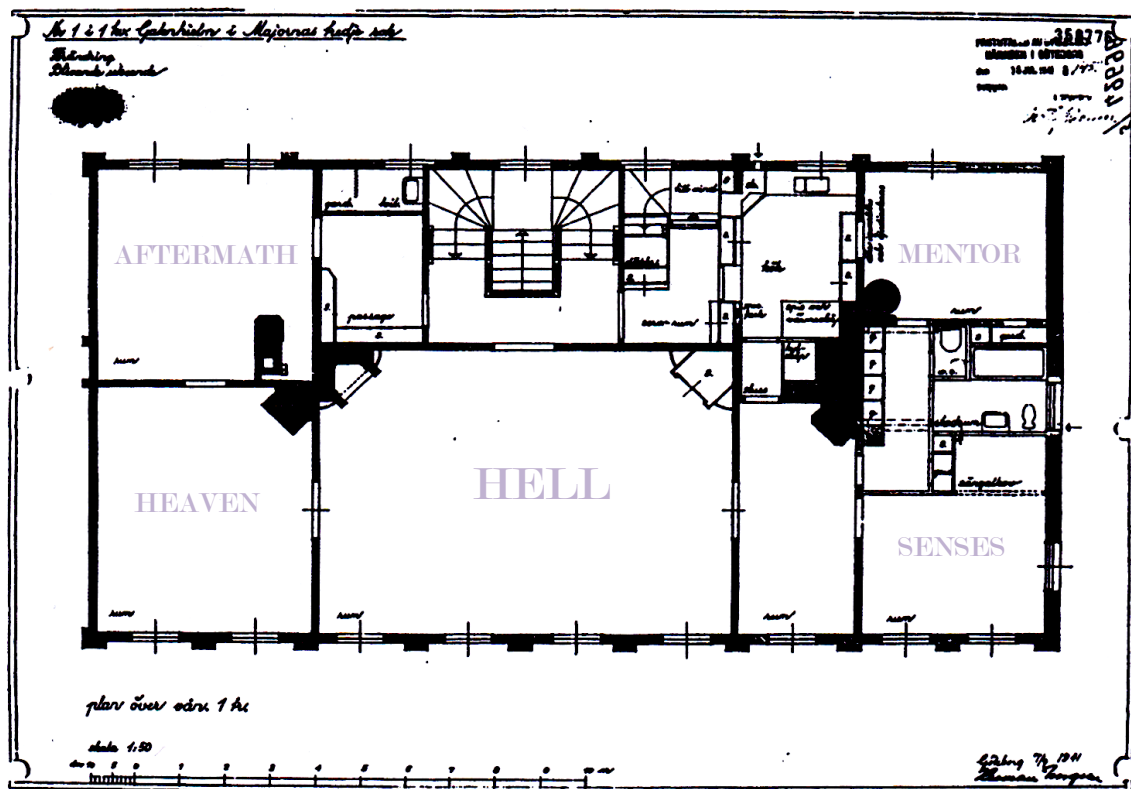


# HEAVEN & HELL

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*retold from an imagined visitor's perspective*



## I. THE ORDINARY WORLD

18:50

I stand at Stigbergstorget, trams are rushing by behind my back. In front of me is Gathenhielska huset, built 1746. Secretive, and closed for the public since 1986, known for being a house for seclusive fraternal societies.

19:00

As I enter a young man in a black suit and a gold watch asks me to sit down and wait. "If you'd like, you can help yourself to a cup of coffee." He asks me to write my name on a sticker, to place it on my chest. There are others coming and its clear that we are all a bit nervous. The walls are painted, naked women with roses in their hands.



19:05

A woman with a crooked nose dressed in black trousers and a fitted jacket walks down the wooden stairs. She looks tidy. A badge on her chest: "PROTAGONIST". She waits until the small talk dies out, then she tells us what will happen.

## II. THE CALL

19:07

"Twenty minutes past eight you will have the opportunity to carry out a mythological model. We call that part Hell. You will have time to prepare yourself. Hell happens mechanically. You will not have to tell me any secrets from your life. If you need to leave before Hell, you can do that. I'm sure you have your reasons."

### III. THE REFUSAL OF THE CALL

19:08

"Some of the things we will do here might be perceived as a challenge. I want you to know that you are then allowed to refuse. I want you to try it. Raise your hand and say 'I refuse.'"

