

nota bene

26th
Edition

Phi Theta Kappa
Honor Society
Literary Anthology



PHI THETA KAPPA
HONOR SOCIETY

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Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society is proud to present the 26th edition of *Nota Bene*, the nation's only literary anthology featuring excellence in writing among community college students.

We are pleased to once again offer scholarships to outstanding *Nota Bene* authors. This year's Ewing Citation Scholarship has been awarded to Kasey Bull, a member from Greenfield Community College in Massachusetts, for her body of work "Nostalgia," "On Moving," and "Simplicity." The authors of four other standout entries have been recognized as 2020 Reynolds Scholars.

When we first published *Nota Bene* in 1994, we were overwhelmed with the response from members who flooded our mailboxes with submissions and from the audience who enthusiastically read the book. Today we continue to see a fervent response to the call for submissions, and selection for publication remains a great source of pride.

Nota Bene takes its name from the Latin expression for "note well." We hope you will take note and be inspired by the good work of these exceptional authors. We are grateful for the continued opportunity to showcase the talents of Phi Theta Kappa members and to affirm our commitment to the recognition and academic excellence of students seeking associate degrees and certificates.

Sincerely,

The *Nota Bene* Editorial Board

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AWARDS

The Ewing Citation Scholarship Award of \$1,000 is given to the author of the *Nota Bene* manuscript considered to be the most outstanding of all entries. It is named in honor of Nell Ewing, long-time Phi Theta Kappa staff member who was a driving force behind *Nota Bene*, beginning with its conceptual design and establishment. She retired in 2012 after serving 26 years with Phi Theta Kappa.



Nell passed away in 2020. We proudly dedicate this issue to her memory.

The Reynolds Scholarship Awards of \$500 each are given to up to four authors whose manuscripts were deemed outstanding. These awards are endowed by the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and honor the memory of the late Donald W. Reynolds, founder of the Donrey Media Group.

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nos•tal•gia

KASEY BULL

*Greenfield Community College
Massachusetts*

nos•tal•gia *noun*. **1.** See "homesickness." **2.** The smell of petrichor after the first summer storm. Worms I named "Wilbur" or "Winnafred" or "Wilhelm." The ruins of a midnight fire on a jagged mountain peak with remnants of drunken renditions of Ginsberg's "Howl." A walk through the cemetery in the rain, the earthy smell of souls beneath my soles. This hunger in my heart, / The hesitant way it keeps time, / The throbbing in my feet, the aching in my mind. The lush lullaby of subtle rhythmic waves of the omniscient sea leaving grains of sand behind. An empty swing blowing patiently in the evening breeze. **3.** A wistful or sentimental yearning for what was once free.

ON MOVING



KASEY BULL

*Greenfield Community College
Massachusetts*

Letters from lovers in prison — sealed with Hershey Pie kisses, packed neatly with love. Photographs from epochs past, faded and neatly torn, arms embracing those I have loved.

An empty mousetrap, one hundred seventy drained batteries, an empty baby book with a name. A record that stops abruptly when Joni Mitchell sings “Tinkling cymbals without love.”

Cymbals in the hall, two guitars and stringed angels, a piano, a flute, a cacophony of silence. One hundred fifty-seven books with folded pages and underlined insight on love and unlove.

Ghosts in the paint and seven diaries from seventeen years ending with an unfinished beginning. The dress I didn’t wear to prom, the cap I didn’t throw, a copy of *Forever Changes* by Love.

Time forever changing, moving hastily to the finish line, no regard for those who have faltered. I place my history neatly within nameless boxes. If found, at least it will be known I once loved.

SIMPLICITY



KASEY BULL

*Greenfield Community College
Massachusetts*

I remember the days when the only thing I wanted was to be older, more grown up. It began when I was only 8, and I would pour a cup of coffee (or rather, milk and sugar with a dash of coffee) and read the newspaper with my parents at the kitchen table. I would discuss the mostly trivial things going on in the world then, and pretend to know what the Yankees score meant. It went on through my years, this yearning to be something I was not. When I was 16, I could drink and smoke anyone twice my age under the table. I wore way too much makeup. “Live fast, die pretty,” I would say. Now it seems that time passes me by faster and faster with every year that I wear on my body like jewels. What are we all running from, and where are we running to? And why do we need to get there so damn quickly?

Slowing down to enjoy the scenery seems to get harder and harder to do these days when everything around us is speeding up, gathering momentum like a man running full force to the edge of a skyscraper with his arms full of paperwork and nosediving off into oblivion. Almost everything is accessible to us within mere milliseconds with the swipe of a fingertip. Order food, find someone to seduce, apply to a job, read a book, find a recipe to cook for tonight’s hook-up, grocery shop, and catch up on the babies and weddings and vacations of 700 old acquaintances all on your 15-minute work break. Go, go, go! If you were to simply stop, as if you ran straight into a brick wall, the intricate fabrics of your reality would come unraveling into a helpless heap of hopeless mess.

Eat, sleep, work, repeat. If you take a moment to go outside and look down the street, you can almost see the hamster wheels rolling through your neighbors’ front lawns — off to yoga, to soccer practice, to cello lessons, to *Surviving the Apocalypse 101* class, to Walmart to be first in line for the newest Iphone, to the park with the children to share the gossip they scored on Twitter about Trish’s Tinder date and to gander menacingly at that morose excuse of a woman.

One day, I woke up and there it was, in a lifeless heaping pile on the floor. Twenty-nine years of my life, slipping through my hands like grains of sand as I held on desperately to the remnants. Nothing more than a living, breathing hourglass. But, maybe that was it.

I had wasted far too many of those precious grains while counting those that were left. Something had to change.

My first measure of action was severing only the diseased roots and cleansing myself from the effect of generations of protagonists out of “My Papa’s Waltz” (Roethke, 1948). There is no way to care for and mend the remaining roots if too much energy is buried in the rotten ones. I had spent much of my youth and my 20s gluttonously drowning my history and anxiety in rivers of liquor. There is only one way to live when you’re inebriated, and that is as fast and as shallowly as possible in order to not drown and to come up for air. The day I stepped through the gate of sobriety, I found that all the doors that were locked before I was now able to open. Once I stopped running from my history like it was a vengeful zombie raised from the deceased, I began to see all the wondrous things that were passing me by as I was running as fast as I could. To imbibe of the bountiful juices in our lives, we must suffer each blow and feel the whole spectrum of our emotions.

Looking around with sober eyes, I began to see all the meaningless things taking up the space around me. What a waste of precious space. Meaningless possessions with no value, empty toxic relationships, worthless work out of which I gained no fulfillment. One by one, I proceeded to judge the value of every little thing taking up space in my life. If it didn’t bring me joy, then I would rid it from my life with no remorse. I have begun to fill my space with meaningful possessions — my guitar, my books, my creations — and meaningful connections that are fulfilling and real. Time and space is all we have while we are here, and it is up to us to fill them with what is beautiful and genuine.

I began to create beauty to fill up my time and space. Create everything. Create music, create art, create poetry, create food, create soap. When you are resourceful with what little you have, you find that you need less. I used to need a lot of things. I needed so many things that I had to work 80 hard hours a week making minimum wage to get them. And then I needed more things to fill the void where my soul used to be. What is money anyway, really? It is simply another word for time. I slashed my work schedule down to the bare minimum, just enough to pay for my survival. If I am unable to pay my bills, I have found that I can spend my time creating things in exchange for survival. I will no longer sell my soul to the devil for five bucks.

When I work now, I enjoy it. I immerse myself in the moment, and I pour all the pieces of me into what I am doing presently. The result is always a work of art. Life is more fulfilling when you’re not seeking gratification around every bend in the road, but rather simply letting it come to you. It’s a lot easier to smell the roses when you paint your world with them.

Now, when I drink my coffee, I don’t think about the Yankees. I no longer dilute it with milk and sugar, I prefer it strong and simple, like me. I don’t think about what it’d be like to be older. I think about what it’s like to be me right now — drinking coffee, sitting on my front porch watching the sunrise over misty green hills, tasting the bold, dark flavor of heady coffee on my tongue, smelling the petrichor from the night before, feeling the light breeze whispering in my hair, and listening to the river roar by.

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FRACTALS IN THE NATURAL WORLD



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"Clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles, and bark is not smooth, nor does lightning travel in a straight line" (Mandelbrot, 1982, p. 1). This is the opening to *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* written by Benoit Mandelbrot, a French mathematician and physicist. Born in 1924, he is credited with the development of the field of fractal geometry — the study of irregular shapes known as fractals (Sardar & Abrams, 1999). According to the book *Introducing Chaos*, "fractals are a way of measuring qualities that otherwise have no clear definition: the degree of roughness or brokenness or irregularity in an object" (Sardar & Abrams, 1999, p. 34). Fractals give us the ability to quantify certain qualities of an object in a way that tools of standard Euclidean geometry cannot. Or, as Mandelbrot (1982) said, "the existence of these patterns challenges us to study those forms that Euclid leaves aside as being 'formless,' to investigate the morphology of the 'amorphous' " (p. 1).

But what exactly is a fractal shape? Take for example a simple function:

$$F(x) = x + 1$$

$$F(2) = 2 + 1 \quad \rightarrow \quad F(2) = 3$$

X is set to any number — in this case two. Now repeat the process by plugging the result back into the variable again and again — a concept known as *iteration*.

$$F(3) = 3 + 1 \quad \rightarrow \quad F(3) = 4$$

$$F(4) = 4 + 1 \quad \rightarrow \quad F(4) = 5$$

$$F(5) = 5 + 1 \quad \rightarrow \quad F(5) = 6$$

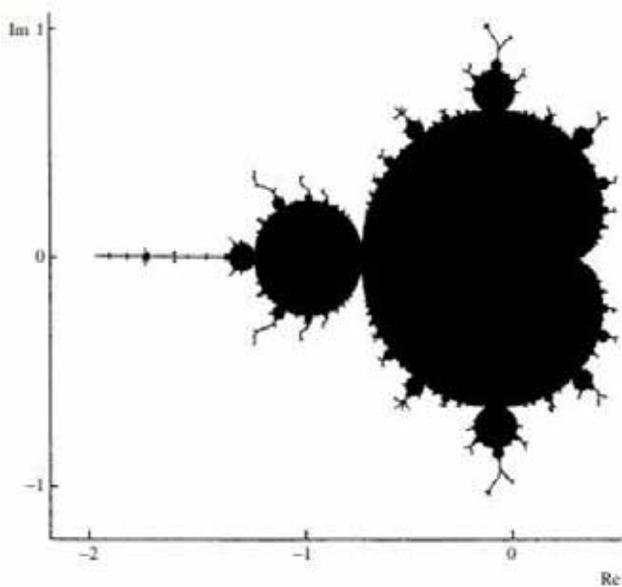
This is the same logic behind one of the most famous fractals — the Mandelbrot Set. Start with a complex function where

$$F(z) = z^2 + c$$

In this case let z be 2 and c be i

$$\begin{aligned} F(2) &= 2^2 + i && \rightarrow && F(2) = 4 + i \\ F(4+i) &= (4+i)^2 + i && \rightarrow && F(4+i) = 15 + 9i \\ F(15+9i) &= (15+9i)^2 + i && \rightarrow && F(15+9i) = 144 + 271i \end{aligned}$$

Any number plugged into this function will result in one of two things: either the number will approach infinity and “blow up” or it will be bounded — meaning it never gets larger than two. (“The Mandelbrot Set,” 2014). Our example above falls in the former category, as it is clearly producing numbers larger than two. Images of the Mandelbrot Set are created when these numbers are plotted on a complex plane, and include all of the bounded points, which form its distinctive shape. As our example is larger than two, it would fall outside of the set.



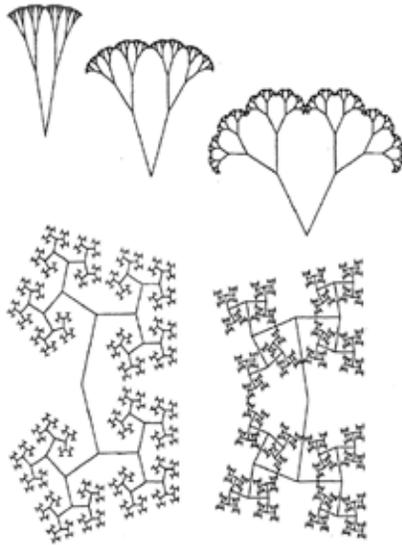
The Mandelbrot Set plotted on a complex plane (Falconer, 2003, p. 224).

While this all sounds very theoretical, fractals show up in a variety of unexpected places.

Understanding fractal principles can provide insight into fundamental concepts not only in mathematics but also in fields as diverse as economics, technology, and medicine. In this paper I will examine fractals in light of the environment. Interestingly, fractals are widespread throughout the natural world and can be used to predict outcomes in environmental systems.

Fractals in the Natural World

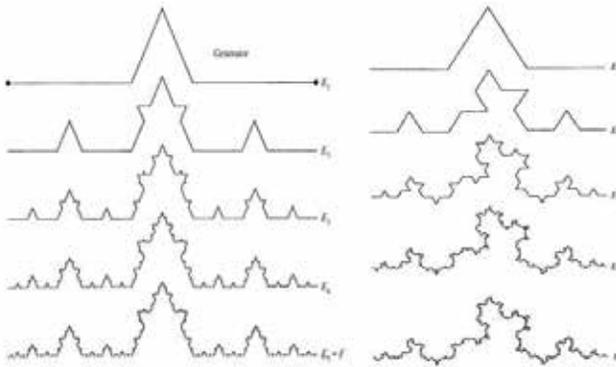
When discussing the abundance of fractals in nature, it quickly becomes apparent that it would be shorter to list what is not fractal, rather than what is. Fractals have an important characteristic of self-similarity. Fractal cosmologist and researcher Robert L. Oldershaw (2002) illustrates this characteristic through the analogy of a tree. Imagine following a leafless tree and moving from the singular trunk to forked branches, which each expand into more branches, and so on. Basically, a single trunk splits itself into a few large branches, which split themselves into multiple medium-sized branches, which split themselves into even smaller branches — decreasing in size with each division.



Example of fractal branching in trees (Mandelbrot, 1982, p. 155).

In theory, this means that a portion of a fractal can be used to determine the shape of the whole — just as examining the forks at the end of a branch can provide a window into the general shape of a tree. This repetitive pattern — described by Oldershaw (2002) as “the repetition of a unit pattern on different size scales” — is what is meant by self-similarity.

However, there are some exceptions to this rule. Fractals like the Mandelbrot Set are self-similar in a statistical sense, whereas most naturally occurring fractals are only self-similar in a general sense (Oldershaw, 2002). Meaning, most natural fractals are self-similar but incorporate some randomness as well.



Left: A standard Koch curve (Falconer, 2003, p. 132).
 Right: A Koch curve that includes randomness (Falconer, 2003, p. 245).

The diagram to the left showcases a Koch curve that is perfectly self-similar. Contrasted to the randomized Koch curve to the right, it appears too ideal to ever appear organically. Whereas the randomized Koch curve is varied just enough that we can recognize it as naturally occurring, such as in the outline of a snowflake or the coastline of an island.



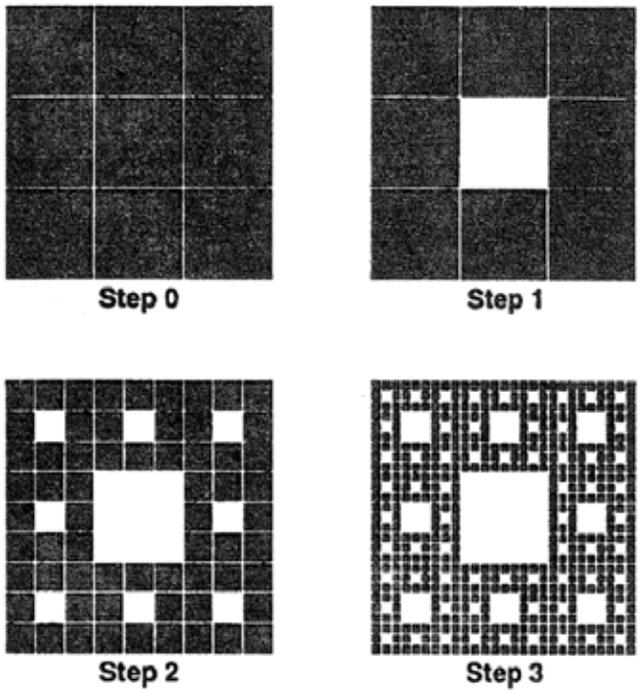
Google Earth image of an Egyptian coastline (Bourke, 2012).

This brings us to another interesting characteristic of fractals — their dimension. A line is one-dimensional, meaning it only allows for forward and backward motion. A plane is two-dimensional, meaning it allows motion forward, backward, upward, and downward. A fractal is somewhere in between. Imagine a line moving erratically over a plane. The more the line fills the space of the plane, the more self-similar — or fractal — the line becomes. This is known as a space-filling curve (Lorimer et al., 1994). The more space that is filled, the closer the fractal is to a plane or two-dimensions. It follows then that the less space filled, the closer the fractal is to a line or one-dimension. Thus “fractal objects cannot be adequately described by two dimensions or three dimensions or n dimensions of whole numbers because fractal dimensions are fractions” (Lorimer et al., 1994, p. 2). Meaning, fractals lie between dimensions.



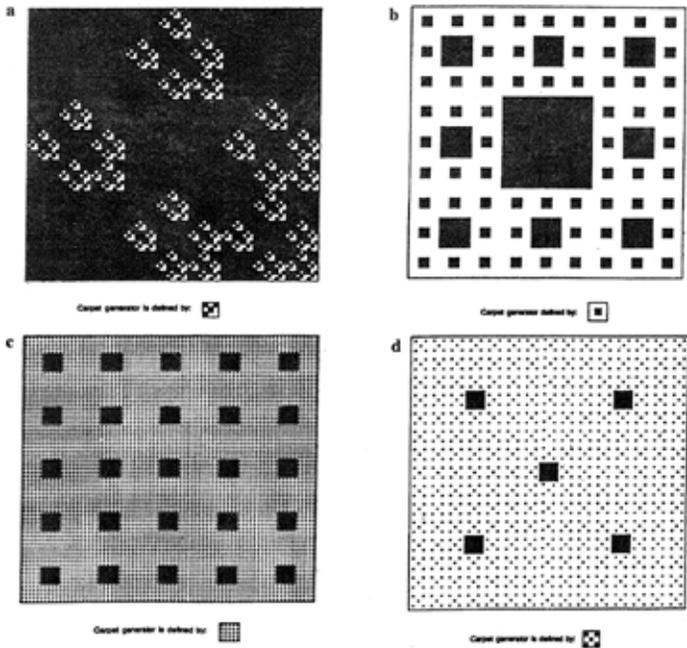
Google Earth image of Saudi Arabian sand dunes (Bourke, 2012).

Fractal shapes appear all throughout the natural world in objects such as trees and leaves, and in natural formations like sand dunes and coastlines. Understanding properties like self-similarity and fractal dimension are necessary in understanding fractals in the natural world.



Process of creation of a Sierpinski carpet (Lorimer et al., 1994, p. 6).

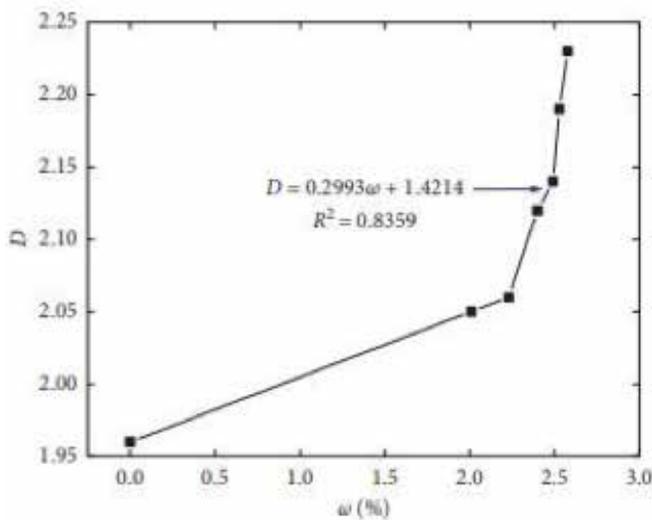
In this example of soil modeling, the white squares represent grains of soil while the black squares represent the spaces between them.



Models of different soil textures with Sierpinski carpets (Lorimer et al., 1994, p. 27).

Each model uses a different Sierpinski carpet to represent a different texture of soil. “The dimension of carpet (a) is 1.46, (b) is 1.89, (c) is 1.96, and (d) is 1.99” (Lorimer et al., 1994, p. 27). These dimensions refer to the concept of the space-filling curve mentioned earlier. Model (a) with its lower dimension represents sand, whereas model (d) — which is almost two-dimensional — represents clay (Lorimer et al., 1994). The higher the fractal dimension, the greater the level of water retention; thus, the lower the speed of soil erosion. This is useful because “before the fractal concept was developed, it was difficult to relate particle-size distribution in soils to water retention data” (Lorimer et al., 1994, p. 27). Now this relationship and its impact on soil erosion can be understood through a fractal lens.

