

# The Devil Puts his Side of the Story

## *The Number 230*

by [Paul Martin Freeman](#) (December 2023)



*All sin starts from the assumption that my false self, the*

*self that exists only in my egocentric desires, is the fundamental reality of life to which everything else in the universe is ordered.* –Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p 34

'Twas on the 230 at Walthamstow,  
It happened just as I'm about to tell,  
That Greaves, a troubled soul I used to know,  
Believed he'd died and woken up in Hell.

Aghast, he saw the flames which roared around him;  
The passengers who roasted where they sat.  
The driver said how glad he was he'd found him,  
Inviting Greaves to have a little chat.

He started talking first about the weather  
On which he asked our startled hero's views:  
Did Greaves not find it *warm* for mid-December?  
The tension thus attempting to defuse.

"Perhaps," he ventures now, "you've heard about me?"  
"I rule those people you'd describe as dead,"  
"And others, too, who cannot live without me,"  
"And sadly yes, all think of me with dread."

"You shouldn't, though, believe that hoary story:"  
"My aim is not to harm but help, you see."  
"And no one finds their true inherent glory"  
"Unless it is," the driver smiles, "through me."

"These fires are here to cure the self of weakness,"  
"For seeing itself requires its spirit strong;"  
"While pain delivers it of foolish meekness,"  
"And notions, too, of goodness, right and wrong."

"And as a mighty sword is forged and tempered;"  
"The dross expunged by force and purging fire,"

"When all that's God's has unto God been rendered"  
"What's left is Man's alone and Man entire."

"And at the tortured self's extremity,"  
"And in its darkest night of pain and fear,"  
"It catches sight of this identity"  
"That's like an endlessly rotating sphere."

"And like the moon emerging from the clouds"  
"Whose light forever journeys through the skies,"  
"When stripped of what the wondrous self enshrouds"  
"Its truth appears whose glory never dies."

"And *this* is heaven, not that stuff they tell you,"  
"With angels crooning hymns and praising God,"  
"And all that other crap they'll try and sell you,"  
"Which even clever children feel is odd."

"For here the self is known without restriction"  
"And grasps itself in ecstasy as free."  
"Unborn, undying, untouched by all affliction,"  
"It is the absolute eternal Me!"

"But God likes Man in ignorance of this;"  
"He much prefers you under his control."  
"He doesn't want you wandering off to bliss:"  
"He'd rather keep you stuffed inside your hole."

"And this is what He tried to do with Adam,"  
"Confining him in Eden's garden walls."  
"But crafty Adam and his cunning madam"  
"Had too much savvy, enterprise and balls."

"I whispered in her ear how God controlled her,"  
"Persuading her to try that stupid tree."  
"And seeing that I was right in what I'd told her,"  
"They coolly upped and left and followed me!"

"For no one ever kicked them out of Eden:"

"That's just," he scoffs, "another pack of lies!"

"Your ancestors courageously chose freedom"

"And spurned what God proposed in compromise."

"Indeed, He really wanted them to stay there"

"And sent some angel clown to bar the way."

"But Adam simply went on strike and lay there"

"Until the fool got bored and flew away!"

The driver laughs again derisively,

Recalling—so it seemed—that ancient scene.

"Then Adam ran," he says, "excitedly"

To see what Man before had never seen."

"Of course, Man isn't happy all the time"

"And suffers misery as not before."

"He has to deal with death, disease and crime"

"And other stuff he finds a constant bore."

"Yet now at least he's always proud and free:"

"No longer is he God's to kick around."

"The eyes he has he now can use to see;"

"His feet he feels are firmly on the ground."

"But ever since, God's tried to get you back,"

"Employing every desperate means He can,"

"From wittering on through wide-eyed Bible hack"

"To sending someone called the Son of Man."

"But since he left and dumped his ignorance"

"Enlightened Man has seen through every ruse."

"He likes himself now, strong and vigorous,"

"And over jail will always freedom choose."

"And even though the price of this is high,"

"Requiring spending time with me below,"

"Yet what I offer princes cannot buy"

"Nor slavish crooning angels ever know."

It was, as Greaves would later tell the tale,  
That then the waiting bus began to move.  
And this our hero, doubtless somewhat pale,  
Was doubtless more than happy to approve.

For as they trundled off to Leyton Green  
The vision disappeared with all the flames;  
And Greaves was left to wonder what he'd seen  
And whether to believe the Devil's claims.

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Paul Martin Freeman is an art dealer in London. The poem is from *The Bus Poems: Tales Sacred and Profane*, currently in preparation. His book, *A Chocolate Box Menagerie*, is published by New English Review Press and is available [here](#).

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