I raise my hand. I say: "I refuse."

### IV. MEETING THE MENTOR

19:12

We follow the woman up narrow stairs, and at the top a man with an American jawline greets us. He us introduced to us as "Benjamin".

### V. CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

19:14

We follow Benjamin through a narrow hallway with closed doors. He takes us to a room, almost empty. Only a couple of chairs and a laminated picture, *The Plague of Thebes: Oedipus and Antigone* by Charles Jalabert.

19:18

Benjamin says: "Soon, you will take part in a mythological model that we call 'Hell'. In this model we will use pictures from the art history and you will take turn to hold the position of the *Protagonist*. There might be more people in the picture besides the *Protagonist*, these people we will refer to as *Material*. Now we will practice how to be *Material*."

19:19

He hands out blindfolds to us and we put them on. I can feel the warmth of the visitor sitting next to me. Soon a hand takes my hand. A palm on my back, gently steering. I am helped to take a position and I try to remember the painting. Who am I? Antigone? A terrified bystander? I holding the pose. My arm is stretched, and my finger is pointing at something. What?

### VI. TESTS AND ALLIES

19:29

We are done and Benjamin leads us to a waiting room. A blonde woman is waiting for us, she wears a badge stating "PROTAGONIST".



19:30

The blonde woman says: "I will tell you what will happen once more. Twenty minutes past eight you will have the opportunity to perform a mythological model. We call that part *Hell*. You have time to get prepared. When *Hell* happens you will know exactly what to do. In order to perform in this model you need to be able to assume two different positions: the position of *Material* and the position of the *Protagonist*. As *Material*, you embody the cause of someone else's suffering. When it is your turn to assume the position of the *Protagonist* your task is to focus on your own suffering. You have already practiced the skills you need to be *Material*, so now we will look into the *Protagonist* position."

19:35

The blonde woman turns to a poster on the wall listing: "FEAR, WRATH, SHOCK, JOY, CURIOSITY, DISGUST, SORROW, PITY". She tells us that affects is the immediate responses the *Protagonist* has in relation to an event, and that they might hold useful information for us.

19:38

We rehears the affects, trying to be attentive to our faces in order to recognize the feeling of sorrow and wrath. We look at instructive pictures and mimic the facial expressions. First I just feel silly but soon an uncanny feeling comes over me.

19:42

A tall young girl enters the room. We are asked to follow, and enter a light warm room. Evening sun flows down over the wooden floor. There are small wooden desks placed along the walls, and the tall girl asks us to take a seat. We are to practice being attentive to our affects through basic sensorial stimuli - sight, smell, sound, touch and taste. There are stations with perfumed rags in glass jars. Head phones with tones playing. Red, blue, yellow and green squares of glass.



Dried rose, pickled lemon, raw ginger and smoked salt. Velvet, satin, linen and wet stone. Two minutes at each station.



FEAR	RED
WRATH	
SHOCK	
JOY	
CURIOSITY	LEMON
DISGUST	F#M (number two)
SORROW	STONE
PITY	Eau de Berlin (number three)

19:50

I smell of pity. I touch the surface of sorrow. I taste curiosity. I see fear. Listen to disgust.

19:55

I am back in the waiting room. It's time to identify our position in *Hell*. There are four different descriptions in the folder and I am to choose out of them.

19:59

*"Mythological model no 4.*

*The moment is an impossible moment. Love and hate, trust and fear have traded places. From this moment on nothing will ever be the same. Yet, later, when they go down the hill they will act as if nothing has happened.*

*Protagonist position: Body bent forward, leaning chest and chin down. Head turned to the right. Arms pulled back, with clenched fists. Mouth open."*

This is my *Hell*.

20:02

A woman enters the room, dark in her colors. She wears a badge stating "AUTHOR". She asks if any one has managed to chosen their position for *Hell* yet. I raise my hand. She hands me a note, a small printed picture. Not until I hold it in my hand I realize that the position I've chosen for my *Hell* is Isaac in "*The Sacrifice of Isaac*" by Caravaggio.



20:04

We enter a bathroom, the AUTHOR and I, and in here it smells heavily of perfume. “ This is the *Protagonist* position you have chosen” she says and points at Isaac and I feel slightly embarrassed for some reason. We look at the picture and we mimic it together. Head down, turned to the right, arms pulled back. She shows me and I repeat.



## VII. APPROACHING THE INNERMOST CAVE

20:08

We're heading back to the waiting room.

