

# THE JUDGE

## A SHORT STORY

“What just happened?” My eyes widened. I looked around. My head seemed a little foggy, but this didn’t look right. “This is really bizarre. Where the hell am I?” I suddenly realized I must have said that out loud, yet I was certain my lips didn’t move. *I know they didn’t.* The person next to me turned as if I had said something. I couldn’t make out a face—it was hazy. It appeared to be a man. Slowly, the face began to form. I could see it was a strong and confident face—with the kindest, most compassionate eyes I had ever seen. His face was like a warm fire on a cold day and it was looking right at me.

I must confess, it felt more like he was looking right through me—or maybe he was looking into me—deeply into me. He didn’t speak or make a sound, but his deep gray eyes spoke volumes of infinite wisdom and indescribable secrets. I thought I should be afraid, yet I wasn’t. I knew I could trust this face. I would have spilled my guts to him. It was that kind of face. It was a face I knew—but how, and why? Suddenly, I realized—it was Father Flannigan from the movie *Boys Town*. There he was, sitting right

next to me on this bench, wearing a black suit with the traditional Roman collar. He removed his fedora and looked at me even closer. *Yes—it was him.* I knew that face well. But, how could that be?

An enormous room began to materialize all around us. Not a room with walls. It was sanitary looking with no visible boundaries but comforting and pleasurable—exceptionally pleasurable. It felt like a room. Occasional soft hues of greens, blues, and purples shimmered in and out further enhancing the otherwise extraordinarily soothing whiteness. There was soft music. I recognized it immediately as Pachelbel’s Cannon D. It sounded like a thousand strings, but it was very distant, but at the same time, engulfing and particularly calming. Birds were singing, complimenting the music as if they were a part of the ensemble. Yet, I couldn’t see birds or the source of the music.

Father Flannigan was in black and white and assorted shades of gray—just like I remembered him from the movie. He was a bit of a contrast compared to the other shimmering colors I was seeing.

My feet were melting into very thick plush carpeting. It was pure white and cloudlike—reminiscent of wading in a lily pond on a warm summer afternoon. I could see my feet, but I couldn’t feel them. I wasn’t wearing shoes. In fact, I suddenly realized I wasn’t wearing anything at all!

The abrupt awareness of being naked was unsettling, but Father Flannigan simply nodded his head and suddenly I was cloaked in a soft white gown. Then, the aroma of warm chocolate chip cookies fresh from the oven began to fill my senses. My taste buds came alive with anticipation. My mouth watered. The first crunchy gooey bite melted in

my mouth—the flavor overtook my entire being. The brown sugar, the chocolate chips, the nuts—but there was no cookie. *Could I be dead?*

Father Flannigan finally spoke, “Well—no you’re not really dead,” he kindly answered as he scratched his head as if he were trying to figure a way to explain. He put his fedora back on. “Perhaps from the form you just left, but you are far from being dead. There is still much to be done.” He seemed satisfied with his well-thought answer. *I wasn’t so sure.*

But I was now certain it was Father Flannigan—more certain than ever. The voice was unmistakable. The image of Spencer Tracy in his famous role was perfectly clear. I must have seen *Boys Town* forty times. I loved that movie. But, how could he know what I was wondering?

Then color came to his face. His gray eyes were replaced by deep blue eyes that welcomed me, and suddenly we were no longer on the bench. It happened in a flash. He was now dressed in an immaculate white suit. It looked like Irish linen, very expensive, very comfortable, and very elegant—collar loose, no tie, no Roman collar. The shoes were Berluti. *I almost bought a pair for myself once—a little out of my price range.* The desk between us had a surface that sparkled and shined as if it were crystal—it must have been six inches thick. I looked around and could see the bench where we had been, but it seemed far away. There were other people sitting there now that I didn’t remember seeing before. Unlike me when I was there, they all appeared to be clothed.