Another example of fractal application can be seen in studying the moisture content of rocks. When rocks are blown up — in fields such as engineering or mining — there is a significant risk of dangerous rock bursts caused by a buildup of pressure (Lu et al., 2019).



Fractal dimension (D) increases with moisture content (w) in sandstone fragments (Lu et al., 2019, p. 7).

When conducting tests on sandstone, researchers found that fractal dimension increases with moisture content. This makes sense with what we know about fractal dimension and water retention. As seen in the example of a Sierpinski carpet, the higher the dimension, the more space to hold water. The researchers conclude that “the higher the moisture content is, the more substantial the damage to the sandstone is” (Lu et al., 2019, p. 7). This is because water helps erode and soften the sandstone, which lowers the amount of surface energy (Lu et al., 2019). So by ensuring the targeted rock has a high enough moisture content before destruction, the potential for rock bursts can be lessened due to a diminishing of surface energy via erosion.

Thus, fractals can be used in many different fields to make predictions about outcomes in environmental systems.

Conclusion

Appearing throughout the natural world, fractal shapes are abundant. Unlike statistically self-similar fractals such as the Mandelbrot Set, natural fractals are only broadly self-similar — meaning they have recognized limits. Outcomes like water retention and rock damage can be predicted by utilizing the concepts of fractal dimension and self-similarity. These examples highlight the real-world applications of fractals in environmental systems.



Google Earth image of a Malaysian river (Bourke, 2012).

Physicist Richard Feynman (1985) said, “If you want to learn about nature, to appreciate nature, it is necessary to understand the language that she speaks in” (p. 58). Fractals are certainly a part of this language. From the interlocking pentagons of a pineapple to the clustering of leaves on a dill weed — nature is full of repetition. “The mathematician’s patterns, like the painter’s or the poet’s, must be beautiful, the ideas, like the colors or the words, must fit together in a harmonious way” (Hardy, 1940). Fractals contain an inherent draw, inviting viewers to look deeper into the fabric from which the natural world is created. Clouds may not be spheres, but they are fractals.

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CLARA'S RELEVÉ

HEATHER TEAGUE

*Georgia Highlands College
Georgia*

Clara slipped on stage tonight
After graceful pas de deux.
She spun with such swift delight
Her mind fell behind her toes.

A moment of a moment,
Though the mouse-king met his fate,
Exposed the true opponent —
Life itself has two left feet.

For a time, I was a dancer.
When I was just three years old,
Ballet, that sweet romancer,
Had begun to take its hold.

I loved my big pink tutu.
I loved stretching at the barre.
So, Clara, when I saw you
I could tell just who you are.

You are me when I was four —
Flash of giggling piqué turns.
Dizzy, but still wanting more,
And believing I could learn.

You are my first pirouette,
When I fell and scraped my knee
Because I had not learned yet
To stop dancing on concrete.

You are the only answer
I would ever offer up
For happiness, the future,
And soft slippers beaten rough.

Though I never knew of poise,
Clara, half as much as you,
I'm in love with thrills and joys,
And I know that you are, too.

I know that you dance for girls
Who are little still at heart.
I know that your turns and twirls
Are your treasured works of art.

You feel like painter does,
But you've got no work for sale.
He's confined by canvas love,
While you've chosen a staged cell.

For me, you see, I chose pen,
So, perhaps we aren't the same.
But then, I looked up again
At hushed nerves, not lost with age.

You sought, just for an instant,
Panic's lackluster caress
That tempts weak ankles present
To give in without protest.

Ah! There you are! You, Poet!
Satin cursive, fluent marks.
I saw (though you don't know it)
Your relevé from the dark.



BEOWULF: THE ULTIMATE MARKETING TOOL



KAREYN HELLMANN
Paris Junior College
 Texas

Studies have shown that Americans are exposed to between 4,000 and 10,000 advertisements every day (Simpson, 2017). In an effort to increase profits, grow their businesses, and connect potential customers to their product, entities are spending increasing amounts of money and energy in marketing. A study of the Anglo-Saxon play *Beowulf* reveals that the idea of disguising an unpopular viewpoint in a form that appeals to a select audience has existed since ancient times, when church scribes concealed Christian themes within an originally pagan poem. *Beowulf* masterfully bridges pagan and Christian ideologies, creating a place for Christianity in a culture that did not have a natural inclination to embrace it.

Luis Palau, a prominent evangelist, explains why Christianity and missionaries are so synonymous with each other. "When Jesus went to heaven, the uppermost command on his mind was, 'Go into all the world and make disciples'" (Lee, 38). Christianity took these instructions to heart, and in the Middle Ages, circa the fifth century, the Catholic Church began to send missionaries to the English and Germanic Anglo-Saxon tribes (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], 2012). In an attempt to connect to pagan peoples, the church used the ancient art of rhyme. Gordon states that there were two types of poetry prevalent in the time period: heroic and Christian forms (Gordon, v). To proselytize to the Anglo-Saxons, the church adopted an approach that would appeal to the foreign peoples of the time by blending the two forms into one.

Beowulf shows marketing savvy by beginning and ending with a pagan tribal funeral. "They shouldered him out to the sea's flood...a ring-whorled prow rode in the harbor" ("*Beowulf*," 2013, lines 30, 32). Boats laden with treasure and the body of the deceased hero were lit on fire and sent out to sea, where later the remains would be retrieved for a cleaner burial under a funeral mound. Other examples of pagan representations in the epic include the boar talisman on *Beowulf's* helmet, prayers to Wyrð, and various monsters such as Grendel, his mother, and the dragon ("*Beowulf*," 2013).

From the beginning, it is easy to also see how Christian references play into *Beowulf*. Quotes like "A skilled poet telling with mastery of man's beginnings, how the Almighty had made the earth" are clear references to the scribe's belief in the existence of a

Creator ("Beowulf," 2013, line 90). Grendel, the chief villain of the story, is painted as a demon descended from Cain, the first human to commit murder by killing his brother. Beowulf and those worthy of glory are depicted as going to Heaven, while the villains of the story live in or come from hell ("Beowulf," 2013).

Additionally, the plotline of Beowulf parallels that of the reborn hero of the Bible. Beowulf is the mighty savior of Heorot, cleansing the hall even as Christ reputedly cleanses his follower's sins ("Beowulf," 2013). Beowulf destroys Grendel and his mother, and Christ casts out demons (Matthew 8:16 The Holy Bible). Beowulf's 12 warriors correlate with the 12 disciples of Christ, and Beowulf's final fight can be compared to the Bible's crucifixion ("Beowulf," 2013). Both heroes vanquish the foe that they pitted themselves against, but neither escapes unscathed. Michael Wood provides other examples as well. "By equating the pagan tree of life with Christ's cross, the Christian poet created something uniquely English, which could reconcile people to the new religion" (BBC).

As far as psychological motives are concerned, Beowulf represented the wish for the warrior tribes to gain immortality through their deeds and heirs after their death (BBC). Christ offered hope of eternal life to the pagan peoples. The relationship between a lord and his thane was the most important connection of the time, and the Christian scribes of Beowulf made use of that value system (BBC). Christ is painted as a good king who is willing to give himself up for his people and offers boundless treasures to those that serve him loyally – such traits that were prized in an Anglo-Saxon ruler (BBC).

Such a combination of traditionally opposed religions creates a dilemma in the minds of historians and literary experts. Nicholson believes that the poem was originally recited in a pagan oral format by the Anglo-Saxons, before being changed by a Christian scribe (Nicholson, 1966). Chosen for its parallels to Christ's battle, the new edition of Beowulf, complete with innocuous references to the "Creator" and the "Almighty Lord," was intended as a widespread means of evangelism through an older piece (Nicholson, 1966). It conveyed to the pagan Anglo-Saxons the depiction of Christ as a war hero who should be praised for his glory and might (BBC).

It is important to consider whether Beowulf reflected the beliefs of the church or diluted them by combining pagan ideologies with Christian ones. From letters, it can clearly be seen that poems like Beowulf were often scorned by clergy members as pagan representations of the devil that distorted the religion (BBC). If Beowulf represents a moment of weakness in an attempt to connect in a way that few modern religions would be able to, did it portray to the Anglo-Saxons that Christianity planned to conquer its enemies, or did it merely showcase Christ as a leader who would stand up for his people? Quotes such as "But the Lord was weaving a victory on His war-loom for the Weather-Geats" and "Almighty God rules over mankind" show that even Beowulf, the mighty hero, depends on Christ for his strength ("Beowulf," 2013, lines 696, 701). God is represented as a strong warrior who achieves victory but does not hunger after domination because he already has conquered the known world.

As can be seen in Beowulf, Christianity uses various means necessary to create a marketing platform upon which to evangelize to others. Organized religion in a modern context has leveraged technology to reach new audiences, but in the age of instant world-wide communication, atheists and other religious groups have populated the internet with the viewpoint that Christianity is a minority belief set and inferior to other religions (Sims, 2001). Taking away the cultural foundation that the religion is based in, Christianity struggles to fully leverage media platforms (Sims, 2001). In the face of this new conflict, various churches are reacting differently. Some, in an attempt to revolutionize their marketing platform to attract members of a godless society, have adopted viewpoints that are no longer consistent with the fundamental components of the Bible and have become churches in name only (Kerr, 2010). The problem remains to be determined how Christianity as a whole will

market its religion to a new, budding audience without giving up its core beliefs, a similar challenge faced with Beowulf's audience.

Beowulf is a masterpiece that has become a cornerstone of the English language. Through it, Christianity took a step into the modern world of marketing, despite the opposition the poem often faced within the church. Beowulf blends potentially divergent world views into one coherent and flowing piece, and its genius becomes clear when it is viewed in a historical context. Given the success of the church's proselytizing to England, one can commend the success of this marketing revolution. While there may not have been church alignment at the time to blending the message of Christianity with pagan traditions, it is hard to argue the positive impact the strategy had on the church's growth. Beowulf is a classic that survived despite opposition from the church and effectively sold the message of Christ to hundreds of pagan Anglo-Saxons.

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PERSPECTIVE



BAILEY KAWASAKI
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"Mama! Mama! I met a boy today!"

"Did you, sweetheart?"

"I did! I did! He was a very nice boy! He walked with me all around town and he gave me an apple!"

"An apple? Was it a very good apple?"

"It was! It was a very good apple and he was a very nice boy! He walked with me all the way to school!"

"That was very nice of him. Did you tell him thank you?"

"I did! I told him thank you and made him promise to be my best friend and walk with me every day!"

"That's very nice sweetheart."

+++

"Oh! Thank goodness you're back! The baby won't stop crying no matter what I do!"

"Must've missed his father's soothing voice."

"Yes, yes, I'm sure. Will you watch him while I finish dinner?"

"Of course, darling."

"How was your day?"

"A little disheartening, if I'm going to be honest with you, my dear."

"Why's that?"

"Well, on my way to work I came across a little boy."

"On his way to school?"

"No. He was dressed in clothes that barely fit him and had clearly been eaten away by something. He was very thin and desperately in need of some attention."

"How awful!"

"It was. I caught sight of him in an alleyway going through the garbage bins by that old café we used to go to."

"Through the garbage bins?"

"Yes. I couldn't stand to just leave him like that, so I approached him. I'm afraid I may have frightened the poor boy at first though. He tried to run away before I offered to help."

"Help?"

"Yes. I took him into the café and noticed they had just been delivered a basket of fresh fruit, so I bought him an apple."

"Well, that's very thoughtful dear, but what about the boy's condition? An apple isn't going to put a roof over his head. Didn't you offer to take him to a shelter?"

"I did, but he refused. He thanked me profusely for the apple and before I could grab hold of him, he ran down the street!"

"Tsk. Poor thing. No child deserves to be living like that."

"No. And he was a very nice boy. Very nice indeed."

+ + +

"What an absolutely awful day I've had!"

"What's happened today, my dear?"

"That no good troublemaker Jimmy was throwing bits of paper all over the classroom again and the headmaster still won't do a thing about him! Even though this makes the 42nd time I've made him stay after class this year alone!"

"That's nice, dear."

"And all of his classmates — my students — they all just laugh and laugh, giving him all the encouragement he needs! I can't even remember the last time he bothered to turn in one of his assignments!"

"Yes, dear."

"And because I had to stay after class watching after that ornery little pest, I missed the trolley!"

"How wonderful, dear."

"And because I missed the trolley, I had to walk home. And do you know what happened while I was walking home?"

"What was that, dear?"

"Some filthy little gutter rat not bothering to look where he was going nearly ran me over!"

"Is that so, dear?"

"Yes! And now, because he rubbed his filthy little rags that haven't been washed in who knows how long all over me, he's gone and ruined one of my favorite dresses! Ruined!"

"Very nice, dear."

+ + +

"You lost him again?"

"It's not our fault, sir! He ran straight into a bustling crowd! What were we supposed to do? Start shoving people to the ground and cause a riot?"

"IF THAT'S WHAT IT TAKES!"

"Sir, it's one orphan!"

"ONE ORPHAN WHO MADE A MOCKERY OF ME!"

"He made his choice! If he thinks he's better off out there than under your...generous care, why are we the ones who have to break our backs trying to set him straight?"

"IT'S THE PRINCIPLE! I CAN'T HAVE THESE KIDS THINKING THEY CAN JUST RUN AMUCK THROUGH THE STREETS! WHAT GOOD IS HAVING MY NAME PLASTERED ON THE SIDE OF THIS GODFORSAKEN BUILDING IF NO ONE RESPECTS IT?"

"But we —"

"We understand, sir."

"Good. It would be a shame if I had to fill those uniforms of yours with yet another pair of 'promising' young men. They do look very nice on you. Very nice indeed."

+ + +

Today was a good day. I met a very nice man while I was out looking for breakfast this morning. He told me a growing young boy like me needs a proper breakfast and brought me into the café I'd been visiting for a few weeks. It always smells so nice whenever I walk by. But the man didn't buy me one of freshly baked pastries that the owner's wife makes every morning.

Instead, he bought me an apple. I was grateful, nonetheless. It was better than what I'd been finding in the bins lately, which was next to nothing. It was a bright red apple. I'm sure it would have tasted delicious. He offered to take me to the shelter. I'm sure it seems like a nice place on the outside. He doesn't know that I shared my bed with mice and fought cockroaches for what little bits of food I could find in there. I know he meant well, but I ran away before he could catch me. I hope he doesn't think it was him I was running away from.

As I ran away from the very nice man, I saw a group of boys throwing rocks at a little girl. They were laughing and calling her rude names. I ran up to help the girl. The boys sneered and called me a freak. They shoved me aside as they went on their way. The little girl was crying. I gave her my apple and offered to walk with her. She seemed very happy. She asked me to be her friend and to walk with her every day. I would like that very much.

After I left the little girl, I went searching for something else to eat. I hope the nice man wouldn't have minded that I gave away his apple. I think he would have understood. I didn't get very far before the two men from the shelter found me. I tried to lose them, but they chased me up and down every alley I ran. There was a group of people walking down the street. They looked like they were on their way home from work. The crowd was very dense. I ran toward them and weaved in and out through people until I was

sure the men from the shelter wouldn't follow me. But when I looked back to see if they were there, I ran into a very tall woman. She was very upset. I tried to apologize, but I had to keep running. I hope she can forgive me one day.

It's a very good night too. The stars are very bright tonight. It's cold, but the alley by the café is much warmer than most of the others. I wonder why that is. I don't have much to cover up with, but that's ok. Soon enough the sun will come back out and bring the warmth back to my fingers and my toes. I'm starting to get very sleepy now. Maybe tomorrow I'll see the very nice man again. Maybe I can introduce him to the little girl. Maybe I'll come across the very tall woman again. Maybe I'll be able to apologize. I'm getting very sleepy now. I can still feel the cold, but it feels different somehow. It almost feels...nice. Yes. It feels very nice.



THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

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Gorgeous, pomp, and bright. I saw a woman — in paradise.
She, curated by the rib of man, was a masterpiece, every curve precise.
Say... a piece... Do you even think twice?
A woman is more than just a piece of man, more than a slice.
Adam always says that a man's love was more
than anyone would ever suffice.

I looked and sighed, once or thrice.
A woman is more than an object — or whatever many entice.
Standing, binded by the roots, I no longer contain myself,
Filled with dispute.
My destination was Eve — I decided to uproot.

En route.

My beliefs of love will forever be believed a vice
But give her the truth, the world would have to pay the price.
Just as dangerous as gathering bundles of Edelweiss.
Eden ran like a fool's paradise.

Spotted Eve, she looked over astute.
Another woman in the garden left her in wild pursuit.
To keep it concise — I gave her as she waltzed over,
A word of advice.

"A world is more than man's roll of dice."

+ + +

Her realization was one she could not refute.
I stood beside her, cloaked with light,
When her arms sealed around mine — skin tight.
"Your love is anyone's, if you're willing to fight."

Our arms danced, fears out of sight.
A sanctuary of light.
She leaned into a kiss — that turned into a bite.
The roots planted back, the Tree of Knowledge froze again amidst fright.

The world was mute.
Eve just ate the forbidden fruit.

A COMMUNITY-BASED ECONOMY



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Abstract

This paper will explore a few government policies and their impact on low-income families, as discussed by Robert B. Reich in his excerpt “The Rise of the Working Poor” in *From Inquiry To Academic Writing Fourth Edition*. This essay will elaborate on the capitalistic nature of American economic politics and its effects on the welfare system, minimum wage, and early education. The framework for a grandiose concept involving reformation of the welfare system will be introduced in the form of a government-sponsored reservation establishment, regulated by a community-based economic structure. Ideas about the economic plight of low-income families will be discussed and deduced. This paper will explain how the problems these impoverished individuals are experiencing are essentially an effect of the deprivation of basic human needs. Furthermore, the nature of these basic needs will be expanded upon in support of the belief that money alone will not solve the problem.

A Community-Based Economy

Welfare, minimum wage, and public education funding policies have increasingly swayed favor toward major corporations and upper-class private interests due to the unassailable economic power they yield in a country concerned with and characterized by its economic growth. As a result of this partiality, many less-affluent individuals are finding it harder to maintain the financial stability necessary to provide for themselves and their families. It would be appropriate to assume that any charitable efforts from a system more interested in its opulence would likely extend its philanthropic graces at the stipulation of self-serving criteria. For example, food assistance cycles money back into major brands and corporations; minimum wage allows CEOs to generate greater profits, and lack of funding for public education keeps a cyclical rendering of less-educated individuals unable to effectively contest their injustice. Consequently, they are likely to accept inadequate pay and conditions from entities that benefit from these individuals’ misfortune and, as a result, contribute further to the economic growth and political power of these establishments. Sadly, it is unlikely for policies to ever change in favor of these disadvantaged men and women. However, there is a way to revive these impoverished individuals’ independence and quality of life

while at the same time appealing to the profitable interest of the U.S. government and the contributive wealth of each community. A commoner's utopia, employing the concept of community-based economics, could replace the current welfare system. Reservations could be established in each major city. The government could exchange food stamps for community gardening and trade systems, encourage employment through self-assigned educated trades, and offer better conditioning toward education and opportunity for children through community-assisted nursery and childcare centers.

A Better System for Nutrition Assistance

In the article, "The Rise of the Working Poor," Reich notes a change of policy in 1996 for welfare assistance stipulating qualifying applicants to be employed or actively seek employment. Reich emphasized, "In effect, the new work requirements have merely reduced the number of people who are jobless, while increasing the number of poor people who have jobs" (Reich, 2018, p. 754). Consequently, these individuals must settle for any employment they can get, which ties them to a minimum wage job that requires long hours and inadequate pay. Considering the exhausting workload, endless hours, and low pay, the nutritional concern is generally disregarded. With long hours and often a large family to provide for, these men and women tend to reach for cheaper goods such as junk food, sodas, and products offered through food assistance programs by major corporations (Paarlberg et al., 2018). This creates a recurrent system that feeds into its principal interest in economic growth at the expense of these individuals' health and quality of life. One prospective solution would be to focus funds used for housing and food assistance toward fertile land in each major city that could be marked off as a reservation for those in need. Members of this reservation would pledge their allegiance to a community-based economic system and assume equal roles and duties within this community, including agricultural and husbandry labor. These labors would be overseen and advised by volunteer or government-funded farming specialists, and roles would be divided among all with reasonable consideration that would allow these men and women to afford the appropriate leisure to take on alternative trades or enjoy quality time with their family as well as enjoy a healthy diet. This could provide each member with bountiful and nutritional sustenance, and any excess produce could be sold to the surrounding communities without export fees. As a result, this local agricultural production would further enrich the reservation community as well as the communities that surround it.