20:12

I start to feel a bit fidgety. The woman with the crooked asks me if I could do her a favor. "Could you go get her the blind folds?" Apparently we need them in *Hell*.





20:14

"Your *Hell* will start In a couple of minutes. There will be people in there. They will arrange the pictures you have chosen, one by one. You will take turns to be the *Protagonist*. Some of you have chosen pictures with more than one person in it. That means you also will be serving as *Material* in the *Hell* of someone else, as we have rehearsed. Do you have any questions?"

20:15

The blindfolds are passed around. Someone asks how long *Hell* will take. "Half an hour." That's quite some time. There are double doors on one side of the room, and I somehow know that *Hell* is in there.

20:17

The blindfold is pressing over my nose. I am waiting. I listen to footsteps and a fan humming in a distant room. I can hear doors open.

20:20

They take me in.

## VIII. THE ORDEAL

20:21

There are tones from an organ and the humming from a fan. The wooden floor creaks. I am guided to sit down and later guided to stand up again. Something is placed in my hand. A knife? My other hand is placed on the warm neck of a stranger.

20:45

I lose track of time. Suddenly, my own head is bent forwards. My arms are pulled back. My blindfold is undone. The room is bathing in red light - red as my fear, and I see my own reflection in a mirror. A blindfolded man stands above me. His hand is on my neck. There is the knife in his hand and an angel grabs his arm. Flashing lights.

20:47

I'm seated again. My heart is pounding.

20:50

We are taken out. The doors close behind us and the low frequency howling of the organ goes on in there. *Hell* is over.

## **IX. A REWARD**

20:52

Slowly I take the blindfold off. We stand on the top of the grand stairwell. There's the woman with the crooked nose. The man next to me wipe his eyes. It might be due to the blindfold.

20:56

"I want to congratulate you, you have gone through *Hell*. You have the right to the title *Protagonist*. You can of course refuse this title. If so, you say: "I refuse". No one refuses.

20:58

I attach the badge stating "PROTAGONIST" to my shirt, just over my name sticker.

## **X. THE ROAD BACK**

21:05

I'm standing in a joyous kitchen sipping white wine. Very soon we will do another mythological model, this time it will be *Heaven*. We prepare for this by placing fruit and leafs in an interpreting of a Caravaggio still life painting. Apparently, in *Heaven* fruit plays a central part. A woman next to me cuts a watermelon in half, two men in aprons reorganize figs. Madonna and Eric Clapton on the radio. People giggle.



21:25

The music is turned down in the middle of “Heaven Is A Place On Earth”. Benjamin tells us that *Heaven* will start in two minutes. In contrast to *Hell* *Heaven* is a picture yet to be painted. An *Author* will imagine *Heaven*, Benjamin says, and the *Author* will describe what she sees.

21:30

We enter the room where *Heaven* will take place. The tray with fruit is there. It’s quite dark but I can still see the faces of everyone. We sit in silence.

21:34

The woman with the badge stating AUTHOR stands up. She places her chair in the middle of the room. She takes out a blindfold from her pocket and she puts it on. “This is what I see.”



21:35

The *Author* addresses us each by our first name. She knows us all. She gives us all a place. “Hannes and Josephine stand by the door. One on each side. They stand at the open gates of heaven”.

21:37

“Doris sits down by Josephines feet holding an apple. Paul stands by the tray with fruit, to the right. Miriam stands to the left of Paul, holding a hand on his shoulder. Snow is falling.” She knows all our names. How can she know all of our names?

21:38

I am placed in the middle of the picture holding the hand of a woman I just met.



21:39

We're all in here. The *Author* describes how she sits down together with Doris on the floor and she led there, still blindfolded. A music box is still playing. Fruit. A sudden flash of light, then darkness.

## **XI. THE RESURRECTION**

21:45

A moment of confusion. There is a glimpse of light when the door to the kitchen opens up. "You can come this way please."

21:46

Back into the joyous kitchen where the radio plays "Like a Virgin". There are perfume bottles on a table with our names are handwritten on their labels. I find mine and it smells of pity.

## **XII. RETURNING WITH THE ELIXIR**

21:50

I stand at Stigbergstorget, with the gray painted tree house behind my back. A couple of pigeons are diligently searching for invisible crumbs in the curb. I remove the sticker from my sweater. With the perfume in my pocket I head to the tram.