all times, though everyone says she's the best mother ever. She understands.

Into the phone: "No. No, I just gotta go to the Tree Lounge. Simon. I know hunny. Make some sales. I know hunny. I'll be safe. Not until we can retry...retire. I love..." Gary is looking at the database. He has an idea. "Honey, what if I could sell millions tonight? Yeah. Yeah. Two words. Skyscraper. What'd'a'ya mean I'm cute when I'm drunk? Yeah, someone at the Tee Lounge. Yeah. Ok. I just gotta get really really drunk and hope I don't die. Yeah? Steak? Ok. That'll work maybe. Wish me luck?"

Gary has been searching for buyers until now, ten PM, and has managed some success on the bottle and a half he's currently on. He's sold a moderate house to an elderly couple and cabin to a carpenter, but he knows that this will be the real prize, the arrival of the investment people to the bars. The only problem he has now is getting security to let him in.

Gary can sell anything, but that's the limit of his super-powers. He can't talk his way into a club any better than the average person can. He has a solution, though. His wife has planned for steak to be nearby. A local bar-b-q place has a portable smoker. She has hired them. They wait down the street.

Gary approaches. Security knows the type. Gary only gets to within twenty yards before being stopped.

"I unnerstand that you wo'n let me in, guys, but can I interest you in som steak?" He takes their money and makes his way in.

Simon waves him over. This is one of Simon's spots. He says that there is more discomfort and disillusionment among the rich than any other group he's met. He says he's given the gift to more than thirty stock brokers, investment bankers, finical analysts, etc. He tells the story of how he gave the gift to one broker/banker/whatever to be the best at his company. Another guy wanted to be better than the first, so he, too, had the gift bestowed. A third - you get the idea. After the seventh gift given, the super-bankers claimed the board of their company and were doing very well until...

"...they were all killed in World Trade Center One on 9/11." The patrons at Simon's table laugh.

Gary arrives on cue. "Wha?"

"Gary! Great to see you. Whoa buddy. Looks like someone's been drinking. More than a klutz than even me." Gary rights himself, having almost fallen while trying to sit.

"Hey Simon. Yer a bastard, you know tha? A bastard. But yer the best...uh...nicest fucking bastard I met."

"Drink? Why a 'bastard?'"

"Um...like...you exude evil."

"Ah cousin, tis not in that fashion. Empower, do I. And make rich. I'm not like a mean-y."

"I mean, how can you be not, like, cruel when yer gifts er so... rotten?" Gary takes a shot. Then another. Another round is on its way.

"No, Gary, evil is getting what you always wanted but never being able to enjoy it. Evil is the death of your soul. I feast on your pain with only its presence. What good would it do me to be mean about it?"

"Rub it in? I donno."

"Nay, this I do not do. To create that pain within you, enshrouding you, tis not something to be done. For me to *make* pain, *create* pain, is no good. That pain tastes shitty."

"Oh, so even when yore been nice it's cause you don like the taste?"

"Gary, that made no sense. You are drunk, bro."

Gary's mind begins to whirl. "Yep. Yep yep yep. Yep yup yippers. Wastedgonegoodbye. Oh, but only two sales? One more sale, one more sale..." Gary's frustration suddenly becomes clarity. "Wait wait wait-a-sec. Simon's a bastard, and he's rich." he thinks.

There are three shots set up in front of Gary, the second round. He takes one in his hand, stares at it, burps. Down. Two more.

"So Simon." Second shot.

"You need to go to bed." Simon sees in Gary's eyes, what he's planning, but it's too late.

"I agree." Third shot down. The last vestiges of consciousness slipping. "But first, I was wondering if you'd be interested in some real estate. Perhaps a skyscraper? It's right downtown, good neighborhood, plenny access schools..."

"Shit." says Simon.