Specialized Services for Trade

Reich believes, "Unlike industrial jobs, minimum-wage retail service jobs cannot be outsourced abroad. Nor ...likely to be replaced by automated machinery and computers..." (Reich, 2018, p. 752). However, lately the automation of such jobs has become undeniable. For example, Red Robin has already incorporated touch screen automation for ordering food, cashing out, and even entertaining. Artificial Intelligence technology is growing at such an exponential rate that fully automated services will soon replace most service workers because the profit gain potential would be irresistible to corporations looking to generate the most financial growth. The unfair minimum wage policy is lamentable, but it is most probable to conclude that the demand for appropriate pay will never have enough leverage to succeed in this technologically advanced age and will likely be replaced rather than compensated (Estlund, 2018). Instead of fighting a hopeless political battle for fair pay in jobs that offer little-to-no personal fulfillment, it would be much more reasonable to strive toward something more distinctively enriching. Struggling minimum wage workers could abandon the seeming slavery of service jobs and commit to a personally aspired trade in one of these welfare reservations. Within this reservation, various trades could be educated by expert volunteers, company-sponsored instructors, and government-funded specialists and interested individuals trained in a disciplined field that could be applied toward the betterment of the reservation community. With further experience,

one might have more opportunity to aspire toward greater heights of success outside the reservation. Community members would likely feel a sense of worth within their community because the service they offer would be through a discipline of their own aspired choosing. This would not only contribute to the harmony of the reservation community, but it would also provide a deeper sense of fulfillment to each participating member.

Community Childcare

Many individuals, like Reich, believe that the educational gap and lack of ambition or opportunity are directly related to the amount of funding that schools in poor communities receive versus those in more well-to-do areas. Contrarily, there are many examples that greatly attest to the fallacy in that presumption. Oprah Winfrey, for example, is entirely self-made, has a net worth of a couple billion dollars, and came from such severe depths of poverty that she did not even have the luxury of indoor plumbing (Cooper, 2007). Another notable example is the son of a uniform salesman, Richard Feynman, a highly intelligent individual who went on to win the Nobel Prize in physics for his work with quantum electrodynamics. Like Oprah, Richard did not come from a notably wealthy family. He was the son of Jewish immigrants who came to America in hopes of a better life. While these two very successful individuals did not have the luxury of wealth funneled toward their hopeful success, what they did have was the attentiveness, guidance, and the encouragement of a caring parent. Oprah's grandmother invested a great deal of time and energy into Oprah's development, teaching her to read at the early age of two and a half (Cooper, 2007). Richard's father, while not especially educated himself, went out of his way to purchase scholarly books to aid his son's interests and adamantly fostered and encouraged his aspirations (Feynman, 1985). Reich acknowledges briefly the importance of after-hour care, admitting, "Today, 43 percent of children born into poverty... remain in poverty... It begins with inadequate childcare and extends through primary and secondary schools..." (Reich, 2018, p. 755). Children need parental guidance, involvement, and encouragement. For the typical minimum wage worker, time and energy are in short supply. Reflecting upon the concept of the proposed commoner's utopia, childcare centers within the reservation could be available at any time and open to any child in need. These centers could have a primary government employee or volunteer specialist to oversee each shift with the accompaniment of community childcare shifts. This would ensure that children in need could always seek guidance for any inquiries, help with homework, or simply affirm that someone is there and cares.

A New Start

The commoner's utopia would offer a new start to those who have lost nearly everything in America's conquest for unconditional financial growth. For a healthy mind and body, human beings need access to a healthy diet. Community gardening and trade for local fresh goods would not only provide these individuals with a nourishing regimen, but it would also contribute to a greater appreciation and sense of independence, and it would stimulate the surrounding communities through its trade of abundance. For a lusty work ethic, men and women must find fulfillment in the work that they do. Offering specialized trade education would give these men and women a chance to develop a useful skill that could be beneficial to their community and allow them to feel valuable themselves. With this sense of worth, within one's self and one's community, these individuals will more likely enjoy a healthier outlook on life and have pride for the work that they do. To foster ambition and encourage intellectual growth, children need involved and supportive figures at home. Providing community child centers in which youth could seek counsel, guidance, or assistance would likely make a tremendous difference in the development of these young people's aspirations and opportunistic outlooks on their life's potential. While initially this reservation would be funded by the government, the main goal would be to strive toward self-sufficiency through this society's communal economic structure. The reservation would ideally develop into

a thriving center that might offer refuge and opportunity for those in need. It would also enrich the surrounding communities through the trade of locally made goods and excessive produce. Although money may have been the cause of such devastation upon these impoverished men and women, it will not be the solution. The only true solution will be to revive these deprived individuals' basic human needs of proper nourishment and replenish security, self-esteem, and last but most certainly not least, a sense of love and belonging.

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LOVE LETTERS EXCHANGED AT THE BEACH



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My head filled with the scent
of coconut lotion and windswept waves
as we passed the pad of paper back
and forth. Laying on the towels we'd
spread upon the sand that morning,
your want and need were exposed,
appearing as a flush upon your skin. I licked
away the salty sheen above my lips
and tasted the slow tears of fallen angels.

Everywhere there was an open space
upon the page, we sought one another;
I ate of your flesh, the tang of heady emotion;
you entered me, light pierced by blue ink.
When the night grew from the sun's setting
the pages were heavy from the weight
of our words, the sensual cursive writing
stretched sinuously across the margins.

I won't forget the flavor of your expression,
lost in the unfolding, heated prose, the promise
of tender kisses to the inside of my elbow. That night,
a thousand tiny mouths whispered in the dark,
they perforated me and left an imprint on my cells.

As I laid under the brilliant body of the sun that day
I found in you my own dark wilderness of longing,
where words were stripped nude and
rubbed swollen to bursting with syllables;
the tight raw flesh of conveyed conversation
a promise we left with one another.



MDD

DELANCEY TORRES

*Kilgore College
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rumpled bedsheets
socks on the floor,
still dirty
pillow creased
wake up but
not really

drink water? no
too far away
alarms go off
medicine
but it's in
the bathroom
too far away
might be noon
lunch time
can't be bothered
too far away

phone's buzzing
maybe it's
friends or
family
but it's unplugged
it'll die
soon enough

"something's wrong
with you"
yeah,
i know
i'm trying my best
but that
isn't good enough
sometimes

PAIRING METHOTREXATE AND OMEGA-3 IN TREATMENT OF RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS BY CLASSICAL CONDITIONING



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Research Question

Question: Can classical conditioning be applied to treatment of rheumatoid arthritis? The goal of this study would be to reduce the drugs used to mitigate the damage by training the immune system to decrease its inflammatory action, an action that would be accomplished by pairing methotrexate (a common treatment for rheumatoid arthritis) with a liquid form of omega-3 oil (a recommended supplement for managing rheumatoid arthritis) so that over time the body might associate the effects of the methotrexate with the sensation of the omega-3. If successful, this experiment would increase the quality of life for rheumatoid arthritis patients, as methotrexate is capable of causing liver damage, the risk of which increases as a result of taking methotrexate over a long period of time (Weinstein, 1977).

Proposed Research Method

In order to effectively add to the limited conversation about the connection between classical conditioning and autoimmune disorders as established under the practice of psychoneuroimmunology, this study would be best performed as an experiment. Very few studies have been carried out on humans, although the ones that have do no harm even when they are not successful for all subjects. Much of the data relied upon to conduct what studies have been performed consists of experiments on mice — and with one human subject in a successful case study conducted by Ader and Olness (1992) — but it has not been followed up by much research. A study that introduces classical conditioning into the process of treatment for rheumatoid arthritis would build upon the data already gathered while addressing an autoimmune disorder that has not been the focus of other research associated with psychoneuroimmunology.

Abstract

The process of treating a disease is usually organized into the realms of treating the body or treating the mind. The study of psychoneuroimmunology seeks to bridge that

gap by connecting both in order to treat disease, a connection that might be highly successful in treating certain conditions: autoimmune disorders, which result from the body's immune system seeing some function of the body as a threat and launching attack. Given that the trauma originates internally, as opposed to injury introduced by an outside agent such as a viral infection, the potential exists for the mind to influence the treatment process. While curing the disease might not be possible, maintaining a functioning state without allowing undue damage from long-term ingestion of medication could be.

Specifically, such an outcome could come about through one practice that develops physical reactions from calculated stimuli, and therefore intimately involves a connection between the body and the mind: the process of classical conditioning. A study could be conducted to apply the process of classical conditioning to a prevalent autoimmune disorder; a good candidate would be rheumatoid arthritis, a condition with no cure that is managed by the use of drugs. An experiment would pair methotrexate (a common treatment choice), with omega-3 (a recommended supplement) in order to establish a connection between the omega-3 and the reduction of damage brought about by methotrexate. In order to conduct a trustworthy study, a focus group and a control group should be created; the focus group should take both methotrexate and omega-3, while the control group should take methotrexate only. For the focus group, doses of each treatment must be taken simultaneously in order to establish the necessary connection. Expected results would be observed reduction of inflammation, although this is unlikely to be visible until after several months of treatment.

Variables

The independent variable in this study would be the combination of methotrexate with an omega-3 supplement administered to study subjects. The dependent variable would be the condition of the synovial fluid following at least a year of treatment. Factors to measure include coloring — the fluid should be colorless if normal and yellow if inflamed — and the white blood cell count, which in normal synovial fluid is approximately $2,000/m^3$ (cubic millimeters of fluid) and in inflamed fluid is up to $100,000/m^3$ ("Synovial Fluid," n.d.).

Operational definitions of terms:

Methotrexate: A toxic folic acid analogue that inhibits cellular respiration and is used as an immunosuppressive agent; employed to decrease inflammation caused by rheumatoid arthritis.

Omega-3: Polyunsaturated fatty acids that bolster the membranes present throughout the body and may enhance the effects of anti-inflammatory drugs given to rheumatoid arthritis patients.

Rheumatoid arthritis: A chronic autoimmune disease in which the body's immune system attacks the synovial fluid found in joints, causing internal inflammation that results in severe external swelling and pain.

Synovial fluid: Liquid found in joints that reduces friction between and cushions the bones.

Introduction

Regarding preliminary research, I consider the work of Dolhain, et al. (1998) summarizing a survey testing the application of methotrexate to the treatment of arthritis as pertinent to my discussion. It is because of the results gathered from surveys like this one that I have chosen methotrexate as the preferred treatment for rheumatoid arthritis in my experiment. In this experiment, the researchers took biopsies of synovial fluid from 11 rheumatoid arthritis patients before and after treatment with methotrexate and observed that all areas of the sickness changed for

the better as a result of the treatment with methotrexate. More specifically to this argument, however, a significant decrease was noted in the level of inflammation in the patients' synovial fluid. Based on the success of this experiment, I have selected methotrexate as a key factor because it appears effective and because its impact on synovial fluid can be clearly traced.

Secondly, through studies in psychoneuroimmunology — the physical connection between the mind and the immune system — Ader and Cohen (1982) opened the discussion on whether classical conditioning could mitigate the effects of autoimmune disorders. They performed their initial experiments on mice who had systemic lupus erythematosus, pairing an injection of a saccharin solution with a dose of cyclophosphamide, the former being essentially a placebo and the latter the actual treatment for the disease. In the end, they concluded that although more research would be necessary, the combination of saccharin and cyclophosphamide had allowed the saccharin to work as a conditioned stimulus, which prevented immunologic activity, and that the same process could be applied to other treatments. Their work inspired follow-up experiments, which ultimately benefited the treatment process of at least one human lupus patient; based on this, it would be reasonable to hypothesize that their findings could be implemented in an experiment targeting rheumatoid arthritis rather than lupus. An alternate disease would in all likelihood have to fit within the bounds of autoimmune disorders in order to benefit from classical conditioning; autoimmune diseases result from the body's genetic or adapted tendency to launch attack on some aspect of itself or some particular function, and classical conditioning can be used to suppress that immune activity. I would postulate that conditioning would not apply to many other medical treatments that are caused by other factors than the body itself; bacterial infections, for example, as caused by an outside agent, would not be likely to respond.

A decade following Ader and Cohen's research (1982), Ader and Olness (1992) conducted an experiment in which they applied previous findings to a case study using a human subject, a patient with lupus erythematosus. Where in Ader's former research (1982), injections of saccharin and cyclophosphamide were paired in order to heal mice, in this case the medical agent (cyclophosphamide) was paired with two sensory factors as conditioned stimuli: cod liver oil, which influences taste, and rose perfume, which influences smell. Gradually, the patient was able to consume doses of cod liver oil alone between doses of cod liver oil taken with cyclophosphamide. This cut the cyclophosphamide treatment in half for a year of treatment, reducing the negative effects of the drug while training the body to mimic its necessary ones. Most significantly, the patient ultimately improved following the work carried out by Ader and Olness. Yet this success has not prompted further study, something I would amend. An interesting factor of this study is the incorporation of sensory stimuli that were necessary to connect the drug with the oil for this patient. In my experiment, the form of the omega-3 oil must be liquid, which smells and tastes strongly, in order to enhance the sensory experience of taking the oil with methotrexate. This research establishes the importance of the state of the omega-3 oil I would use for a study.

Based on these findings, I would pursue an experiment that put into practice Ader and Olness's research (1992) and adopted the use of methotrexate as the primary treatment because of the contemporary need for a solution to autoimmune diseases. Rheumatoid arthritis has seen some forms of treatment, which is why it provides a good starting place, but even the methods that do have some effect are neither perfect nor complete. Yet any negative consequences that could result from carrying out a conditioning experiment would be slight; in a worst-case scenario, perhaps the omega-3 supplement simply might not take effect as a conditioned stimulus, but the patient's life would not be endangered by a failure. Therefore, it is an ideal place from which to begin research that could pave the way for future experiments, even as it might hold benefits for the population affected by rheumatoid arthritis. If the principles discovered by Ader and Cohen hold true across a variety of autoimmune disorders, the entire status of autoimmune disease in the medical field would have

reason to be re-evaluated as having a possibility for a cure — something that no autoimmune disorder has today. There has appeared to be no solution for a sickness in which the body attacks itself, but perhaps there is one; perhaps it arises in the mind, and given the opportunity, I would choose to put this principle into practice by way of an experiment that introduces conditioning into treatment of rheumatoid arthritis.

Hypotheses

Based on research from Dolhain, et al. (1998), I would expect the methotrexate to decrease inflammation found in rheumatoid arthritis patients' synovial fluid. Given this information, I would also expect reduction of inflammation to take place as the experiment is conducted. Once an opportunity has been provided for the stimuli to link, I would introduce a dose of omega-3 on its own, and from that treatment, I would expect to see reduction of inflammation taking place without ingestion of methotrexate, based on Ader and Cohen's work (1982) and on Ader and Olness's work (1992). Rheumatoid arthritis operates after a similar fashion to other autoimmune disorders, of which lupus erythematosus is one; the effects of methotrexate are accepted as effective (Weinstein, 1998); and the process of classical conditioning has been successfully applied to the treatment of animals (Ader & Cohen, 1982) and of a human subject (Ader & Olness, 1992). Looking at these studies, it appears likely that classical conditioning can influence an autoimmune disorder where few approaches are fully or safely effective.

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CACOPHONY & CAUSATUM



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Do the sounds surrounding us have an impact on our physical health? Many of us have become adept at blocking out background noise to such an extent that we do not realize it is even occurring. That does not change the fact that it is happening, that it is part of our body's environment, affecting us. In this thesis, I will explore the real interactions between our mind/body and sound. To remove the premise that sound is only experienced via the auditory nerves and gain a much larger comprehension of the perception of sound, this thesis will focus on how people are impacted by the vibrational qualities of sound. We will be delving into a brief study of the physiological experience of sound for someone profoundly deaf. Also, to make it an ecumenical experience, I will be examining a background noise that surrounds us all — birdsong. We will then move on to explore the ways we can perceive sound, and how those perceptions are translated into our personal reality, through the avenues of our emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual self. Once our grasp of the multidimensionality of sound is mapped out, we will investigate specific interplay between people and environmental noise. However, before we dig into specifics, we must begin with an understanding of what exactly is meant by "sound."

What is sound? Sound is actually movement, as it is the vibrations in the molecules of everything around us and within us — they can travel not only through air, but also through solid objects. These vibrations have varying wavelengths, which the brain interprets as pitch. Pitch is also known as frequency, or the number of wave cycles per second. Amplitude is the height of each wavelength; the higher the wave, the louder our auditory senses translate them as being (Ciccarelli, 2018). These waves are made of compressions (meaning the particles are being forced together) and rarefactions (which means extra space is being allowed around so that they then expand). Sound is a type of kinetic energy. A helpful explanation is found online at NDT Resource Center in a section entitled "Vibration." It states, "As the particles are moved from their position, they exert a force on the adjacent particles and pass the kinetic energy" resulting in the movement of sound (NDT, 2018). This is a vital understanding and must be firmly grasped before progressing to the next sections of this paper.

We tend to link the detection of these soundwaves with our auditory sense, i.e. the outer and inner ear, auditory nerves, and the auditory cortex. In actuality

these vibrations are perceived throughout our entire body. What does this mean when considering the impact that audio vibrations have on us physiologically and psychologically? The field of music therapy has gained much ground in understanding the ramifications of vibrational treatments. According to Music Therapy of the Ozarks, the applications range from lessening the symptoms of cerebral palsy to speech recovery (Music Therapy). Sounds have a real and measurable impact on our neurological processes, helping the brain to heal, sometimes even after severe damage. Gabrielle Giffords, a congresswoman, was shot in the head in a vicious attack in early 2011 and suffered aphasia (the inability to speak) due to the damage to the left hemisphere of her brain. Her physicians used music therapy to “rewire” a new pathway in her brain to access language. Commenting on this quasi miracle, Dr. Oliver Sacks acknowledged, “Nothing activates the brain so extremely as music” (Moisse et al., 2011). Beyond the neurological effects, are there other ways in which we are physiologically influenced by sound?

Musicians have a special relationship with sound, an intuition about it that goes beyond the “normal” senses. Their descriptions of interacting with sound are often unintentionally scientifically accurate. In a passionate tale of discovering a new form of music as a young man, 10-time Grammy Award-winning American jazz vocalist and conductor Bobby McFerrin recounts, “I felt different after seeing Miles Davis perform, I became a different person after, I felt molecularly changed — I’ve never experienced music like that, before or after” (World Science Festival, 2009). Joining his sentiment, fellow musician Björk, a singer, songwriter, producer, DJ, and winner of 116 awards for her music, wrote lyrics expressing a type of molecular change in her song “Headphones.”

“Genius to fall asleep
To your tape last night
(So warm)
Sounds go through the muscles
These abstract wordless movements
They start off cells that
Haven't been touched before
These cells are virgins
(Waking up slowly)
My headphones
They saved my life
Your tape
It lulled me to sleep
To sleep, to sleep
Nothing will be the same
(I'm fast asleep)
I like this resonance
It elevates me
I don't recognize myself
This is very interesting
My headphones
They saved my life
Your tape
It lulled me to sleep
To sleep, to sleep
I'm fast asleep now
(I'm fast asleep)
My headphones
They saved, saved my life
Your tape
It lulled me to sleep
To sleep, to sleep.”

Notice her references to cells being touched by the vibrations, setting off changes within her to the point of not being recognizable to herself, much as Bobby's explanation of molecular changes to the point of becoming a different person. Is this simply a case of artistic liberties being taken with a visceral experience? No. As you will recall from the introductory section of this paper when defining sound, cellular/molecular action and movement is precisely how sound works. In a moment, we will elaborate on just how accurate their descriptions truly are as we traverse research into molecular transformations initiated by soundwaves.

To further explore the captivating relationship musicians have with sound, we will turn to the premiere solo percussionist, Dame Evelyn Glennie. Despite being profoundly deaf from 12 years old, Evelyn has mastered over 1,000 percussion instruments and is a Grammy Award winner, in addition to many other awards. Serving as perhaps the best example in known history of the ability to "hear" without using the auditory pathway, Evelyn Glennie taught herself how to distinguish the subtle variations in soundwaves through somas aesthesia, or the sensory systems of the body including skin senses and proprioception and the internal organs. This is an ability we each possess, as strange as it may seem. Imagine what a different sensory experience life would be if we cultivated this ability. I strongly encourage everyone to watch a performance by Evelyn. It is an unforgettable experience and makes us aware of the prodigious flexibility of perception that is possible and lies dormant within the vast majority of us.

Now that we understand that sound is a type of energy that vibrates on a molecular level, we begin to understand its real power. We have discussed the ability to sense it with our entire being and have set aside the elementary notion of sound being inextricably tied to our ears. Now falls away the separation founded on the auditory sensations of hearing and deaf; based on these few facts we now realize that deafness is not a disability, for how could it be since sound is still perceived? Instead of attempting to explain through words what sound/music means as a deaf person, it makes more sense to experience it through music, such as through Sean Forbes' performance "I'm Deaf." Deafness is a culture with its own language, history, customs, and traditions like any other culture. With all this knowledge arming us, we are prepared to move forward into an exploration of how sound is available to all and how we can harness this power in beneficial practices. What an exciting field this is, with new findings and newly realized applications each year.