I could hear their distant murmurings but the faces and images were fading away. It was just the Father and me now. We were alone. I could have sworn we had been over there on one of those benches, but now I’m not so sure. It was a mere flash in time. I

don't even remember coming into this room. I thought I was standing, and then I suddenly found myself sinking into a lavishly overstuffed guest chair at this crystal desk. It was pure white. Facing me was an incredibly well dressed and ageless Father Flannigan. His sparkling eyes were soft and consoling. They never left me.

*Did he just say from the form I just left? What does that mean?* My form is just fine, well maybe I can't completely feel it, but it looks just fine. Maybe I am dead. How can that be? I feel pretty good. In fact, I feel outstanding. I've never felt better. I don't remember being sick, or in an accident, or even being old. Shouldn't I know if I were dead? The words, "Are you St. Peter?" somehow escaped from my trembling lips.

"No, but I can get him for you," was his too quick response.

"Oh no, please don't. I'm good." My anxious eyes scanned the vast area, on guard for a sighting of the legendary gate keeper. *How would I know him if I saw him?* I knew my heart must be racing, although I couldn't feel it. I tried to be calm, but I'm sure Father Flannigan noticed that I was squirming in the overstuffed chair. It was so soft—it had to be filled with a high-quality goose down, or something even more glorious. I could have just melted into it. "I'll just stay with you, if that's all right. Do you know how I got here?" I asked awkwardly trying to hide my fidgeting.

"Most people don't remember how they get here. They don't know if there was an accident, a heart attack, an illness, or they just sat down in their favorite chair and went to sleep. If you don't remember, that's a good thing. It's not important anyway. If you did remember, that would just be something you would have to deal with when the time came. It's all part of the transition."

*Transition?* The word echoed in my head. The crystal desk that was completely bare just moments before now held a very ornate gold nameplate. I know it wasn't there before. The word "before" haunted my mind. I had always had a good sense of time, and now it seemed like it was standing still. It seemed as though this all had taken place in the blink of an eye. I couldn't even be sure that my eyes were blinking. The name plate (the one that I'm sure wasn't there before), was modest in size, perhaps eight inches long and the name 'Fr. Flannigan' was in raised gold lettering. "Should I call you Father, or maybe Saint something?" I asked cautiously.

"You can call me Father if you wish. You can call me whatever you like—whatever you're comfortable with. For now, I am only here to be your guide and help you get ready for the judge."

Holy cow! He just said, 'judge.' *There really is a judge?*

"What about all these other people?" Now there were many benches—rows and rows of them, with many people; hundreds, maybe thousands. Still distant, they were slowly coming into view. "Are they waiting for you too?"

"Yes and no, but perhaps not exactly in the sense you may be thinking."

*There he goes again with what I'm thinking. How can he always know what I'm thinking? It's like he knows the answer before I even know what the question is going to be.*

He went on to say, "You see, some people are welcomed by their family members first—that is, if they're available. And, some see others they have known. Usually someone they have trusted or admired. But mostly, whatever or whomever they see is for their own comfort.

The words ‘family members’ and ‘available’ caused me to pause. I had to ask, “What do you mean, if family members are available?”

“Oh, you are such a curious one, aren’t you?” he said with a grin and low chuckle. “Of course, this is all new to you. You’ll see how all this works very soon. Some family members may have already returned for unfinished business, or new business, or even on to new adventures or assignments. Some stay longer for other activities, and many are here to study. The possibilities are virtually unlimited.”

I felt like my head was spinning. “What do you mean returned? Returned where? How? Do you mean—like reincarnated?”

“Maybe—but you wouldn’t normally remember anything if that were the case, or even want to. That’s the business of the soul, the soul retains everything. For some it can just be a fresh start.”

Unsatisfied and confused, I decided to move on with my questioning, “You said study, is there a test? Will I have to pass a test? Will I go to hell if I fail?”

“Those are all good questions—and so many of them.” He smiled again. “The good news is that there really is no hell—per se. That’s just a marketing tool used by many religions. However—I must say, it does have an influence on many souls—often for the better,” he said with a wink that produced a small twinkle in his right eye.

