And the Darkness Is Harsh

Roger Zelazny

We are resting here, and we are waiting. Waiting.

Do you know what it is like to wait? We are crowded here, my brothers and I, and we are watching that great metal door and waiting for it to open.

It is locked now. But it has opened before and they say that sooner or later it always opens. When we hear a soft click, and the clean daylight from outside looks in, we will be ready.

We are always ready. So are millions of our kin, the world over. Ready and waiting.

They say that it is beautiful outside, that the warm light comes down from the sky and makes green things come up from the ground and live and grow. They say that at night it is beautiful, too, that there is a darkness that is pleasant and not harsh, and that there are thousands of little lights up in the sky. It is then that the living things sleep, they say.

We would not know that last because we never sleep. We only rest between our times of use. Now we are resting, and waiting, and reliving our tragic pasts. Our pasts are always tragic; that is, if we have a past. Some of us don’t. We are the new ones.

But we can hear the old ones remembering and we know what it is like. We know what it is like to see the outside, all that beauty, and to go forth into it.

It changes then.

It always changes when we leave here. There are always other things in the sky than stars, and the night becomes a harsh darkness like that of our home.

At times it is not always dark. The living things do not all sleep at night then, and some of them keep on sleeping, even in the daytime.

It is only beautiful for a little while after we emerge. Then it becomes ugly.

We do not like ugliness. We do not like waiting. We do not even like existing. But we are servants. We must exist and wait to make more ugliness every time that door opens.

It will open again. They say that sooner or later it always opens.

Then the soft daylight will look in and tell us of the beauty outside. It will look at our shiny metal bodies and at the word “Armory” printed outside the door.

It will look and it will go away.

Then we will be through waiting.

A Word from Zelazny

This was Zelazny’s first completely published short story from the Euclid Junior High School literary magazine Eucuyo in 1954. He was actively sending stories to magazines and receiving only rejection slips. He later had this story reprinted in the limited edition chapbook of the same title, wherein he described this as “an obvious Bradbury pastiche.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. And the Darkness Is Harsh, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)