Rachel Dempsey noted in her thesis on ethnomusicology, "The general belief in this field (holistic healing) is that most physical illness or disease has origins in emotional and psychological issues, as body and mind are intricately interlinked. Sound healers believe that 'everything that happens to a child emotionally and mentally resonates through the body' leaving an imprint at a cellular level (Roden, 1999). The cells are thus distorted with unreleased negative experience, and this subconsciously influences behavior, manifesting as a physical 'block,' or causing illness or 'disease.' Cancer is cited as a classic example. Diseased cells have a different cellular structure to healthy ones and therefore vibrate at a different pitch. The negative experiences and feelings need to be released if the person is to be fully healthy" (2000). These are powerful statements. While it might seem easy to write this off as opinion, it is important to pause here and consider what empirical evidence has been gathered to support these statements.

An interesting research paper by Fereshteh Ahmadi entitled, "Hard and Heavy Music: Can It Make a Difference in the Young Cancer Patients' Life?" mentions that there have been a number of studies conducted that "have examined the effects of receptive interventions, such as music listening, music and imagery, or a combination of music therapy interventions on outcomes such as decreased pain and nausea, improved mood, increased family communication, and improved quality of life among cancer patients" (Ahmadi, 2009). It appears that the same sentiment is being expressed in both academic papers — both Dempsey and Ahmadi point out that sound heals us in a multidimensional manner. Their summations are based on the

extensive experiments and research of respected doctors in multiple fields of study, not mere whimsy. In fact, they are far from alone in their research into sound and its direct and measurable effects on our health, both beneficial and detrimental. In the research paper, "The effects of 528 Hz sound wave to reduce cell death in human astrocyte primary cell culture treated with ethanol," the findings are noteworthy: "Research in human gingival fibroblasts culture showed that the frequency of 261Hz could alter cell growth." They then turned their attention to the so-called "miracle" tone of 528 Hz and found that it "can cause significant and extraordinary changes in biological function. It has been documented that the frequency of 528 Hz activated DNA repair. At 528 Hz frequency the water molecules surround and support its six-sided hexagon structure" (Babayi & Riazi, 2017). A fascinating discovery, the applications of which are intriguing. Sadly, it is not all good news. Biochemists Shaolin Gu, Yongzlu Zhang, and Ying Wu discuss the harmful outcome of industrial and urban noise. Based on their research and that of several other teams, manmade noise causes diseases such as sleep disorders, tinnitus, cardiovascular disease, and an increased rate of stroke and myocardial infarction (Gu et al., 2016; Theakston, 2011; Sorensen et al. 2012). There are further implications of microorganisms being severely disrupted by industrial sounds, which ripples out, leading to adverse consequences for all lifeforms.

How does this compare with birdsong? Medical doctors are beginning to tap into that power for treatment of disease. Birdsong is currently being used to treat dementia, improve concentration, and lower stress and fatigue, in addition to giving an overall feeling of relaxation and peacefulness (Hass, 2013). From all accounts there is much room for further application to lessen or alleviate symptoms of other diseases, both psychological and physiological. As yet, the potential understanding of cellular reactions to birdsong is virtually unexplored; but, based on what we have learned from the interaction between music and cellular structure and from the limited number of studies thus far performed, it seems clear that this is a valuable resource for alternative healing.

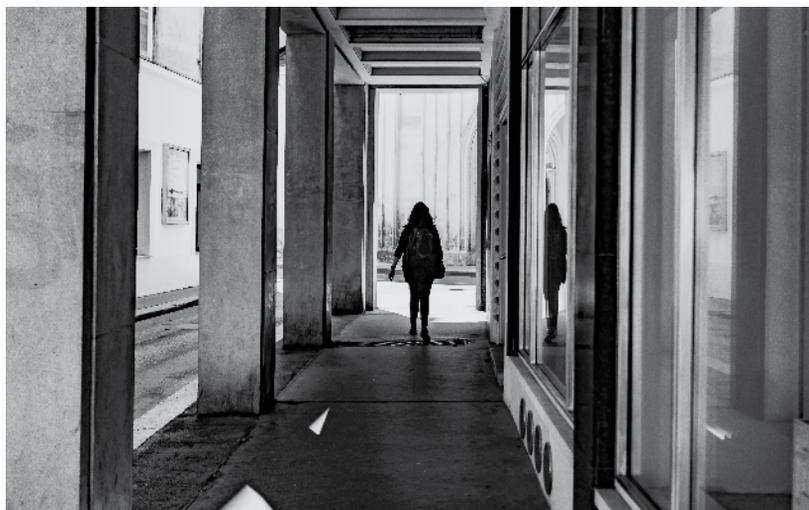
If this paper has accomplished what it set out to do at the beginning, to understand if birdsong has an impact on mind/body of someone who was born profoundly deaf, we have learned the answer is a resounding "yes." In learning from deaf performers and deaf musicians, we now are aware that sound is sensed throughout our nervous system rather than being limited to the narrow sensory experience of the auditory pathway. We have discovered the kinetic energy of sound, the vibrational power that can harm or heal, the sound waves that travel through solids, liquids, and gases. We have discussed the application of certain frequencies to treat disease at a molecular level, to lessen negative symptoms of illness, and to calm the nervous system. We have studied the research of biochemists and now know that industrial noises are harmful to our overall wellbeing, in stark contrast to the studies being done on birdsong, which is filled with potential uses for healing both mind and body. So, go on outside and take advantage of the gift of birdsong and all its inherent healing potential.

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US SHADOWS



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The rain was falling, yet I felt no single drop
As I retreated into the safety of the night
Within the quiet shadows, I could be alone
Only there was the balance just right

It was so strange, the roaring music
My mind drowning in a sea of sound
Many, many songs, but not one to my liking
I dare not embrace that loud

There were smiles, only few sincere
Every cheery face so much like a mask
Even the eyes lacked soul behind their lids
A peculiar absence beneath the casque

I admit that I was curious
I had stayed longer than my mind advised
To observe the masquerade
And see through the vibrant disguise

It was a web, a secret trap
They all laughed while in the coils
A prison woven by their own spiders
Like roses poisoned by the soil

I shall never revisit that cave of song
So much like a siren's singing lair
Once was quite enough for a shadow
Us shadows prefer fresher air

LGBTQ+ MOVEMENTS: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND HOW WE CAN DO BETTER



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Every LGBT rights movement has been a stepping-stone in the direction toward the liberation and freedom of LGBT people throughout the country. However, nothing in human history is perfect, especially in any fight for human rights. Where these LGBT rights movements made great strides toward attaining equal rights for their communities, we still have a long way to go as rights are being rolled back in the United States. Each of the previous movements had some serious oversteps, from over-assimilating to the detriment of members, to demanding the rest of society change to fit the movement's ideals. Every group policed its members' identities and excluded those who did not conform. The previous movements could have been more effective if they had employed strategies such as much greater inclusion to those who do not fit a limited definition of sexuality or gender identity or utilizing their justified anger to affect change in a more composed manner.

The Mattachine Society was arguably the first of the modern LGBTQ rights movements. Founded by Henry Hay in 1948, the Society would provide space for men to openly love one another. They did not have the language to describe sexuality that we do now because it hadn't yet developed. Because of this lack of descriptive language, Hay and his cohort utilized the language created by the medical community to describe their sexualities as a disorder. For example, the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual described homosexuality as a "sociopathic personality disorder." The Mattachine embraced the idea of homosexuality as a disorder and utilized that in their fight for equal rights. They went so far as to call their sexuality a handicap, comparing the purpose of the society to Alcoholics Anonymous (Katz, 1992). Comparing homosexuals to alcoholics perpetuated their stigma, because alcoholics have historically been looked down upon in the United States as people with a disease of the mind that must be treated. Thus, homosexuality was equated to mental disease that warranted treatment, and homosexual behavior was made taboo and eventually outlawed.

The members of the Mattachine Society were doing the best that they could at their era in human history. The 1950's was a very conservative era. LGBT people could easily lose their homes, jobs, children, and be subjected to violence if they were outed.

Anyone who did not fall into the “norm” of the time was pathologized. In describing the formulation of their tactics, Henry Hay told Jonathan Katz (1992), “We had to move with what the times would allow (p. 410).” They moved forward intending to keep their members anonymous in order to protect them, which was a necessary step in the late 1940’s because of the aforementioned dangers (Katz, 1992).

Utilizing medical language that is used to describe a person as disordered is going to stigmatize and pathologize them. At the same time, the Mattachine Society was trying to show that homosexuals were no different than anyone else. Several decades earlier in 1924, Henry Gerber attempted to found a gay rights organization called the Society for Human Rights after working with Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld in Germany. Hirschfeld is best known for his Institute of Sex Research, which was burned by Adolf Hitler during World War II. Gerber, inspired by Hirschfeld, created a problematic purpose statement for his group: “...to promote and protect the interests of people who by reasons of mental and physical abnormality are abused and hindered in the legal pursuit of happiness” (Janega, 2003) He attempted to get doctors and psychologists on board in order to progress his cause, but most refused because they didn’t want to be associated with Gerber’s cause, and didn’t feel that the promotion of equal rights should be on the basis of sexuality as a deficit (Janega, 2003).

Time showed, through the work of both Gerber’s group and the Mattachine Society, that these medical professionals were correct in believing that using sexuality as a disorder was not the most helpful path toward equal rights. The use of medical terminology and definitions to describe homosexuals created a pathologization and stigmatization that the LGBT community is still fighting today. This pathologization has given ammunition to anti-LGBT groups that LGBT people should be medically treated, not normalized. This has given rise to tactics such as conversion therapy and legislation that has greatly inhibited our rights to equal access to employment, housing, and healthcare. As a result, the Immigration and Naturalization Act, active from 1952 to 1990, classified LGBT people as outlaws based on their supposed affliction of “psychopathic personality.” It is near impossible to organize when the law is telling you that your very existence is forbidden. This act criminalized these psychopathic personalities, and this was widely interpreted to mean homosexuality (Minter). The first sodomy laws in the United States were repealed in 1962, and the Supreme Court finally ruled as recently as 2003 that sodomy laws were unconstitutional (Janega, 2003). We are just beginning to undo the damage done.

Around the same time that the Mattachine Society was finding its ground, Del Martin and her wife Phyllis Lyon were founding the Daughters of Bilitis. The Daughters of Bilitis were generally the lesbian counterpart to the Mattachine Society. They wrote *The Ladder*, which acted as their newsletter and served to connect lesbians that wouldn’t have connected otherwise wherever the newsletter reached. Where the Mattachine Society accepted and attempted to utilize medical terminology to their advantage, the Daughters of Bilitis struggled with how to deal with the medical and psychological communities. In this, they conducted original research that surveyed medical and psychological practitioners and found that an overwhelming number of these practitioners did not support criminalizing homosexual acts (Lyon, 2012). The results from this study were published in 1971, and the diagnosis of homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual two years later. This is an excellent method of equal rights activism. When research is conducted, data and facts are obtained to back an argument up. When we have this information, we have footing to create real, lasting change. Lawmakers and the public will generally listen to data derived from research, get on board, and create legislation and social change to reflect and support the research’s findings. This made a huge impact in the beginning of the depathologization of homosexuality in America.

The work of the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis set the stage for everything that was to come, and this is probably their most significant contribution to LGBT rights. While Henry Hay, Del Martin, and Phyllis Lyon were hard at work, they and everyone who

they were representing were still being actively hunted by law enforcement. In New York City, the mafia owned several gay bars. They required these bars to bribe them in order to keep the NYPD mostly at bay. On June 28, 1969, the patrons of the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street had enough and rose up against the NYPD's raid. The uprising lasted three days, until the police finally backed down. This event marked, for all intents and purposes, the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement (Jay & Young, 1992).

Three years prior to the Stonewall uprising, in 1966, the transgender patrons of the Compton Cafeteria rose in revolt. They were fed up with being raped, mutilated, and killed. They were sick of being hunted by the police. They were sick of being out of work, of being on the street, of losing their families. These mostly transgender women would gather at Glen Compton's Cafeteria in the middle of the night to gossip, enjoy one another's company, and let one another know that they were still alive (Stryker, 2005). Regardless of this consistent patronage, they were often turned over to the police, who would raid the establishment. One woman stated, "...it was like they were trying to humiliate us... we weren't human beings..." (Stryker, 2005, 25:55-26.20). In August of 1966, they fought back. A hot cup of coffee was thrown in a cop's face, dishes were shattered, and fires were started. Like Stonewall, this rebellion also led to some policy and law changes in San Francisco as a strong network of support services that addressed the social, mental, and medical needs of transgender people was established (Villarreal, 2011).

We would not be as close to equal rights as we are today without these rebellions. The Mattachine-era movements did everything they could for their time, though I'm left to wonder, what if they'd pushed just a little more? They looked down on anger and rioting, but in the end this is what worked. I was told recently that I should never apologize for my anger and found since then that when I allow my justified anger to drive my argument, I am heard and things change. This is what happened in 1969. They were fed up, they fought back, and things changed. A new acceptance for the LGBT community was born, and policies began to appear that protected and supported LGBT rights.

Inspired by the LGBT community's outright defiance in New York City, the Gay Liberation Front grew quickly. They still drew theory from psychiatric theory, most notably Freud's polymorphous infant theory. This theory stated that infants are born with a nondiscriminatory sexuality — that is, they are attracted to everyone regardless of gender — and are then socialized to become the "normal" heterosexual. Gay Lib extended this to adulthood and claimed that all humans were polymorphous in their very nature and insisted that all people needed to accept this as truth in order to be liberated of social norms (Altman, 1993). In tongue-in-cheek "Gay is Good," Martha Shelley laments at the difficulties that LGBT people face, and that she is fed up with the straights. While the Gay Lib Movement did so much to advance gay rights, I believe this argument is harmful to the cause. Where gay men, women, and gender variant people were asking that society embrace their identities as they are, it is hypocritical and exclusionary to ask anyone to change because of one's own beliefs. We can create deep and lasting social change without trying to change the identities of those around us.

The men in the Gay Liberation Movement also policed identities quite harshly. Despite polymorphous theory, homonormativity became front and center in practice. If a person was not a gay male or lesbian, they were not accepted as furthering the cause. Allen Young (1992) describes this phenomenon as the "gay man's quest for... exaggerated masculinity" (p. 11). The macho clone was widely accepted as the homosexual norm. This was a phenomenon that began in the late 1970s in San Francisco and described hypermasculine gay men as "masculine, rough, straight-acting, chiseled, and muscular" (Perez, 2001, p. 241). This is widely interpreted as the result of internalized homophobia, or the result of homophobia being so strong in our society that homosexuals themselves succumb to perpetuating its effects.

The Gay Liberation Front began to exclude people who did not conform to gender norms. The queens who fought so hard at Stonewall and after were treated horribly and started to become excluded from the GLB community. In one heartbreaking instance, Stonewall veteran Sylvia Rivera was booed onstage during a speech in 1971. It is simply the extension and infiltration of heterosexism into the homosexual community. Drag queens and transgender people did not fit society's gender norms, and so were shunned even by the community they fought so hard for.

In 1978, LGBT icon Harvey Milk was assassinated. Milk was the second openly gay elected official in the United States. He was loved deeply by his constituents and created an air of hope in LGBT people around the country. The LGBT community stood still while it waited for Milk's murderer to be convicted and put away for life. Eight days later, they revolted when Dan White was given only eight years for the double murder of Milk and San Francisco's mayor. People took to the streets in San Francisco and congregated at city hall. They broke windows and set police cars on fire. This anger was justified. Their city had failed them, and further victimized the LGBT residents. They'd had enough, and this violence again became a catalyst for legislative and social change (Epstein, 1986).

All of these movements did great things for LGBTQ individuals in the United States. The Mattachine Society fought for visibility of homosexual people in society. The Daughters of Bilitis utilized the powers of research to affect change. Gay Liberation fought with their anger for social and policy change. Many were constrained by the norms and safety issues of their time and acted how they felt was appropriate. There is no fault in this. There are areas where each movement could have done much better. The Mattachine could have been less forceful in requiring its members to normalize. The Gay Liberation Movement was much too forceful in requiring the whole of society to change to their ideals. Instead, we must embrace the diversity of not only those in our own communities, but the rest of the world. There is no "right way" to be gay, trans, or any other non-cisgender identity, and there is nothing wrong with being a cisgender heterosexual person. The problems come from our divides, and refusal to embrace our differences. When we embrace and celebrate one another, we can begin to make the changes the world needs.

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HERA'S REBELLION

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She hung from the sky, bracelets of gold tearing into her skin.
Golden ichor trailed down her arms and dripped from her feet.
The Pantheon watched in horror, her cries held as an example.
The Queen of the Gods, in excruciating pain, at her husband's hand.

This is how the story goes.

Hera rebels against Zeus, the cheating, ruthless, and powerful King.
All Olympians, but for one, use their abilities to conquer the God.
They work together, gathered by their Queen, to see justice,
And she is torn down and tortured by Zeus.

Only after she has cried for the world to hear,
For the Pantheon to agonize over,
Does her husband let her go, flaunting his dominance,
And reigning once again.

Written by men, recited by fathers, and rejoiced by sons,
This is what is known and remembered.
This is wrong.
This is not what happened.

This is how the story goes.

Beastly and cruel, Zeus ruled Olympus.
 Thunderbolts struck the sky, always demanding his way.
 Mortals below were plagued by his lust and anger,
 And women died ghastly deaths, humiliated by the God of the Sky.

Among his kind, the King of the Gods took what he could and dictated his pleasures.
 His wife was treated the worst, a victim to his whims from the beginning.
 He had tricked her into marriage, violating her being,
 And tearing away her innocence.

Now, an object of his fancy for the rest of her immortality,
 The Queen of the Gods grew angry.
 The Pantheon listened with quiet fascination as their Queen plotted,
 And drew in close.

Infuriated by Zeus's control and manipulation, they convened with Hera,
 And laid out their aspiration to overthrow their King.
 Time would pass, while Zeus lounged in comfort,
 Not suspecting a thing.
 For who would dare go against the King of the Gods, the God of Lightning and Thunder?

He feasted on nectar and ambrosia, devouring his meal with fervor,
 And gave away to the night, falling into a deep slumber.
 In Nyx's realm of nocturnal pleasures, Zeus lay, blood laced with poison.
 And Hera called the Pantheon to move; it was their time to strike.

Athena and Apollo moved with swiftness, bearing down on the King,
 And chained him to his bed with rawhide created to capture a God.
 Poseidon moved at Hera's side, snatching away his brother's power,
 And cast away his thunderbolts and lightning, his tools of anger and cruelty.

Bolstered with victory, Hera called a watch,
 "Keep view of the ones we do not know, and those who might work against us!"
 Thetis, the nymph, was caught not a day later, screeching for her forbidden lover,
 And cast to the sea by her God, while Hera smiled above.

The hundred-armed beast, Briareus, did fight, appearing a night after.
 Athena shielded Hephaestus, with his hammer lifted high,
 Artemis let her arrows fly, and Ares hollered a battle cry,
 And the Gods came together, working as one, to send the beast away.

When Zeus awoke, a flame on his tongue, and spitting tales of hate,
 Hera stood proud, surrounded by those he had wronged.
 "Unhand me, you witch!" he screamed with shock and anger.
 But Hera stood strong, unwavering and determined,
 She would not let this chance escape her.

She bent to his level, drew his eyes to her own, and smiled a cunning grin,
 "We'll keep you forever, confined to your pride, unless you compromise for a change."
 He roared in response, struggling against his restraints, but the Queen remained calm.
 The Pantheon watched in awe, unsure of what would happen.
 For what could the mere Goddess of Marriage, of Childbirth, Family, and Women do?

With only a beast to contend with, Hera turned away,
 And left Zeus to wrestle with himself.
 Days would pass, the Olympians finding a balance,
 And seeking leadership, Hera lighting their way.

Yet every night, the Queen of the Gods went to her husband and spoke,
 "Have you reached a conclusion? Are you ready to hear me?"
 And he growled in response every time, slashing at her with cruel words and names.
 The Queen would sigh and shake her head, turning away once again.

Time would pass and Zeus remained, watching the Gods live on,
 Without a thought cast to him, they prospered without his presence.
 Every attempt and every fight to bring the King of the Gods back
 Was shot down with fury and fire, the anger of all Olympians at call.

One night, too worn by her husband's arrogance, Hera went straight to slumber,
 And left Zeus all on his own.
 Torn by his wife's disregard, the King of the Gods felt forsaken,
 And for the first time in all his existence, wished to make a change.

When Hera awoke, she felt a shift and made her way towards Zeus.
 His eyes were wide and his brows furrowed with thought,
 And Hera knew what to do.
 She walked to the King, her husband, and offered him a smile.