“Actually—what you’re seeing here, including me is just a reflection of your own conscience, or your own mind, if you will. It’s that part of you that can’t be accessed in the three-dimensional world you are accustomed to. You needed to see this image. It’s what you can understand now. It makes sense, and it’s soothing for you. Some people might see Mother Theresa, or Jesus, or Buddha, or even a grandmother. Some claim to

see Moses.” The Good Father paused and looked off into space, “But for almost every one of them, they claim he looks like Charlton Heston. And of course, many are welcomed by some other members of their family. Anyway—you got me.”

I had to think hard on that, and wasn’t so sure that I was all that comforted, but I was still savoring the flavor of those heavenly chocolate chip cookies. I had to ask, “Is this heaven?”

“Well,” he paused a long moment. “On the surface—and I use that term loosely—heaven may not be what most people think it is. It’s opportunities, it’s reflection, it’s looking inside yourself. When you can get inside yourself—truly deep inside, that’s when many discover that what they’re finding in there—even if they’re afraid to look, really is what they think it is, and even much more.”

I felt like my head was spinning again. Father Flanigan was very kind and he was being very patient with me, but I needed to change the subject, “So then, are there angels here?” I looked around—but nothing. Sometimes a wisp of blue or purple was barely visible to me. Sometimes it was a wisp of green—but so faint. It was more like faintly colored wind.

“Oh yes, certainly.”

“Why can’t I see them?”

“You don’t see them right now because they are in dimensions that are still beyond your capabilities. Usually you won’t see them at this stage of transition unless they want to be seen, yet they are all around us. They sometimes appear as what you might perceive as shimmering colors.” He paused a moment, “Very beautiful.” Then he gave a long sigh. “I love seeing them pass through like that. But of course, they’re not

actually visible until you achieve access to the seventh dimension. They can sometimes be seen on Earth, but all too often the human mind can't hold a clear image—if any image at all. Dreams can reach beyond the third-dimension, but that's a different story. Nonetheless, the sense that something was there is very real, even if it was no more than a little puff of wind. The human mind in the three-dimensional state can no more comprehend the presence of angels than a monkey can drive a Buick.”

*Odd he would say that—I used to drive a Buick. That was a long time ago.*

He continued, “You wouldn't remember this, but when you first went to Earth, you needed others to care for you and see to all your new needs. You were so small. You were still connected with the heavens—and the other souls. After a few years you would have forgotten all that as you adapted to life in the three-dimensional world. You couldn't do it alone. You had to learn to communicate in that world, then walk, and so on and so on. Now that you're back here; and once you've re-adapted to some of the higher dimensions you will become aware of much, much more. Things you could only imagine and many things you haven't—or even couldn't imagine will now become possible.”

My look of astonishment was clear to Father Flannigan. He remained calm. *I couldn't imagine remaining calm now.*

“This will all proceed at a pace you are comfortable with.”

I took some solace in that. “So—what happens now?” My curiosity came out uncontrollably. “Is this really heaven then? Am I going to go to heaven? Are there really pearly gates and streets paved with gold?”

“Oh, I suppose some might envision pearly gates and gold paved streets—and maybe even angels with harps riding on clouds. We’ve heard it all, but those are only preconceived images from some of the teachings on Earth. That all makes fine material for books and movies—something visual, something the three-dimensional world can grasp. Here, we’re not bound by those limitations. We really have no need of pearly gates or that kind of opulence—and even less use for gold. That’s all good stuff for the human theater. You might say our medium of exchange here is simply love. Gold and silver will buy you nothing.”

“But what about this crystal desk, that gold nameplate and that impeccable linen suit you’re wearing?”