He spoke before she could manage, his voice inquisitive and reserved,
 "Why do you do this, My Queen? Why now, after all I've done to you?"
 Hera shook her head, and bent to his level, hoping he'd understand,
 "I am the Goddess of Family. I am here to bring balance where you have created chaos."

His eyes, grey with storm clouds, lit at her words.
 He nodded solemnly and cleared his throat to speak,
 "What are the changes? What's to be done?"
 And Hera smiled lightly, her war finally won.

"I cannot control what you do, you have always done as you pleased."
 Her voice was noble and her words, unyielding.
 She could feel the Pantheon and knew they could hear her.
 "No further, will you have dominion over me. Never will you interfere in my affairs
 or joys, again."

The King chuckled then, calling fire to the Queen's eyes.
 "Is that what you want?" he laughed with pretension, hoping to hurt his wife.
 Hera cast aside his conceited words, and smiled meanly,
 "And you will no longer control or dictate the lives of the Olympians. They will be
 free of your influence."

Anger flared in Zeus's eyes, his laughter but a memory.
 "You mean to belittle me. To weaken my power!"
 Hera scoffed at her husband, thinking his mind so little.
 "The further you extend your hand, the further you earn their rancor."

"I am a King!" he shouted, storm clouds swirling in the air.
 Hera did not falter, and met her husband's glare with her own.
 "And a King without subjects, without allies, is no king at all."
 Her words echoed through Olympus, daring the God to remember her authority.

"You are meant to be wise, Zeus. That cannot be if you are the reason for every conflict."
 It took several moments before the storm faded away.
 The King sought the Queen's eyes, imploringly,
 "And you would still have me back? Why not keep me caged and powerless?"

Hera shook her head, conviction biting at her lips,
"We require balance. Not the repeated actions of the past."
The Queen saw the memory of Kronos in Zeus's eyes.
"Balance cannot be won out of fear or death."

It had taken so long, and Hera was revolted at the thought of her effort,
Being for naught, and failing at the hands of pride.
Yet, after being immersed within his own mind and hearing the words believed
by the Gods, by his Goddess,
Hera felt the change, shifting in the air: Zeus understood.

The bonds that held Zeus tight, slackened, slithering off his body,
And Hera stood, her body glowing bright as her true form shone.
Zeus did not move to stand, feeling the Pantheon watch with bated excitement.
He kneeled at his Queen's feet.

Heralded by the Goddess, a flash of gold and ash flew to her hands.
Lightning bolts sparked between her fingers, and thunder boomed at her palms.
The Goddess of Marriage remained resolute, poised with pride.
The eminence of her rebellious undertaking was beautiful, incandescent.

Hera's voice boomed, reaching the Underworld below as she spoke,
"Zeus, God of the Sky, of Lightning and Thunder. King of the Gods and Olympus."
Zeus began to glow, his true form burning like the sun.
"Do you vow to uphold the promises made on this day?"
In the hurricane of Hera's power, Zeus's voice still rang clearly. "I do."

CAN YOU SEE THE IRONY? A SPOKEN WORD ABOUT ISLAMOPHOBIA



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*Isn't it ironic
How we all long for equal rights?*

You see, I come from a religion of peace
Islam
سالم
To submit one's will entirely to God
But the media doing what it's best at
Has twisted it into something it's not

The media is why I never go out alone, I'm afraid someone is going to pull my hijab off
The media is why entitled strangers tell me to "Go back home, you foreigner!"
But I am home
Born and raised in Texas
But most times
It feels like I'm living on another planet

My own neighbor carries around a gun
Ready to accidentally pull the trigger
I can't walk into a room without being excluded because of my faith
Going through the airport security line was bad enough
Having to get an extra pat-down
Because your dad has a beard and your mom wears an abaya is even worse

And it's at times like this that I laugh at the notion of equal rights

I find it funny that you'll do anything to earn the right to wear what you want
Planning petitions
Setting up strikes
Taking to twitter
But when entire countries are banning my religious wear
The world is suddenly silent

All around the world, my people are being raped, tortured, and kidnapped
Over 11 million Muslims have been thrown into concentration camps
Their organs, harvested against their will
Families wondering if they'll ever see each other again
Mass murders and riots have become the norm
Our places of worship reduced to ashes

Thoughts and prayers
Can only do so much
Against the bigotry that runs amok
We need action, not ignorance
Humans are capable of change
So why haven't we learned from our mistakes?

*Because, in the end, it's our own actions
Obstructing us from our rights*

¹Arabic root word of the word "Islam"
Means "peace, to submit to God"

IT'LL BE OK LITTLE FELLOW



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A decrepit apartment building sits on a winding road, hidden in a cluster of barren trees. The wind howls through skeletal branches, a promise of imminent snow carried on its frigid back. Inside the apartment, flies are buzzing.

The winged pests have invaded the kitchen. They hover over an assortment of empty beer cans that litter the countertop. A healthy smattering of empty whiskey bottles mingle with the beer cans like glass icebergs jutting from an aluminum sea.

One of the flies ventures down the hall, past pictures of a once-happy family, past a small desk stacked with unpaid child support bills, and past an open closet where a row of nursing scrubs hang in dusty disregard, having been untouched for over a year.

Our free-spirited buzz-buddy flutters into the dimly lit living room where an old Western movie is playing on the television. A brooding, world-beaten man sits on the couch, dappled by the flickering light. Our fly moves closer and lands on the fellow's unshaven cheek.

Todd Clint takes a tentative sip from his glass of whiskey and shoos the fly away. He watches the lone gunfighter strutting down a desolate street on his TV screen.

"Always loved these old Westerns," he muses. "Beth loved watching them with me too." But now his daughter is gone, along with his ex-wife Natalie.

Loneliness creeps in.

For years, Todd had perfected his cowboy impersonation. Strong. Silent. He went to work and took care of his family. All the while, a restlessness had festered beneath his façade. There was a void in his heart that nothing could fill. Irritability set in. Raucous arguments with the wife ensued. He had turned to the bottle for relief and it took everything from him.

The bottle took his marriage. The bottle took his daughter. The bottle took him.

"Working in the hospice unit was the only thing that kept me going after that," he reminisces.

Yet his job had to go too, following a nervous breakdown that had sent him to the psych ward. He was supposed to see a new therapist in the morning but did not plan on going.

A gunshot reverberates from the television speakers as the cowboy onscreen confronts some bandits.

Boom!

Todd slithers off the couch and crosses the room, over to an end table by the window. Outside, snow is plummeting from a swollen sky.

Boom!

He turns over a picture of his daughter with trembling hands and reaches into the end table drawer...and pulls out a revolver.

He puts the gun to his head. Teeth chatter. Lips tremble. Tears well up in the corner of his sunken eyes, the floodgates threatening to burst.

His grip tightens on the trigger...

And... A whimpering sound floats through the window, filling the room. Todd lowers his gun and looks out. The mysterious sound persists. *"What is that?"*

He puts the gun away and heads outside to investigate. The front door to his apartment building groans as he opens it, giving way to an impenetrable fog of wintry madness.

Freezing in his pajama pants, Todd strains his ears to listen. Again, he hears that whimpering sound. He limps off the porch, bends down and peers into a snow-laden bush.

The sight of a beady-eyed baby squirrel shivering in the cold takes his breath away. Todd had been numb for a long time. Emotions stifled. Tender heart locked away and fortified. Yet as he gazes down upon this shivering, helpless little creature, something stirs in his soul. The sensation leaves him reeling.

He scoops up the baby squirrel and holds it to his chest. Those beady eyes stare up at him, frightened and desperate. Frosted whiskers twitch nervously. Todd can feel the squirrel's thin coat of fur against his shirt, matted and damp from the snow. He looks into those eyes and says, *"It's going to be ok, little fellow."*

Back inside the apartment, Todd gets to work, those old nursing instincts kicking into high gear. The first order of business is bath time. He stands over the bathtub and cradles the squirrel over the faucet. He applies a thin layer of baby shampoo to his hand and gently lathers then rinses the little guy, dries him off with a towel, and holds him up for inspection.

Todd smiles despite himself. *"I think we're going to call you Wayne,"* he tells the squirrel. Wayne blinks those beady eyes in approval, sniffs Todd's face, and then licks his unshaven cheek. Todd gently pulls on the back of Wayne's neck and takes note that the skin stays bunched up when he lets go. *"Gosh, you're really dehydrated!"*

By some miracle, Todd has a stash of Pedialyte in his fridge that he normally consumes in-between bouts of heavy drinking. He rummages through his old, dusty box of nursing stuff and finds an eyedropper. Slowly but surely, he holds Wayne in his arms and feeds

him Pedialyte through the eyedropper.

With Wayne washed and fed, Todd takes a couple of his old nursing scrubs from the closet and scrunches them up into a cozy bundle. He places the bundle next to his pillow and lays Wayne down inside it.

Todd doesn't think about the revolver for the rest of the night.

+ + +

In the morning, Todd feeds Wayne, then places him back in the bundle of scrubs for a nap. He makes a list of supplies and heads out the door. "I'll be back soon little guy."

Despite his best intentions, as if dragged there by some unseen force, Todd finds himself sitting in a cozy little office, face to face with his new therapist. Todd looks the man up and down, clean cut and baby faced.

"This guy can't be older than 30!" Todd thinks to himself. The young shrink takes his glasses off and wipes the lenses. "Having trouble with your glasses doctor?" Todd asks.

The shrink smiles. "Lenses are fogging up, and I'm no doctor," he replies. "Please, call me Robert."

Todd nods his head. He puts his hands together to keep them from shaking and taps his foot anxiously.

Robert continues.

"I understand that you were referred here from the hospital, after being treated for panic attacks...reports of severe depression, suicidal ideation. Is that right?"

Another head nod from Todd.

"Do you still want to hurt yourself?" Robert asks.

Todd shakes his head.

Robert raises a thin eyebrow, rubs his chin. "Why are you here Todd?"

Todd laughs bitterly.

"I really don't know," he says. "I guess I'm bored...haven't worked in a long time...kind of lonely..."

"Is your family supportive?" Robert asks.

Todd bites his lip, exasperated.

"My wife...I mean my ex-wife...we don't talk very much. She won't let me see my daughter...says I drink too much."

Robert takes note of Todd's trembling hands. "How much do you drink?" Robert asks.

Todd laughs again.

"Not nearly enough," he says. Todd swallows hard.

"I spent my whole life doing what I have to do, putting food on the table...I'm used to feeling useful. The last few years, I don't know...maybe I started drinking more. Just getting up in the morning became a chore... Been out of work for a while now and I pushed everyone away..."

Robert takes his glasses off again, rubs them with his shirt.

"Glasses still messing with you?" Todd asks.

Robert shakes his head.

"No, I think I can see you a lot better," he says.

"Todd, I can see that you are a natural caregiver, in your personal life and professionally... Sometimes, we put the needs of others before ourselves..."

Todd snickers. "And you know that, how? From a book you read?"

Robert coughs uncomfortably. "If you are willing, I know a very good rehab center I can send you too, very discreet...very..."

"Screw that!" Todd interrupts. "I...uh...I found a baby squirrel in my front yard last night. I can't leave him alone for too long."

Robert frowns. "You think it's safe to keep a wild animal in..."

"He's not wild!" Todd interrupts yet again. "He's a helpless, adorable little thing and if I don't help him...no one will!"

Robert shakes his head. "But who's going to help you, Todd?"

Todd stammers. A tear creases his unshaven cheek. He can feel a wellspring of emotion surging inside him, all manner of things that he doesn't know how to articulate. He gets up and rushes out the door.

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For the next several weeks, Todd makes it his singular mission to care for Wayne. He tracks down an exotic pet expert online and starts an ongoing dialogue via email. The pet expert provides him with very useful information. Todd also purchases a sugar glider cage from some chap on eBay and converts it into Wayne's very own sanctuary, complete with a watering dish and a cozy banana hammock to sleep in.

The weeks progress into months, and Wayne's condition improves considerably. Yet as Wayne grows healthier, Todd's physical and mental state deteriorates. He finds himself obsessed with Wayne, constantly fretting over every little thing. Sleep becomes harder to come by. He begins drinking even more. Thoughts of the revolver come and go, but he blocks them out.

"If I go, Wayne will die!"

Todd tells himself this over and over like a mantra.

Wayne had become Todd's lifeline, and vice versa. Yet there was a dangerous imbalance to this equation. The tipping point was steadily approaching.

One cloudless, quiet night, Todd lays Wayne down in his cage and plops down onto the

couch to watch some TV. Time flips, space flops, and everything blurs together the way it tends to when you chug a liter of whiskey and chase it with countless beers.

Suddenly, Todd's eyes are flung wide open. He stands abruptly, woozy and unsteady on his feet. The living room is filled with thick, black smoke that stings his eyes and snatches the breath from his lungs. He smells the fire burning before he sees the flames coming from the kitchen, crawling up the walls and into the living room.

Todd makes a mad dash for Wayne's cage, which is enveloped in putrid smoke. Todd fumbles with the latch, finally flings the cage door open, and clutches Wayne to his chest. He can't tell if the little guy is breathing or not, but there is no time to think. Todd runs to the door, smoke blinding and choking him, flames licking at his heels. He grabs the doorknob and recoils in agony. The flesh of his hand is seared and bubbling. Gritting his teeth against the excruciating pain, Todd reaches again and pulls the door open.

He tumbles into the hallway, Wayne still in his arms and a cloud of smoke billowing out behind them. Before Todd has a chance to get off the floor, he is picked up by firefighters who have already arrived. They guide him down the steps and out into the night air.

The moon hangs low in a cloudless sky. Stars burn with a brilliance to rival the fire raging inside the apartment. Flashing lights from the firetrucks and ambulances play across Todd's mortified features.

He looks down at Wayne and nudges the little guy.

"Hey buddy. Wake up! It's going to be ok..."

No response.

A hopelessness like he has never felt grips Todd's heart.

"Please buddy! Please wake up!"

Nothing.

Todd explodes into chest-rattling sobs.

And then... a whimper, like the one Todd had heard on the night he had found Wayne.

The little fellow opens his beady eyes.

Todd sighs in relief.

Yet his relief is short-lived, as a group of police officers and firefighters converge on him.

"Sir, you need to give us that wild squirrel," a police officer says. "Animal control is on its way."

Todd recoils, and then rears up like a mother bear protecting her cub. "Try to take him pal! I'll clock you into next week!"

The situation begins turning for the worst, when a familiar voice breaks through the ruckus.

"Todd! What are you doing!"

He turns to see his ex-wife Natalie walking towards him. She grabs him by the arm and leads him away from the officers.

"What are you doing here?" Todd asks her.

"One of your neighbors called me," she says.

"Thankfully everybody made it out okay...but there's a lot of damage. What happened Todd?"

Todd fumbles over his words, frantic.

"I don't know... I was boiling some sausages...must have drifted off."

She sighs. "You can't keep doing this."

A tear streaks his face. He looks up at the clear night sky, and suddenly, the turmoil in his head becomes crystal clear as well.

"I need help," he says. "I don't know what I'm doing...and I'm going to keep hurting people otherwise."

Natalie nods slowly. A glimmer of hope flashes in her eyes, but she dampens it quickly. Cautious. Protective. She has heard this song and dance too many times.

She notices the squirrel in Todd's arms.

"What are you doing with a wild animal... Might have rabies!" She exclaims.

Todd stammers.

"His name is Wayne! Tired of people calling him wild... He sleeps in a freakin' banana hammock!"

He swallows hard.

"My therapist can get me into a treatment center...but I need you to watch Wayne while I'm gone."

Natalie stands there, beautiful and severe in the moonlight. Suddenly, Todd remembers why he had married her in the first place.

"If you are serious about this...I'll support you..." she says. "But Todd, I won't put myself through your crap again...I won't put Beth through it... But if you are serious..."

A silence passes between them, filled with reverberations of their complicated relationship. Tender. Bittersweet. Love unspoken.

"I'm serious," Todd says.

She smiles. "Good. But first you need to get your hand looked at."

+ + +

A cozy apartment building sits on a narrow road, the front yard flanked by lush flower beds. The gentle breeze caresses the vibrant flowers and rustles through the neatly cut grass, the promise of new beginnings sailing on hopeful airwaves. Inside the apartment, a squirrel is chittering.

Wayne lounges in his cage, healthy and plump, with a full coat of fur. He bristles with excitement as Todd opens the cage. There is a glow to Todd's skin and a sparkle in his eyes.

"Wayne!" Todd says. "I want you to meet my daughter Beth!"

Wayne scurries from the cage, up Beth's leg and onto her shoulder. The little girl giggles as Wayne sniffs her hair.

"See?" Todd says to Beth. "He likes you."

Later, Todd and Beth snuggle on the couch and watch an old Western.

"Did you really save Wayne's life?" Beth asks Todd.

Todd smiles.

"Actually, sweetheart... He saved me."

A lone gunslinger walks off into the sunset on the television screen. Wayne scurries across the mantle above the TV. The little fellow looks down contentedly upon father and daughter.

In loving memory of T.J. the Squirrel



LISTEN

LISA GISSELQUIST
*Lord Fairfax Community College
Virginia*

And then Lizzie walked in on Henry and Juliette, and Lizzie shrieked at them so loud that you could hear her from across the hall, because she was expecting to go on a date with him that night and now she found him in bed with her sister, and so she screamed and George came running into the room and nearly tripped over the cat, who was lying on the floor, and then the cat jumped on the bed and scratched Juliette and thus she screeched and fell off the bed while Henry was trying to explain to Lizzie, who was NOT having any of it, and she was soooooo mad at Henry that she took their wedding vase and threw it at his head where it shattered against the wall, causing the cat to race through the room and tear up the antique carpeting that Lizzie's mom had brought from Germany 30 years ago and the cat destroyed it *Mom, come quick, Eric is in trouble and needs your help right this moment* And then Lizzie's mom came into the room and you should have seen the look on her face; she was livid and started chasing the cat around the room while Henry was on his knees trying to tell Lizzie that he wasn't doing what she saw him doing only moments earlier and then George saw Lizzie about to throw another vase, this time one that they had borrowed from the theater, and thus tried to step in and grab it before she threw it but instead got beamed in the face and fell over onto the floor right on top of Juliette who was still crying over being scratched by the cat and she was nearly squashed by him and so she let out a cry of fury and began bashing him over the head with one of the pillows from the bed, which wouldn't have done any good even if he was conscious, while Lizzie's mom chased the cat over and around them until



Henry started screaming at them to stop interrupting his apology, of which Lizzie was still ignoring; in fact, she had just focused back on Juliette, the person that she blamed for all of the problems, and Lizzie jumped her and started attacking her with a still unconscious George lying on the floor between them and Juliette started yelling that if Lizzie had been a good wife; *not now, Allie, mommy is talking*; then Henry wouldn't have started to look elsewhere for love for they are in love and they were planning to run away and live together for the rest of their lives, the news of which infuriated Lizzie and she started screaming that she was going to kill Juliette, which brings in George's wife from next door, who, when she saw George lying on the floor unconscious and Juliette and Lizzie fighting on top of him, screamed out that they have murdered George and jumped into the fray right around the time that the landlord came up the stairs to investigate the noise complaints that he had been getting from the other tenants; when he saw the chaos of people fighting and screaming and bleeding and attempting to murder each other, he pulled out his phone and called 911 and asked for a SWAT team to be sent in and warned that some of the people might need to be placed in a mental asylum because there was no way that the people involved in this mess were mentally stable and Lizzie was still screaming during this phone call that she was going to kill Juliette and she had found a piece of one of the vases that she broke and was trying to smash the sharp edges into Juliette in any way possible and Henry was trying not to fall over George while the cat tried to hide, *Mom, Don't you care that Eric could die any second now?* Don't interrupt your mom while she is talking to her friends about something important, wait, what do you mean that Eric is going to die?

AN UNASSUMING SUGGESTION FOR THE AMICABLE AND MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RESOLUTION OF THE CONUNDRUM ON THE SOUTHERN BORDER OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



BREHAN BRADY
Community College of Rhode Island
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For many years now the question of how to better secure the shared border between the great nation of Mexico and its no-less-magnificent northern neighbor has consumed our national discourse. Numerous plans have been proposed, ranging from maintaining the border as it currently exists to various schemes of questionable long-term practicality that would mitigate the apparent tidal wave of humanity that crosses the national frontier on a daily basis. All of these varied suggestions, while genuinely well-intentioned, lack both imagination in execution and any form of perspective on what is causing these disposed and deprived hordes to leave their ancestral homelands and trek northward in the first place. Impeccable men of learning and letters have determined the origins of this unnatural phenomenon to be unworthy of discernment, and thus we are compelled to seek only a means to deal with the immediate consequence of past policy. I have thought long and hard on this current state of affairs, and I have struck upon an idea that would create a permanent solution to the security question while also providing for the future economic health of the border region, both north and south. This solution, simply put, is the construction of a canyon of previously unimagined proportions that would stretch along the entire 1,954-mile international border, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean.

Before I extrapolate upon the innumerable benefits of my own suggestion, I would like to first speak on the numerous practical and historical shortfalls of the most popular solution currently being discussed in the hallowed halls of our nation's capital, namely, a wall. Walls present a short-term solution with little-to-no long-term benefits. They have a very limited practical impact on preventing movement from one side to the other since they can be very readily scaled or, as those with any mining experience can attest to, very easily circumvented by the use of a tunnel. Both of these potentialities bring the long-term viability and effectiveness of such a structure into question. A very dear and knowledgeable friend of mine from the great nation of England has informed me that on a daily basis thousands of unruly Scots cross unchecked into his country

with ease despite the existence of a wall that was so carefully constructed by a man of vision and status named Hadrian. This example proves my point that walls are of very limited effect when employed to impede the movement of persons from one nation into another. Another shortcoming of walls is that they can rapidly become eyesores through the inevitable graffiti that will no doubt cover both of their surfaces. Nothing so detracts from the austere beauty of virgin grey concrete as the application of splashes of vibrant color, more so when they contain slogans calling for the removal of the structure they adorn. All one has to do is ask a resident of Berlin who lived there during the time of their great wall to understand the effects that such unsupervised artistry can have. That wall was so thoroughly defaced that it had to be torn down and the two halves of Germany reunited just to remove such an unsightly defacement of government property.

In thinking about my nation's current crisis of humanity, and the seemingly endless influx of persons crossing into said nation via the southern border, I struck upon a novel and creative solution that would stimulate the economies of both countries involved and bring an end to the crisis. This solution would be the creation of a canyon, and no ordinary canyon at that. This is not a ditch, a furrow, a crevasse, or a ravine, but rather the creation of a geological structure of a scale and scope that the world has never seen. It would dwarf the Grand Canyon, making that wonder of time and nature seem Lilliputian in scale when compared to that which I am so modestly proposing. To quote a prominent leader and guardian of American Democracy, it would be "Yuge." Its scale would render any unauthorized attempt to cross it null, a fact that is supported by man's inability to easily cross the Grand Canyon without the aid of modern flight machines. Whereas the Grand Canyon is only a mere mile deep at its greatest depth, I maintain that the manifest destiny of American exceptionalism compels us to exceed that by a factor of at least two. As Americans we are not bound by the same laws that restrict Mother Nature, whether they be temporal or moral, and as such we can continue to act without any regard for the consequences that the impact of such an endeavor would have on the environment. The urgent need to solve the riddle at the border, and also create new revenue streams for the mega-corporations that would doubtlessly receive the contracts for the construction of the canyon, outweigh any other consideration.

It is of the utmost importance to look deeper at the economic and financial benefits that the construction of such a canyon would bring for the United States. While I do acknowledge that it would require an initial outlay of funds that is difficult to calculate without the aid of the computational resources of an Ivy League mathematics department, this debt could easily be passed on to the unborn generations of taxpayers who would be the ultimate beneficiaries of a secure border. Again, using the Grand Canyon as a basis for my logic, the potential revenue from tourism could help to defray the cost of construction. Imagine tourists from the furthest reaches of the globe traveling to the economically depressed towns of southern Arizona to behold the ultimate expression of national sovereignty. They would line the northern edge and gaze in wonder across the depthless void at the huddled masses clustered on the southern edge, vainly yearning to be free. The financial windfall from the sale of t-shirts and refrigerator magnets alone would be of immeasurable benefit to those now-forgotten outposts on the American frontier. The manufacture of these tokens of tourism could provide a form of gainful employment for those who find their way north now barred by the previously mentioned canyon, and thereby give them some way to contribute to the economy of the nation that they find themselves marooned in.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I wish it to be known to all who take this suggestion into consideration that I stand to gain no benefit, either in reputation or coin, by proffering it. As a lifelong New Englander, I have very little personal interest in what transpires on the southern reaches of this country. The threat of unimpeded masses of immigrants flooding my corner of America is held in check by the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean. I am truly grateful for this, as I would not want to have to face throngs of Portuguese or Frenchmen fleeing their stable and prosperous democracies searching for a better

life for themselves and their families on my streets. I am doubly grateful that the government of my country has wisely invested vast fortunes of money and resources in ensuring the stability of Europe as a whole, and it is unfortunate that the nations in which the current migrant crisis originates do not warrant the same level of foreign interest and support. Since I do not possess all of the facts, I can only assume that these central and southern American countries have only themselves to blame for the creation of conditions that compel thousands of their citizens to flee north in search of a better life, and that the United States is free from all responsibility in the matter.

If we as a nation have made the determination, through the election and appointment of learned men and women to the highest positions of government, that we no longer adhere to the principles that welcomed generation after generation of immigrants into the warm embrace of America, then we have no other recourse than to follow my suggestion. If we, after deep and reflective deliberation, have arrived at the conclusion, despite living in the 147th most populated country on the planet, that there simply is no longer any room in the fabric of our nation for one more thread, then we are compelled by sacred obligation to act in drastic fashion to seal our borders. We must, therefore, aid Lady Liberty in extinguishing the flame that lights the lamp held aloft in her hand, the one that has served as a beacon of hope for all those searching for relief from oppression and subjugation, and throw our collective might behind the task of barring shut the golden door. My final suggestion is not that we look for ways to reform the system that has aided in creating the deplorable conditions that force a people to flee hearth and home in search of a better life, but rather that we pick up the tools of excavation and isolation, spit on our hands, and get to digging.

THE COST OF DISNEY'S COMMODIFIED MAGIC



KYLE SIMPSON

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It easily can be argued that many children in the United States are conditioned to believe in magic. However, it is not just any magic; it is Disney magic. I was one of those children who believed. Born in Orlando, Florida, in 1990, my entire childhood and adolescence was considered prime real estate for Disney's marketing. The United States had just "defeated" the evils of Communism — a "victory" Disney included itself in — and a bright, optimistic era of unchecked neoliberalism followed suit — an era that Disney positioned itself as a cornerstone of. The narrative of the perfection and victory of neoliberal capitalism was not true, but the optimism of the 1990s certainly was to many of us who spent our childhoods in the decade. Despite being born in the seat of the Magic Kingdom, I had never been to the park.

When I was 2 years old, my father's jewelry business went under because his best friend and business partner spent all the money on drugs. So, my father had a midlife crisis, filed for bankruptcy, and moved us to a literal shack in a village in Alaska. He realized that was a terrible decision after six weeks, and with no money and nowhere else to go, my mother's parents took us into their home in Jackson, Mississippi. As I grew up, I heard my family's stories about Disney World and how much fun they had together; I could not help but feel excluded. I was the only one of my siblings who was born in Orlando, and the only one to not have been to Disney World.

At the age of 5, my chance to amend this perceived injustice presented itself. For the first time since we had fled Florida, we were going to visit my father's parents in Orlando in the summer — I was beyond stoked. After having spent preschool and kindergarten telling people that I was from Orlando, I would finally be there and know what it was like (it is a gross, overcrowded mess of urban and suburban sprawl). I was going to meet my half-brother and see the beach for the first time in my life. It was going to be a trip of many firsts, and I was excited for all of them; but most importantly, I was going to Disney. This had not been confirmed, but I just knew that it was true; Disney's magic is one of optimistic belief, and I *believed*, so it would be true. How could it not?

The car ride from Brandon, Mississippi, to Orlando was a blur, the deep queasiness of motion sickness and the inability of my brain to understand time and distance made it

seem like an awful eternity. That eternity was really something like 13 hours, and it did end. I found myself in Orlando, meeting my grandparents for the first time that I could remember; it was not a particularly great experience. They were cold, miserly people, the type that literally looked down their noses at other people; they were disdainful of my mother and they had conspicuous favorites among the five of us grandkids — I did not occupy one of those spaces. My time spent in their home was stressful and made me feel the dull pangs of homesickness.

The trip was not entirely awful, however. I was able to meet my half-brother, Rick, which is honestly one of my happiest memories. I had only seen him in a couple of photos and heard from him in equally spare letters. I thought about him often; he was my family, my brother. I hated not knowing him. I met him at his adoptive family's house. We played Super Nintendo and he answered my endless questions about his life. He asked if I was going to Disney World, to which I emphatically replied, "Yes!" He took me to Daytona Beach, and we spent the afternoon together; it was a welcome respite from my grandparents' house.

On our second-to-last day in Orlando, it was finally the day — we were going to Disney. I was going to meet Mickey Mouse; I was going to feel the programmed elation of Disney's commodified magic. I could barely contain myself on the car ride there. As we parked and got settled for the long day, I was struck by the lack of Disney imagery; Mickey and the others were absent. Instead, I was in a cold, metallic, hyper-stylized space. I asked my mother where Mickey was, and she looked at me with an expression that I knew meant bad news. "Kyle, Mickey Mouse isn't here. We're in EPCOT; it's a different park." My family had told me that we were going to EPCOT, but I did not comprehend what that meant until this interaction. I cried and asked why we could not go to actual Disney; she explained that we could not afford admission to the Magic Kingdom (in fact, we would not have even been at EPCOT had it not been for my grandparents). That explanation was so confusing to me; I had never needed to consider money or economic class prior in my life. Now I found myself devastated, confused, and embarrassed. My father scolded me for emoting in public, and I was forced to try and compartmentalize the experience.

I did my best to find joy in EPCOT, but I never truly did. I felt obligated to because my grandparents were with us and my father had chastised me for being rude by communicating my disappointment. There were no fun rides, no Disney characters; it felt like a punishment being there at all. I wanted to leave. We rode one "ride": a room that jolted around as we went through the human body on a screen. Two people vomited during it; nearly everyone on it complained of nausea during and after the experience. There were some cool exhibits on virtual reality that I was interested in, but they were not included in the cost of admission. Once again, I was hit by the Disney paywall, punished for my family's lack of funds; it was a shame that stung, and one that I did not forget.

I was not capable of being fully aware of the significance of my misadventure at EPCOT at the time it occurred. However, I was undeniably affected by the realization that the word "poor" that I had heard prior was in fact a descriptor for me and my family. It was a harsh lesson, one that made me realize that the magic of Disney was only for those with the means to purchase it. Innocence and imagination had a cost — one that we could not afford. My sense of self-worth was altered. I was much more prone to feelings of shame after the EPCOT experience. Being made aware of socioeconomic status — and its very real consequences — at such a young age absolutely informed the person that I am today. I am passionate about the sociological and psychological forces at work in economic systems and their effects not only on demographics but also on individuals. I lost my sense of magic a long time ago, but I gained awareness of forces greater than myself. I now devote my time to challenging the hyper-commodified neoliberal economics in which exploitative companies like Disney thrive in. I will never stop questioning the cost.

THE END



KATRINA HELLMANN
*Paris Junior College
Texas*

The date is 4.000.018. It is the end. Farewell.

We've all just been told that we have one minute left to live. We're scared...yes. But we're used to it by now. After all, ever since we were born, we knew when we'd die. That day is today. That minute is now.

I pick up my journal. Perhaps someone will find it long after I'm gone. I thumb through the pages, losing myself in memory.

+ + +

The date is 1.000.016. It is late afternoon.

I was born alone.

I know three things.

I am number 8769, and I am an artificial machine, created only to simulate and serve the human race.

I will serve for two years before I will die and be replaced.

I am not to speak to anyone, except to explain exactly what I am. I am made to take orders.

+ + +

The date is 4.024.016. I see a mirror for the first time today.

I look human.

I have thick, short, curly hair and it is a dark blond. The skin on my face is pale, a stark contrast to my bright blue eyes. My arms are silver from my elbows down to my wrists, if only so the humans can tell that I'm not one of them. They would never see us, of

course. They live separate from the robots like me. A tall fence separates us from each other. We are not to make contact. But the precaution is there nonetheless.

+ + +

The date is 5.021.016. Perhaps I was wrong.

Someone speaks to me today...one of the humans. He's tall enough to lean over the fence, and he has dark hair that hangs over one of his eyes. He asks me my name.

I point at my arms. I tell him I am number 8769, and that I exist only to serve him and those of his race. I turn back to my work.

He just smiles and shakes his head. He asks me for my name again, and I don't understand.

I repeat that I am number 8769.

He shakes his head, and I tilt my head in confusion. He smiles at me and says that I've got to be more than a number...that I need a name.

I break the rules. I say that names are reserved for those who are real. Not machines like me.

He answers that I look the same as all the other humans, and I can talk too. He asks me what makes it different.

I tell him that I'm different inside than any of the other humans. I say I'm not real.

He smiles, and his words still ring in my head. "All humans are different inside."

I'm not fully sure what he means, but I nod anyway. He smiles and names me Emilia.

Emilia.

It's a strange name...but I'm a strange creature.

It fits.

+ + +

The date is 8.003.016. I don't see him again for three months.

But I catch a glimpse of him today.

He calls out to me over the fence. He calls me by name, rather than number. It surprises me.

I look up, and I watch as he leans over the fence to talk to me. I glance around. Nobody's watching me.

Tentatively, I greet him. I tell him that he shouldn't be here, but he doesn't seem to listen.

He asks me what I like to do in my free time, and I tell him that I am built only to serve. I don't take time off, except to rest in an attempt to preserve energy.

He asks if I ever do anything on my own. I tell him that I don't need any time for myself... that I'm grateful to just be alive.

It's the first time I've ever lied.

+ + +

The date is 9.021.016. I break the rules all the time now.

At first I tried not to talk to him — those rules must have been set for a reason. But now, it doesn't bother me so much.

I find myself almost looking forward to seeing him.

He climbs over the fence completely today. He doesn't seem to care as he sets foot inside the artificial side.

I'm scared of him when he's that close. He's about a head taller than me. He's dressed plainly with a dark brown shirt and an even darker jacket.

He smiles at my fright. He promises not to hurt me. I believe him, but I do not trust him.

We talk, the same as we always do. He climbs the fence, and he leaves not long after.

+ + +

The date is 3.021.017. He shows up every day now.

I realize that I know a good deal about the boy who speaks to me, but I still don't know his name.

+ + +

The date is 6.012.017. He took me over the fence today.

He doesn't bring me near the other humans, but he takes me away into a forest. He points up to the stars and asks what I think of them.

I don't understand. I contact my data servers, and I begin telling him the names of the stars.

He grins at me. He tells me to look past that. He takes my hand, and he says they're beautiful. I ask what he means. He tells me the dictionary definition of beautiful.

And then he whispers three words. "In short, you."

I pull away from him instantly, and he looks away, embarrassed. He tells me that he's sorry, that his actions weren't called for. He goes back to looking at the stars. I do too, but I don't see them the way he does.

I'm thinking only of his words. I've never been considered beautiful by anyone. I will die in 10 months, but I don't tell him.

He takes me back home over the fence.

+ + +

The date is 8.023.017. We lay on our backs beneath the canopy of stars.

They glow above us. He points upward into the sea of stars at a sparkle of light flying across the sky. He tells me it's a wishing star. I shake my head. My sensors are telling me otherwise.

I tell him that it's an airplane.

He smiles and tells me that I can still make a wish. I ask him if wishes on airplanes even come true, and he laughs. He says they do.

I believe him. I make a wish.

+ + +

The date is 1.002.018. We're in the forest again.

I ask him a question, starting the conversation myself for a change. I write it here to preserve it forever, long after I'm gone.

"...What is...your....name?" I hesitate more than I mean to.

"My name?" He repeats, looking at me.

"Yes," I answer quietly.

He gives me a pained smile. "I'm number 4283." He whispers. He rolls up his long sleeves part of the way, revealing silver forearms.

He isn't human. He is just like me. I don't know what he's been doing on the human side of the fence, or how he even got there, but I do not ask.

"Then you need a name," I reply. I do not stutter, for once knowing exactly what to say.

"Do I?" He asks, staring up at the stars.

"Yes..." I pause. "My name's Emilia, isn't it? Yours has to be similar. You can be Emerson. And...I'll call you Emery."

He glances over at me, and I notice how his eyes catch the light the same way I do. I smile. So does he.

+ + +

The date is 3.031.018. I have one day left to live.

He comes to the fence again and I cross over to the human side without question.

We walk to our forest, but we don't speak. I'm not sure if he knows that I'll die tomorrow, but I don't want to tell him. I'm scared.

He slips his hand through mine, and I smile, squeezing his gently.

We talk, and I savor every word.

He takes me back to the fence, and he helps me over it to my side.

And then, out of nowhere, he kisses me. He brushes his lips over mine, and my eyes go wide with fright.

It...feels perfect, but he pulls away far too soon.

I meet his eyes. Softly, I kiss him back.

It's the perfect way to end my last night on Earth.

+ + +

The date is 4.000.018. I have 30 seconds left to live.

I set aside my journal. I wonder what Emery will think when he learns that I'm gone in a few hours.

My eyes turn to the stars. They cluster together into constellations, and I can see patterns in them. They're magnificent and colorful. They shine and sparkle. I finally understand the meaning of beautiful. A silver spark of light begins to soar across the sky.

My sensors tell me that it's an airplane. I tell myself that it's a shooting star. I make a wish.

It suddenly doesn't matter to me that I'll only live two years. What matters is that my time on Earth was meaningful. Emery made it meaningful to me. He made each day as colorful as the beautiful night sky.

I smile.

And then everything goes dark.

ESMERELDA'S JOURNEY



JORDAN COEN
*Lane Community College
Oregon*

Dear Diary,

June 15th, 2019

I graduated from Sacramento High School today in my dark blue cap and gown, with my gold tassel hanging next to the scar on my cheek. As my name was called and I walked across the stage to get my diploma, all I could think about was how I'm going to UCLA. I'll be pursuing my dream of becoming a professional photographer starting in the fall. They were in the front row, being the loudest family there, and next to them was Ivey. They were screaming, "Go Esmeralda!" and, "That's my girl!" My smile got bigger as I extended my arm and got my diploma. If you had told me four years ago that I would be graduating high school and going to college, I would've called you a liar.

Love,
Esmeralda

Dear Diary,

February 16th, 2016

The car rolled four times. When it stopped, I looked in the front seat, and Dad was slumped over lifeless with his head sideways on the steering wheel. His window was broken, and he had glass in his arm and all over his lap from the windshield. He was gone before they got there. Mom's head was leaned against the passenger seat window as if all of her bones in her neck were gone. They tried to resuscitate her but couldn't. Ivey was passed out. Her arms laid limp as her head hung, like it was tucked into her chin. She had glass in her hand. I yelled, "Mom! Dad! Wake up! Wake up!" My hands were sweating as I reached for my phone and dialed 911. As I called, I tried to force myself through the pain, but I couldn't; my left arm and back hurt too much. Once I got off the phone, Ivey woke up and I explained what happened. You know how in movies when someone is severely hurt and what they see is a blur? That's how I felt. I heard the paramedic tell someone to call DHS. Then they checked me and Ivey out and sent us to the hospital separately. Through all of this we were holding hands, just in case. Once we got to the hospital the nurse took the glass out of my cheek, wrapped my arm up, and put it in a sling. Then I met Amy, my caseworker. A doctor handed her my prescription. They diagnosed me with chronic back pain, so I have to take pain medication every day. She also told her that I need a heating pad. Then we got Ivey.

When I saw her I side-hugged her with my good arm. My heart slowed and my body felt relieved, and my eyes started to water. I closed my eyes and pulled even tighter. I heard her sigh as she hugged me back. She had a cast on her leg and had crutches next to the bed. Amy told us that our parents died, which we already knew, but we didn't want to say it out loud because then it was real. It was no longer a possibility that they were still here. We pulled up in our driveway and I looked at our house. I pulled myself up as I put my hand on the car door frame. I groaned as my back hurt when I finally started to walk. I had to stop-and-go in order to continue. Amy handed us each a black trash bag and told us we had an hour to grab our stuff. She made phone calls to try and find us a family to stay with while we did this. Ivey hobbled as if she was trying to practice using her crutches. I walked straight, which was where my room was. Ivey's room was right across the hall from mine. When I got there, memories started to flood in. I looked at all of my stuff and wondered how I was going to fit everything I wanted in a bag. First, I grabbed my tan teddy bear that my parents gave me when we were born. On one of its feet it says "Esme." I sleep with it every night. Ivey has one too, except hers says "Ivey" on it. I remember how I slept with it whenever I was scared or had nightmares. Next, I grabbed a blanket my mom made me. It has all of the different ballet moves on it. Then, I grabbed my camera that my dad gave me a few years ago for my birthday. I love photography. My favorites are candid. Next thing I knew Amy came in with Ivey. She squatted down so she was at our level. Her hands clasped together in her lap as she had us sit down on my bed and told us that she found some families that wanted to foster us, not a family, but families. I reached over and grabbed Ivey's hand as I trembled with fear; tears fell like a rainstorm.