Then, as if the room and desk had never existed, we were suddenly standing in a trickling stream. The desk was nowhere in sight. I could feel the gentle coolness on my bare feet now. It felt fantastic. We were both in faded bib overalls and weathered straw hats. The music and the birds were still with us. A bluebird gently landed on my shoulder. It chirped and sang a moment, then nodded as if he were giving his approval and flew off. The swiftness of these transitions was making me dizzy. Father Flannigan spoke again, “Perhaps this makes more sense.”

Then with a knowing nod, he stepped out of the sparkling stream and started up a grassy knoll. I followed him. He stopped when we came to an ancient oak. It was the biggest in the area and looked like it was hundreds of years old—maybe a thousand.

“It’s many thousands of Earth years old,” he said. “This is your tree. Let’s sit.”

I sat on a bulging root directly across from the Good Father. We were immersed in the shade and comfort of the old tree. I gawked in amazement. “Am I going to have to

take a test?" I asked, hoping the good Father wouldn't pick up on my thinly veiled impatience. He did, of course. Nothing got past Father Flannigan, whether he was wearing a fedora or a straw hat. And he still hadn't answered my question about heaven. *Maybe I should have gone to church more.*

"Church serves a fine purpose for many people," Father Flannigan stated. "There are so many of them now, all claiming to be the right one." He sighed heavily, still completely ignoring my question of tests and heaven, moving right on to the invasion of my thoughts about church. He paused a moment, chuckled and said, "I suppose they have to claim something impressive to give themselves credibility. The sad part of churches is that there is so much reciting and repeating of words and verses written by others—which in and of itself can be some pretty good stuff. But, it doesn't take the place of the individual soul putting some energy into looking inside themselves for what they are seeking. And everyone is seeking."

"So then, is this heaven?" I probed again.

"Well—not just yet—not exactly anyway. You will still have to get past the judge."

"How long will all this take?" The thought of the judge concerned me. *More like nervously anxious.*

"How long will it take, you ask? That would be one of those time and space references so many of you like to bring up when you arrive. It doesn't work like that here."

"Are you telling me that time and space don't exist here?"

“Oh, absolutely they do. It is certainly most essential in the world you just came from.” He paused waiting for me to catch up.

The Good Father continued, “People need to get to work on time. Deliveries need to be made on time. Kids need to go to bed on time, come home on time. The news comes on at six. There are countless things connected with time. It can be mind-numbing. Your world revolved around time, and most people never seem to have enough of it. We, around here find amusement in its peculiar measurements. The New Year starts eleven days after what’s called the winter solstice, the shortest day for light in most places. Wouldn’t you think that would seem a more likely time to start a measurement as significant as a year rather than waiting eleven more days? Most of you have gotten the seasons down pretty good—but then, there is the day itself. You people have it starting in the middle of the night in total darkness, long before the first hint of light. And everyone seems to be okay with that. And—then there’s the thing about space—everybody wants their own space, or more space. This is my room, this is my house, this is my yard, my city, state, or country. It goes on and on—there’s no end to how time and space set so many limits on that world. It is much less of an issue here. So yes, time and space do exist here, as surely as a two-dimensional shadow exists on Earth—and with about the same importance. Many of the things that were too complex to grasp on Earth will become easier to comprehend.” His voice was assuring and as kind as the aroma of the orange blossoms that now drifted through the air.

“So, will I be seeing the judge soon?” I was slightly emboldened by all these new enlightenments.

“Well, you don’t exactly ‘see’ the judge. It’s not quite that simple. Every soul goes to Earth to learn their own lessons from that moment they separate from the sea of souls until they return for their reconciliation.”

“Reconciliation?”

“Yes, reconciliation—you’ll work that out with the judge.”

“Can’t you stay with me to help? You did say you’d be a guide for me.”

“I have guided you this far, answering many of your questions, and even more. Remember, I am only a reflection of you—of what you needed to see. But, I’m afraid you’ll have to face the judge alone.”

He raised his right hand and a small holographic kind of image of me began to form; first as a child, then quickly moving to the teenage years, then a young adult. “You can review your life right here,” he said. “What I’m showing you right now is merely an oversimplified preview.”