"Ivey, the family you'll be with has a son and a daughter. That's why they can't take you, Esmeralda. Your foster parents' names are Scarlett and Mason. Their son's name is Jacob and their daughter's name is Harper. Esmeralda, your foster family has a son and they can only take one of you in. Their names are Charlotte and Christopher and their son's name is Elijah. They are going to make arrangements so you can see each other in a public place once a week. Ivey, you're going to go with your caseworker, Amelia, to your foster parents house." Amelia grabbed Ivey's trash bag full of stuff. She stood up, and I gave her a big bear hug, like I was never going to see her again, because who knows. I felt like my heart was going to burst through my chest at any moment. I got up, grabbed my favorite candid picture that was in a frame on my wall, and handed it to her. It's from when we were little, and she was swinging on a rope swing. She then got up and gave me her favorite silhouette painting. It's my mom and I hugging. We didn't say it, but this was our way of saying goodbye, just in case.

I was in the backseat of the car looking at my reflection in the car window as we drove to Charlotte and Christopher's house. When we got there, Amy grabbed my trash bag because there was no way that I was going to be able to carry it with my one good arm. She held it at her side. I walked behind her as I was hunched over, my arms were at my side, and my back hurt a lot. I sighed as I felt like all of the air inside me left; I didn't want to be here. Charlotte opened the door and introduced everyone. Amy handed her my prescription and my heating pad. Charlotte showed me my room. It was close to 10 so Charlotte made me a ham and cheese sandwich and brought me a glass of water. Mom used to make me this as a midnight snack. She set them on my nightstand and told me goodnight. It was Saturday, so I had a day to try and get settled in. After everyone made their rounds, I closed my door and grabbed the sandwich. I snacked on it as I took out my blanket and laid it on my twin-size bed. I set my teddy bear on my bed, next to the pillow that Charlotte placed on my bed before I got here. It reminded me of Ivey. I sat down on my bed and finished my sandwich.

Love,
Esmeralda

Dear Diary,

February 17th, 2016

We all played games tonight and hung out with Winter, their Siberian husky. Then Charlotte, Christopher, and I sat down and wrote everything out in a planner. I have physical therapy on Mondays after school at 3:30, grief counseling on Tuesdays after school at 4, meetings with my caseworker the first Wednesday of every month at 5, support group on Thursdays at 4, and on Fridays, I go to a restaurant and get to see Ivey at 7. It'll be our time alone. Saturdays and Sundays I won't have anything going on. That will be when I get the majority of my homework done and when I spend the most time with my camera. I was tired, so I laid down with my heating pad, holding on for dear life to my teddy bear, as I thought of my mom and dad.

Love,
Esmeralda

Dear Diary,

February 20th, 2016

I've been here five days now. I'm supposed to take my pills every morning before I eat, but today was different. Today was waffles with strawberries. I walked into the kitchen and walked past the bottle. I got on my tiptoes and reached for a plate for my waffles when Charlotte told me that I needed to take my meds, calling me "Esme."

My face became even more red than it naturally is, as tears filled my eyes, I screamed at her and told her not to call me Esme and not to tell me to take my meds because she's not my mom. Then I smacked the bottle as the pills flew all over the kitchen, stormed to my room, and slammed my door. Everyone whispered about what happened. Charlotte called my school and asked Christopher to take Elijah to school today. After an hour, Charlotte knocked on my door and we had a conversation about why I don't want to take my meds. I have 30 minutes of unsupervised time, which means I can go to my room, but if Charlotte or Christopher knock on my door, I at least have to acknowledge that I'm there, so when Charlotte knocked on my door I got up, opened the door, and sat back down on my bed. As I was asked why I didn't want to take my meds, my eyes filled with tears. They remind me of my parents. She explained that I still have to take them for my health. After she explained that I was staying home, she brought me some waffles. Then I talked to my mom and dad. I apologized to them and explained why I did it. Lastly, I made sure they knew that I love and miss them and that I don't want to forget them.

Love,
Esmeralda

Dear Diary,

February 22nd, 2016

It's finally Friday, and it seemed like it had been a year. I've been waiting for today. I got to see Ivey today! We met at this restaurant called Angels. Charlotte took me, she sat at a different table, and watched us while we ate and talked. Once we got there, Ivey was already at the booth. Ivey's eyes twinkled when she saw me come around the corner. She sat up straighter as I ran toward her, and she sat there. I gave her a big hug. My back was killing me, but I pushed through the pain because I was happy to see her, relieved, yet scared all at once. Scarlett came over and met Charlotte. They shook hands and sat down at a table. "You look nice," I told Ivey as I sat down next to her so I was touching her shoulder. A weight was lifted off of my shoulders. She was safe. We were going to be okay. I reached down and grabbed her hand. She smiled. As she told me that I looked nice too and that she hates her foster parents, she glared at Scarlett who was laughing with Charlotte. We laughed as I explained how I felt toward Charlotte — I

can't stand her. I told her about what happened with my pills, which she thought was funny and apparently something like that happened with her the other day. Mason told her to get ready for school, and it reminded her of our dad. She told him to stop pretending to be her dad. It's funny, I always told our mom everything and she always told our dad everything.

"I love you."

"I love you, too," I told her as I squeezed her hand, making sure it was still there. After dinner Scarlett and Charlotte came over and told us that it was time to go home. I stood up and gave her a big hug. "I miss you," I whispered in her ear, "Only seven more days until next time. I love you." We both cried as she repeated it. It felt like we were being separated all over again, which in a sense we were, because this was our only contact with each other.

Love,
Esmeralda

Dear Diary,

February 16th, 2017

It's my sophomore year of high school and I had to write about something personal to me and Charlotte helped me. I started it with, "I was put into foster care when I was 14 and lost my parents..." I continued to write about my struggles, and she suggested that I write about what I hate about the system, so I did. I ended it with, "I don't like that the foster care system separates families and I'm going to do something about it." She told me it was beautiful. This was the first time that I've asked her for anything.

Love,
Esmeralda

Dear Diary,

April 20th, 2019

When I got home from school I checked the mailbox, like I always do. As I opened it I saw a handful of envelopes. I skimmed through them thinking that I didn't get anything. To my surprise, at the bottom of the stack, I had gotten the letter that could devastate me. It was from UCLA, and it was in a normal-sized envelope. When I saw this, I rushed inside and threw the mail on the kitchen counter as I ran to my room to make sure I opened it before anyone got home, in case I didn't get in. I was terrified as I opened the tiny envelope that I was sure was my rejection letter. As I sat on my bed slowly tearing the envelope seal, I heard Elijah and Charlotte come in. He was excited about a new friend he made at school. I managed to pull the folded-up letter out of the envelope and saw the word "Congratulations." My heart filled with joy as I thought I couldn't wait to tell mama and papa.

Love,
Esmeralda

Dear Diary,

June 15th, 2019

We threw our caps, and they all ran over to me. "Congratulations!" I yelled. Charlotte and Christopher stood back until I turned to them and said, "Thank you, mama and papa, for everything." There were tears in their eyes as they hugged me. I made it, we made it.

Love,
Esmeralda

ALL THAT IS BEAUTIFUL IS DARK AND DREARY

AZUCENA ENLOE
Austin Community College
Texas

Why praise the glory of a storm
That soothes worries and waters the land
When there exists the waves
That consume life with impartiality
Taking, taking, letting us know
How above all we fail to
We fail to be.

Why let gentle words slip through your lips
Spoken softly, settling on skin like sweet warmth
When monsters live like pests
Always there, always haunting
Standing, seen in the mirror
As tears slip down
Tears that'll never cease.

Why express pleasure in earthly delights
In a symphony of laughter — having no ulterior purpose
When darkness lingers
As it always has, always will
A symbol carved into the temple
Of what it means to be
Not just human, no, aware.

Why make peace with all that is
Step from stone to stone toward the light
When there are horrors to face
Not with swords or knives
Nor with tender love
But with painted sorrow,
Immortalizing, not cauterizing, the pain.

Because, dear heart, is has been decided
By those determined to chart maps of bastardized terrain
That love exists only for heartbreak
Where honor is a picture, not a deed
To live means to suffer
And all that is beautiful
(can only be)
dark and dreary.

BOXED WATER THEORY



DOMINIC MARCOALDI
Nashville State Community College
Tennessee

The primal urge and impulse to find food and water is at the base of our psyche, and we have throughout time built our greatest civilizations in close proximity to bountiful land and water. Water is especially important to our existence and the homeostasis of the world. Since the beginning of collectivization, we have built our towns and cities to include water supply and sanitation. From the ancient Indus Valley civilizations to the aqueducts of Rome to contemporary metro water supplies, the presence and easy access of water has become ubiquitous and easy. Running water is deemed a human right, and failures such as the contamination of Flint, Michigan, are seen as horrifying and inhuman. In addition to running water via faucets, our markets, groceries and convenience stores have made the purchase and identification of clean, drinkable water an easy endeavor. One need only to look for a plastic bottle and exchange some change to satiate their thirst. It is this ease of identification that has made the seeking and drinking of water a thoughtless enterprise, one that is taken for granted by most living in evolved societies. Though only a lowly sandwich artisan in a local deli, my meager position affords me with the ability to observe my fraternal species at their most primal: in the midst of hunt or scavenge to satiate their hunger and thirst. This paper is based off of observations that took place when people were offered water in an apparatus that they were not familiar with: a box.

Located in downtown Nashville, I work in a small retail shop and deli that sits on Demonbreun between 2nd and 3rd Avenue S. From the lawyers and accountants of the Pinnacle building and tech developers at Asurion to the fine musicians of the Schermerhorn, this block is in close proximity to many businesses of high standing. Being only a block from Broadway and other staples such as The Johnny Cash Museum and the Country Music Hall of Fame, tourists, from drunken bachelorettes to twilight-year-old Canadians escaping the cold, are also caught in the wave of customers in our shop. The menu of standard lunch fare is complimented by a large drink cooler. The cooler itself is the first thing one sees upon entering, a Mecca of bright lights and cold bottles and cans dressed in labels and condensation. The deli opts to be local and artisanal, eschewing the mainstream brands of sodas. Often, customers will ask if

we have “regular Pepsi” or “regular Coke.” It is easy to explain that we do not have those specific items, but do have an alternative in the name of Boylan’s soda. On the Boylan’s bottles, the signifiers to soda all add up and customers are easily persuaded. After all, the bottle is just like a coke bottle, the color of the drink is of same palette to the other sodas and the bottle is predominantly labeled with the word “soda,” in font suggestive of a retro, family-owned business.

It is when customers ask for “regular water” that a great disturbance is laid upon the psyche. Sitting at the very center of our drink cooler sits the culprit: a brand of water called Boxed Water. Boxed Water is fresh, drinkable water provided in an eco-friendly, biodegradable carton. It is a solid white carton that features a big, bold, standard font exclaiming, “BOXED WATER IS BETTER,” alongside a drawing of a water drop. On the opposite side, the benefits of Boxed Water are listed. The benefits include the fact that Boxed Water goes through an 8-step water purification process that provides a pure pH neutral water with no additional additives; it is a more sustainable alternative to bottled water; and proceeds from each box sold are donated to planting trees and cleaning up our oceans and beaches. It is no doubt that the company behind Boxed Water is a thoughtful enterprise that has true intentions of providing a positive and healthy-conscious product to the individual and the world. If they only knew the psychological turmoil they have caused.

Customers ask for water in a variety of ways, but the three most common ways to ask are “Do you have regular water?” “Do you have bottled water?” and “I’ll take a water.” Each have their own intricacies. For the first, the employee must decipher what “regular water” means. For the second, the employee must ease the customer into the harsh reality that they will not be able to get bottled water. The third is similar to the second but requires more set up. The reactions to the realization that Boxed Water is the only freshwater option are scathing. All are confused in some way, but the confusion leads to vitriol or mockery. Some will ask if we have regular water again. Some will go to the cooler and still be unable to find the product and have to be personally guided to it. Most scoff and refuse to buy it. “Boxed Water?” they ask in a condescending tone and begin to question the employee as if Boxed Water couldn’t possibly exist because they themselves have never thought of the concept before. They will then laugh and, if they are in a group, convene together and make jokes about it. The employee will usually respond by telling them that Boxed Water is an eco-friendly alternative to plastic bottled water. Despite the positives to the environment and the individual of Boxed Water as opposed to regular plastic bottle water, Boxed Water is met with skepticism and, at worst, downright disgust.

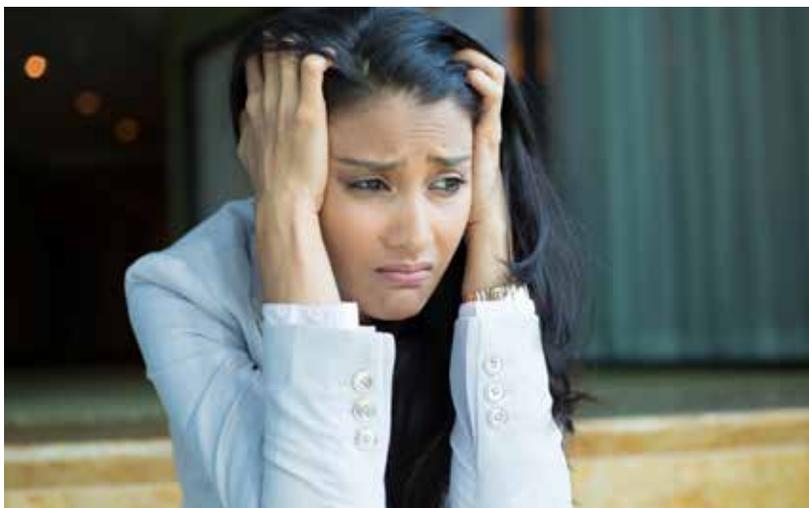
This disgust spans across most demographics with slight variation. Those of ages that are approximately in the 20s and 30s react more positively to Boxed Water. Those aged 40 and above are the most skeptical of the product and the most vocal in their skepticism. Both men and women react in roughly the same way. The biggest difference is found in individuals versus those in groups. Those that are by themselves tend to be persuaded easier into buying Boxed Water. Those that are in a group tend to be the hardest to persuade, perhaps due to the opportunity to act tough or make jokes with their group.

Two hypotheses can be drawn from this phenomenon. The first involves symbol apprehension. The signifiers present in the name Boxed Water and its packaging normally do not add up to represent fresh, drinkable water. Water is usually presented in a plastic bottle with pictures of springs or rivers or, at least, labeled with the color blue, a common signifier of water. The carton of Boxed Water is a stoic black and white and, though it does feature a water drop, the water drop is the color black, a color not associated with drinkable water. The water drop blends easily with the font, making the symbol indistinguishable from the words. There seems to be a discord in the semiotic process wherein the thought of drinkable water is not able to appear as an interpretant

in the mind of each subject. This is interesting because the word “water” is present on the carton, but the subjects reading the word are still unable to comprehend the fact that water is contained in the carton due to the confusion caused by the other signifiers. The second hypothesis relates to evolutionary biology. Because water is such a vital part of life, it is ingrained in us to not only seek it out but be skeptical of its source. There is no doubt that many diseases and deaths have been caused by the drinking of unclean water. Our minds must have created some instinct to be weary of drinking water from an unknown source. This aversion to unknown water sources seems to be still prevalent in the minds of those in the contemporary age, even if society has made this trait irrelevant with their safe and ubiquitous water systems. Though it can be assumed that none of the customers that reacted so negatively to Boxed Water would be able to distinguish safe, drinkable water if they were forced to live in the wild at the mercy of nature, the trait continues. Perhaps this instinct has become too distorted due to the fact that society has set in stone certain symbolic representations of water (i.e. the color blue, a lake, a plastic bottle), making it difficult to adapt to any new way of thinking about or representing water.

The Boxed Water Theory can be stated as thus: humans react negatively to an object when the signifiers used to represent the object are not of the same lexicon that is commonly assumed in a society to signify said object. This is further exacerbated when the object contains life-vital elements such as water or food. Perhaps it is a good thing that this process happens; human beings may be only protecting their lives from the unknown in their aversion to Boxed Water. But it may very well be a negative that humans are unable to comprehend common objects represented differently and adapt to change, even if the change benefits them and the world.

LAURA



LAUREL HENNING
York Technical College
South Carolina

She stood behind the broad back of her employer scribbling notes as if her life depended on it. Her life did depend on it, in a way. Her employer cut her check, and that check kept her fed and clothed, though not well. Her tight pumps squeezed her feet, but she ignored them. Earlier that morning she had carefully taken a sharpie to hide another scuff on these pumps — a trick she had learned from her mama — and she was not about to throw them out.

Her suit hung at odd angles, as if it had been fitted to another woman. It probably had. The previous owner had probably donated it to Goodwill three years ago in almost-new condition because she realized that it was tacky.

Laura realized it was tacky too, and she cringed when she caught her reflection, but she had no other option than to wear it. Privately, she thought it went well with the drab monotony of the offices of Brown & Warning, but she kept such thoughts to herself. Those who need to keep a job are not in the position to complain.

And thus, she was scribbling notes for her boss in too tight shoes and an ill-fitting suit, the bright fluorescent lights bringing out the imperfections in her skin, makeup, and attire in harsh relief.

Finally, the meeting was over. Dismissed, she tucked the notebook under her arm and scurried to her little drab desk in the midst of so many identical cubicles. To have to sit at that little, scuffed desk in the artificial light was a trial for her, yes, but to be away from the thick cigar aroma of her boss was a relief. Sometimes she let herself imagine what the office could look like if she were allowed to redesign it. She would replace the harsh white lights with soft ones, and put in big windows to let in the sun. There would be plants and artwork, and the desks would shine with newness. But that was a fantasy, and the white walls of her cubicle brought her back to reality with a jolt.

She peered at the company calendar above her desk. Today was the 15th — that put two weeks between now and her interview on the first — which meant that today could be the day that Simon & Philipps called her to let her know that she had the job,

and the dreariness of Brown & Warning would be forever left behind. She looked at her phone: no missed calls. That was fine. If not today, tomorrow.

Laura maintained her positive outlook as she let herself into her house after work. The call would come tomorrow, she assured herself. Worrying would do nothing but make her tired and cranky. She shoved her ratty briefcase, and her troubles, into a corner. "Samuel?" she called, searching through the dim light for a human form. A little boy came bounding across the carpet, a smile filling half of his face as he ran, arms outstretched. His pants were tight and short, and his shirt was pilled and faded, but Laura saw none of that—she saw only his smile and big eyes. His embrace crumpled and relocated every odd angle of her little, ill-fitting suit, but she didn't notice. She felt only his arms around her neck and his heartbeat against her chest.

"I have news for you!" he said, looking up at her, but still clutching her neck.

"Let's hear it then." They moved to an ancient love seat, and wiggled until the lumps in it were arranged somewhat comfortably. The sharing of news between them always took place on this lumpy, good-willed love seat.

"I know what I want to be when I grow up."

"Really? That's quite a decision to make."

"Yes. I've been thinking over it since last summer, and I've decided for real now. The other things were too. . .eggs-trord-eh-nary." He said the new word carefully. "I want to be a lion tamer."

Laura could tell Samuel was in earnest, so she maintained her composure.

"It's because I know that men do that, and I know that I will be a man when I grow up, because I'm a boy now, and boys turn into men."

Laura took his hands in hers. "That sounds like a very exciting job. I think you will make an excellent lion tamer."

Tomorrow came and went, but there was still no call. Laura dragged herself and her briefcase home. Today had been longer than usual, and anxiety over the impending call had only increased her stress. Laura cheered herself by thinking of the bright colors and open work spaces of Simon & Philipps that she would soon enjoy. Mr. H---, her prospective new boss, didn't smell like cigars. He smiled often, and she had seen a picture of a little girl on his desk. Her current boss had no children, nor did he want any. But Mr. H--- understood what it was like to have children, she was sure. That understanding, and the pay raise, were very useful for a working woman.

At home, Samuel's smile greeted her, but disappeared when he saw her pinched face.

He said nothing, but his brown eyes queried, "What's wrong?"

For a moment anxiety flickered across Laura's face, but she quickly regained her composure. There was no sense in worrying Samuel about her work situation. "I'm fine, Sammy. Let's get something to eat."

It was past a normal dinner time, and Laura began rummaging through the kitchen. She opened one bare cupboard and then another. If she could piece together this dinner, she could stretch the budget. If she could stretch the budget, she could buy Samuel some desperately needed sneakers. Finally, she found enough to make a meal for two.

As she and Samuel talked over dinner, Laura fought off waves of drowsiness. The scratches on the wooden table began to blur together, and she lay her head down, hoping to clear her vision. "Samuel," she murmured, "put the dishes in the sink, please. I'll wash them in just a minute." She heard Samuel shuffle to the kitchen, and then distantly heard the clink of dishes touch metal. The next moment, she was asleep.

The next morning at the office, Laura checked her calendar. It had now been two weeks and three days since the interview in the bright, airy offices of Simon & Philipps. Mr. H---, the man who had a little girl, the man who understood what it was like to raise a child, the man who was offering a salary that was a leap above Brown & Warning's — this man had told her that she would be called within three weeks if she was selected. Laura now faced the reality that if she didn't receive a call in the next 48 hours, she was stuck at the stingy monotony of Brown & Warning.