I could see the house where I lived as a child, and where I played, and the friends I played with. It was all flashing before me as quickly as lightening, but still with intense clarity.

“Wow, this is amazing. So—are you my judge then?” Father Flannigan was growing on me. I liked him. I trusted him. *I would have been okay with that.*

He returned a warm smile, but still didn’t answer this all-important question.

I boldly probed further, “Will there be more than one judge?”

“There is only one.”

I nervously brushed off some of the dried grass from my feet. It tickled. It was an odd sensation for me—something it seemed I hadn’t felt in a long time.

“The reconciliation part is where you may really notice the time as you came to understand it on Earth. Here’s how it works. You will see your entire life and how your decisions and choices have affected others, both good and bad. Some of the results may really surprise you. You’ll see that things are not always what they appear. You will sort of earn credits for all the love and good you brought into the lives of those around you. Those credits will offset the not so good times; the times of greed, anger, apathy, self indulgence and other ego building energies you have used.”

I must have frowned, because he paused and calmly said, “Don’t look so worried, everybody goes through this.” The strength in his voice was comforting.

“So then—everybody gets through this step?” I inquired hopefully, with a certain amount of unhidden anxiety.

“Well—it’s much more than a step, and for some it can be very difficult. Unfortunately, some souls find themselves hopelessly mired in their greed and self indulgence. Their reconciliation can seem to take a very, very long time—decades in Earth time, sometimes even centuries.”

This bit of news shocked the little bit of confidence I was gaining. *Centuries?* “So then, there really is a hell of some kind, but I just can’t understand it. Is that what you’re saying?”

“No, there still isn’t a hell,” was the polite reply. “For those souls that don’t love, whether they can’t or choose not to—well they simply cease to exist, but that’s exceptionally rare. Like seeds that are thrown into a fertile field; not every one of them will blossom right away, but sooner or later nearly all do. Virtually everyone has something to work with. The soul has incredible depth and powers of reconciliation.

One simply has to want to. This step cannot be escaped. The heart simply won't allow that to happen. It's time for the heart to reconnect with the soul now that it's no longer limited by three dimensions."

"Can't you be my judge? You seem so nice, and so patient. You know me so well."

"Oh me, heavens no—I'm not qualified for that. But, I will tell you this. As you go through the review of your life, the selfish and self-indulgent parts may seem like an eternity, but they are tempered with the good parts of your life."

*My look of confusion had to be unmistakable now.*

He continued, "You will be your own judge." He paused and smiled. It was a warm smile—encouraging and hopeful. As he turned away he said, "Oh, just one more thing—if by any chance you had the sensation of tasting cookies when you were on the bench you should do well."

*He knew.* So, we were on a bench. I didn't imagine that. That whole bench scene disappeared so quickly I wondered if it even really happened. I wanted to thank him, but then without warning, he was gone.

I looked up hoping to see him. Nothing. Before the words 'Father Flannigan' could escape my lips, his image appeared—as big as a house, probably a thousand feet above me.

"I will be here for you whenever you need me."

He disappeared again. I looked up with begging eyes once again.

"I promise—I will be here for you. But, you can do this."

His image faded away once again and instantly I was surrounded, or perhaps even absorbed by a thousand images of me at innumerable stages of my life. I was actually beginning to grasp something I would have thought utterly impossible. I could see everything clearly. The review of my life with the holographic scenes began, and we all started the examination of our life. We would all work together on this—all of us at the various stages of our life. The bluebird came back and landed on my shoulder again. He smelled like chocolate chip cookies—fresh from the oven. He stayed with me for a long time before he flew off again.

Then I heard distant voices—very distant—very faint—barely audible, “There’s nothing more we can do. I’ll have to go out and tell the family.”

That was followed by, “Doctor, this is really strange, but when I removed his shoes and socks he had pieces of dried grass on his feet. His file indicates he had an accident twenty years ago and was paralyzed from the waist down. He had been confined to a wheel chair ever since.”

END