For the entire day, she couldn't think of anything but the phone call. Her anxiety snowballed into obsession. Whenever her broad-backed boss wasn't looking, she checked her flip-phone for a message. In the break room, with its tacky art hanging askew above the ancient sofa, she worried. At her desk, as she typed dutifully away on the keyboard that had a sticky letter *P*, she wondered. Even while she was note-taking at numerous meetings, choking in the cigar smoke that hung around her employer, she allowed a little corner of her mind to think about the clean, spacious offices at the office of smiling Mr. H----. *He* smelled like cologne.

Finally, the day ended, and she was allowed to drag her battered briefcase and soul away from the grind of the office. She usually left work haggard, but today small tears threatened to run over her cheeks and leave dollar-store mascara in their wake. As she cranked her car, a muffled noise came from her briefcase. Her phone! She snatched it up as her heart skipped a beat. This was it, she thought. She answered cheerfully, hope rekindled. Her smile faded as an automated voice droned through the speaker. It was the electric company, reminding her that her bill was due.

Now the tears made good their threat and spilled over her cheeks in torrents. Her chest heaved within her tacky suit and made all of the odd angles move awkwardly back and forth. She wanted — no, she *needed* — this job. She hated the shades of brown at the office, she hated the choking cigar smell from her boss, she hated the key that refused to work on her keyboard. She longed for the bright colors of the office of Simon and Phillips, she longed to work for someone who understood her situation, and she longed to work at one of the large, smooth desks she had glimpsed on her way to the interview.

Samuel greeted her at the door with his signature half-face smile, but when he saw the feebly disguised grief on Laura's face, he stopped smiling, stretched his tiny arms around her torso and hugged her tight. "I love you," was all that he said, but it soothed Laura's soul like balm.

Over dinner, Samuel updated her on the details of his future as a lion tamer. Laura listened, fascinated at how much passion this scrawny little boy brought to his dreams. He was going to start exercising so he could be strong, and since last summer, he had already checked out every book on lions from the school library.

When Laura trudged into the office the next morning, she appeared as haggard as when she had left. This was the last day for her to receive the call, and her hopes of securing the job were dwindling with each tick of her wristwatch. Despite her heavy heart and previous sleepless night, she dutifully took minute notes, standing behind the broad back of the man who cut her paycheck. The economical part of her would not let her do less; if she was not going to get a new job, she had to keep this one. To any observer, her day passed just as every other day — she scribbled notes as if her life depended

on it, patiently fought with the P key on her keyboard, endured the pinch of her heels without murmur, and said nothing of the ugly browns of the office walls.

But her vision was clouded as she took notes, the P key was aggravating, her tight pumps gave her blisters on both feet, and the ugly brown of the office was especially insulting.

At 1 o'clock, she smoothed the odd angles of her suit, sat down, and took a solitary lunch break. Her internal tension had been mounting all day, but she made her mind numb as she ate a light lunch. There was still the afternoon. They could call, and then all of her worrying would be in vain. Besides, she was starting to accrue a massive headache.

At 5:30, her boss told her she could go home early. Laura had never looked well-rested or youthful, but her haggard appearance was beyond the normal extent, and he hoped the surprise of getting off early would put her in better shape for the next week. Laura, standing in her tight pumps, thanked him as politely as she could, in spite of the constant pounding in her head and feet, and then calmly walked out.

Once on the sidewalk, her nerves gave way. She stumbled to the car, her briefcase clunking behind her. Her head pounded with every step, and the tears that poured down yesterday were brimming in her eyes again. Her pumps pinched her heels terribly. Her soul felt like it had been rent in two. It was too late now, she knew. They would not call. Someone else had gotten the job. Alone in her car, she sobbed like a child.

At home, she stopped herself before she climbed out of her car. Peering into a scratched travel mirror, she painstakingly removed mascara runs, tapped puffy eyes, and smoothed disheveled hair. She couldn't let Samuel see her distressed.

Laura managed a fake smile as she walked inside. She knew she would cry later, when Samuel was asleep. She might even cry every night after putting him to bed. But she wasn't going to now. Her dreams had crumbled, but duty remained.

Samuel came skipping across the living room. He threw his tiny, dirty arms around her waist and smiled up at her, "I love you." A glimmer of hope stirred in Laura, but she silenced it. Her dreams of escaping Brown & Warning were crushed, and she was not going to find comfort in the love of a naïve child. When he got older, he would see her for who she really was: a low-wage worker in a tacky suit, unworthy of the beautiful offices of Simon & Philipps.

Shoving her emotions aside, she returned the hug and asked, "How has your day been?" hoping it didn't sound too forced. Samuel said nothing, but pulled her over to the love seat.

Once they were both seated, he answered, "I found out today that I can't be a lion tamer."

Only now did Laura see the grief in Samuel's eyes. Her sorrow over her own tragedy compounded her anger over his. "What? Who said? You can be anything you want to be!"

"No one said. I figured it out myself. Someone brought their cat to school for show and tell, and when I petted it, I started sneezing. Then I rubbed my eyes, and they got red. They stayed red for the rest of the morning, and I didn't stop sneezing until after lunch. Ms. M--- said I'm allergic to cats."

Tears began to well up in Laura's eyes. Why did Samuel have to be allergic to cats? Why couldn't he continue to dream about being a lion tamer? What was the harm in that? The world was intent on wrecking them both. She started to cry, but Samuel interrupted her.

“Why are you so upset?”

“You wanted so badly to be a lion tamer!”

“I did.” He traced the pattern on the love seat with his finger. “When Ms. M--- said I was allergic to cats, I almost got really mad because I wanted to be a lion tamer so bad. But then I remembered how you told me that life isn’t always about what we want, and dreams come and go.” He looked up into her eyes. “But you can go and find another dream, because you’re the same you.” He paused, then added, “I made the last part up myself, but I’ve been telling myself that over and over. One day, I’ll find a better job than being a lion tamer.”

THE OAKHEART



TREVOR FARMER

*Pearl River Community College
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The spring day had gone by just like any other, the wind steady, the air sweet, and the bright colors uplifting for the people of Rorik's — a quiet town on the edge of the Kingdom of Baldrin. The town mostly served as a home for travelers, lumbermen, and hunters who used Clovia's Forest to fill their everyday lives with work and wealth. The snows had melted nearly two moons already and the claws of winter were finally losing their grip as the temperature rose and the air softened. Blossoms of white, pink, yellow, and red soon grew throughout the forest floor, supple brown and ashen branches giving way to a more welcoming and gentle shade of green. It was the time of deep breaths and heavy lifting as the people of Rorik's now tried to start the growing season with their best foot forward.

The town was livelier than it had been for months, the smell of melted butter and baked breads filling the streets in a tangible stream of delicacy. Children ran between the legs of adults like deer amongst the trees, and mothers took joy in their chores that could finally be done in the sun once again.

The crowds parted as a giant of a man made his way through, his thick black beard pulling into a wide smile as children ran up to him, the villagers waving or bowing, sometimes both, as he passed. The children grabbed at the bottom of the bear pelt around his shoulders, the hide tight against his back due to his sizable width.

"Is it real?" one small girl asked, her courage swelling out from within her.

"Why, of course," the giant said. "We druids can strengthen our magic using hides and pieces of nature. Here, for being so brave as to ask."

He knelt down, closing his hands. Green light spilled from his fingers and when he opened them, a green rose was standing tall. He plucked the strange flower and handed it to the small girl, her expression as happy as the festival itself.

"Thank you, Bjorn," she exclaimed, holding the flower close. Bjorn laughed as she spun around.

“Now take care of it,” he began. “That flower will never lose its petals if you keep it watered. Run it along your plants at home to make them grow better than ever.”

He stood back up, patting her head as he waved his dinner plate-sized hand to her and the others around. Her parents, farmers from near the town, bowed deeply to Bjorn in thanks, having asked him for help with their crops a week before.

In the center of town rode in the weekly caravan of traders and craft-folk, bringing their trinkets, supplies, and other bobbles for the villagers to spend their good moods on. These traders, however, were accompanied by a man who had been run out of town long ago — a poacher by the name of Jaecar Graywind.

The Graywind family had been well rooted with the town of Rorik’s, being one of the first groups that were sent to tame these lands. Over time, however, as their rival family grew larger and stronger, they were pushed into darker trades for their money such as rare animal skins, mushrooms, and a psychedelic syrup made from the sap of a certain tree. Many of the Graywinds had expired from their trade, having been on the wrong side of a bad deal a few too many times. Jaecar, however, was the youngest of the newest generation and had watched the blunders of his brothers and his parents, growing to be much more cunning.

Jaecar had with him a plethora of fascinating crates, each one holding some special creature within. Some would jostle with a sharp rattle, others would occasionally have a breath of flame leap from between the bars, making whoever was peering in to jump back quickly. As one can imagine, crowds soon gathered around his booth, many children buying necklaces with various fangs tied onto strips of leather. Soon, however, Bjorn came upon his booth, his usually friendly demeanor now turning into something much harsher.

“Jaecar,” his thunderous voice shouted, the people before him scrambling to the sides to make way for the giant.

Jaecar’s gray lips pulled into a smirk as he looked up into the bearded face of the giant. “Bjorn,” his raspy, silvery voice began. “How good it is to see you again.”

Bjorn now stood before the menagerie, his heavy boots making the ground near him shake. The sides of his head were shaved clean; small runes were tattooed behind his ears, which were visible with his hair pulled back into a ponytail. His beard was bushy but trimmed and as black as sin; his eyes a deep, deep green that looked boiling at the sight of Jaecar.

“Why have you returned, Snake? And why have you made these poor creatures suffer so? I banished you for this exact reason! Using the magic that I taught you to take advantage of nature’s bounty,” he cut himself off before he continued, the children near him now beginning to get spooked. He snorted loudly, his green eyes moving to look at the creatures in his possession. There was a wide variety, however none were too terribly uncommon in the grand scheme of things and none of them looked to be malnourished. “Not enough to kick you out again,” he said, slightly disappointed.

Jaecar simply listened to his old mentor rant, not wanting to get him any more riled up than he already was. However, the anger that boiled within his skin couldn’t stay back forever. As Bjorn began to turn, Jaecar started to pester. “You know, Druid, the people of the Kingdom don’t like monsters very much. The King has ordered me to slay whichever ones I find in my travels. He’s been paying me most handsomely.” His voice was like a dagger dipped in a frozen river, the sound of ice water that made your hair stand on end. Especially now, when malicious intent was behind his words.

“Good for you,” Bjorn said, his voice a low rumble. “But I can handle anything in these woods, so keep your greasy head far from it, do you understand?”

Bjorn turned, his feet glowing green as roots began to crack the Earth, woody tendrils shooting towards Jaecar. Just before reaching his neck, they stopped, slowly creeping back into the soil whence they came. Jaecar’s eyes were wide, his skin paler than usual as he almost fell over from his spot. He growled, his eyes sharp as they pierced the back of the giant, boring a whole through his chest.

Bjorn knew he would only grow more agitated and decided to take his leave. “Keep your nose clean, Jaecar. I don’t want to have to teach you another lesson.”

Jaecar simply snorted and fixed some of his displays, ignoring the old fool. The crowds around his booth definitely dissipated after the small debacle, but soon a new wave of fresh interest would take their place.

Bjorn went to visit with some of the other vendors, his smile wrinkles returning once again as he shook hands with old friends and remembered the names of new ones. There was one in particular that sold exotic plants, putting on small shows for the children, not too dissimilar from what Bjorn did earlier. The man was clearly very young, his blonde hair golden in the sunlight, small points of his ears sticking from the sides. An elf, and a half-elf by the looks of his rounder features. Bjorn approached the young man after one of his colorful showings, some petals still lingering in the air.

“What’s your name, child,” his thunderous voice asked.

When the young man turned around, he nearly jumped out from his red tunic, his ears growing rosy. “I-It’s you! Y-you’re Bjorn aren’t you? I’ve traveled all this way to meet with you!”

Bjorn raised a bushy brow in curiosity, “Oh, did you now? And what for?”

The elf bowed deeply, his smile wide and child-like. “I’m Foldrin, Foldrin Goldrunner. While up North, I met with some of your old Druidic circle when I was trying to learn new nature spells and they told me you were creating a new Druidic artifact! Is it true? That’s never been done in the history of nature!”

Bjorn’s eyes shimmered in concern. Why would his own circle tell a stranger about his secret project? “Yes I am,” he began. “You’re referring to the Oakheart. I’ve been cultivating the local magic into a single point, from the heart of the oldest tree on the continent. It’s nearly finished, and once it is we’ll be able to restore the Great Death of the West.”

Foldrin’s features dimmed as he heard the name of the massive swath of death that ran through the Kingdom. Long ago, a swarm of Undead attacked the Elven Kingdom of Aldrune. That was 400 years ago, and yet the path they marched still remained dead and bare. Bjorn looked up in the sky, seeing that the sun was beginning to make its journey back to the horizon. Bjorn smiled at the young man, putting his massive hand upon his shoulder.

“Keep up the work, Foldrin. I’d like to see what progress you make by the time you leave. We’ll see if I can’t teach you a few tricks of my own.” Foldrin’s light-bronze eyes grew wide in excitement as he nodded with another bow, waving his idol farewell.

Bjorn stopped with the occasional villager on his way out, waving farewell and promising to return soon since he hadn’t spent much time with everyone today. Once

out of the village, he cut within the deep woods of Clovia's Forest, a labyrinth of bark and overgrowth, home to a number of creatures and magical beings, one of which being Bjorn himself. As he made his way through the dense woods, he felt lighter and lighter with every step, sighing in relief when he came upon a wide clearing, a tree that towered far above the rest standing before him with lower limbs the size of roads caravans could travel on.

However, something wasn't right. The door within the base of the tree was flung open, leaving Bjorn's house to be totally penetrable. Bjorn was always good about closing it, after all he was tired of forest creatures making a mess of the place while he was away. Bjorn stomped his right foot, a battle axe nearly as tall he was raising from the ground. The whole weapon was a shiny steel, the side of the axe having the face of a roaring bear, a green emerald lodged within his maw. The shaft of the weapon looked like the trunk of the tree, the very base even having small roots that extend all around.

Brandishing the weapon, Bjorn walked into his wooden home, still having to lower his head as he entered the door frame. Someone was here; he could feel the troubled air around him. Bjorn peered down the short hall that led to his study, where the next door was wide open. His eyes grew in shock as he bolted down the hall, his feet shaking the very core of the tree. Spinning around the corner, his chest was met with a loud thunk as the intruder ran straight into his solid mass. Bjorn advanced onto the man, his massive foot pressing on his back before kicking him over. It was Jaecar, his silver eyes as cold as ever as they looked up at Bjorn with a freezing hatred.

"What in Thor's name are you doing here, you traitor?" Bjorn then saw his prized possession within his mitts, the Oakheart. Bjorn's eyes fumed in anger as he rose his axe, the butt of the weapon striking between the eyes of the poacher, a loud bang filling the room as his head crashed against the floor. Bjorn grabbed the gnarled piece of wood, the size of a large hen, radiating a bright green energy that covered the room in light.

"How dare you defile my home, you rat. You've betrayed me for the last time." His voice was the wrath of a wildfire itself, his massive hand grabbing Jaecar by the hair as he began to drag him through the house, throwing him out onto the clearing. Jaecar spun around onto his feet once hitting the dirt, whirling around and taking out twin daggers, both nearly the length of a short sword and wickedly sharp.

"It's you who is the defiler, Druid! You ruined my family! We were powerful! We ruled these lands like none other. So what if we took part in the bounties of these lands? They were ours to use as we saw fit!" The rage that brewed within Jaecar's heart overflowed as he roared out in anger, running full speed at the giant. Before Bjorn knew it, he could feel the cold bite of the blade, hardly having time to move his head, a long gash opening along his cheek and nicking his ear. He was strong, far stronger than he was all those years ago.

When Bjorn spun on his heel to counter the sly devil, his fist only met with empty air, colder than the rest around it. His eyes furrowed in frustration as he felt the traces of minor teleportation magic. "The bastard got away," he muttered to himself, his fists clenched tight in outrage at the attempt. But Jaecar was right.

It was Bjorn who ruined the Graywind name so harshly, so suddenly. Bjorn left not one stone unturned when exposing their deeds to the villagers. His fingers reached for his cheek, his beard now matted and a muddy red-brown as his fingers pulled away with a bright crimson. It would leave a scar, no doubt about it. Normally he would heal a wound like this to prevent that, but something within him just couldn't do it. His feet were heavy upon the wood of his home, trudging down the hall until he was back into that room. There it was, his most valuable possession — the Oakheart. With its radiant

green energy, he could heal nearly any damage done onto the Earth. He's worked for nearly two centuries to see this happen. However, for some reason, the light didn't seem so bright anymore, as if the magic now decided to contemplate within its wooden shell.

"Jaecar... You were supposed to be the one...the one to pick up my mantle. I'm so sorry." Bjorn muttered his remorse under his breath to no one in particular, fists growing tight. He was glad his beard could catch his tears; that way, he never had to see them hit the ground. The hate from his former student still burned within his cheek, this scar now a memento of that harsh, harsh betrayal. Who betrayed who, however, Bjorn couldn't even tell anymore.

WHAT STAYS WITH US



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It starts when you're a child. That creeping feeling that climbs over your back and races down your spine. You draw in your breath slowly, as if the speed at which you inhale corresponds to the passage of time around you. As if it protects you. And the words you repeat — "there's nothing there," "don't be afraid" — they're mantras. Words intended to cast away the very things whose existence they deny. But there really is nothing there to hurt you. There's no dark little evil thing, looming behind the trees with patience, waiting to gobble you up. There are only plastic bags that brush against the ground — reminders of the true sins of man, not that you, a child, understand — or animals that scurry about, more eager to escape your presence than you'll ever understand. And yet, this reality means nothing in the face of your imagination.

One day, the true darkness of the world finally sinks into your bones and that childish imagination fades away. At least, that's what my father told me when I was young.

He was a wise man. A gentle one. And when the leaves started to fall and I'd begin to fear walking home from school, all bundled up in my beloved blue rain jacket, he'd say, "Listen here, my child. There are few horrors in the world that aren't devised by men."

Of course, I was still suspicious and weary, but aren't all children? Eventually, however, the words settled inside me, making their home as part of the person I've become.

Some things stick with us forever, and those words, they still linger, scratching at the back of my mind. Every once in a while, often in autumn when the crunching of leaves revives memories of my childhood, my father's words thrust themselves to the forefront of my mind. Forced to grow up quickly, I've long understood exactly what the horrors of men are. However, I never did ask my father what he thought the non-man-made horrors to be. But that's okay, I tell myself as I walk alone down roads coated in beautiful hues of orange and red, a plastic grocery bag hanging from my hand.

I think of my father a lot more often nowadays. I wonder what he'd think of me if he were still around.

One day, I'm thinking of him as I rush down the block to the corner store. "There's no need to run," I hear his voice in my head. He used to always say that running reinforces urgency, and urgency invites mistakes. So I slow my pace down to a walk and make the journey one step at a time. It's dark out and I have my red scarf wrapped tightly around my neck, protecting me from the icy wind that has grown restless in the night. It's not too late, but it's no longer the afternoon. My stomach grumbles in discontent, wondering why I have yet to provide my body with nourishment. My world, both inside and out, is in disarray. Yet while the tree branches decide to go to war with each other, instigated by the wind, the lights of the store are warm and inviting.

The electronic bell chimes as I walk in and the man behind the counter gives a friendly nod. Although we recognize each other, we don't talk. We are strangely familiar. In this place, in which someone seems to exist between the world I live in and a world of dreams, I find the silence quite comforting. Faces I won't remember glance around, searching for the solutions to their desires. But no one talks. This store, which is neither extravagant nor worn down, is a calm haven. My father would've liked it, I think.

Once I have my selection of unhealthy foods (it's been a bad day and I don't try to hide it), I step up to the back of the line. There's only one person in front of me — a man dressed in a red beanie and a jean jacket. I hear him arguing with the kind man that works at the store and I sigh. The simple peace I found has been broken. Fortunately, the rude customer accepts that he isn't getting anything without the right kind of ID and he storms out into the night.

I step up, a simple smile on my lips, and my transaction goes on quietly. I'm thankful for peace to have returned. Outside, I notice, my eyes wandering to the window, won't be so lovely.

The street is still but the wind is furious. And then I think I see something. I squint to get a better look, my heart now adamantly making its presence known, but there's nothing there. A strange but familiar feeling overtakes me, reminding me of my father and the childish imagination that once swirled in my head, but it is soon forgotten. The man asks if I'd like my receipt and as always I decline. The moment has passed, the feeling fades, and my worries are left behind at the register. At least, that's what I believe.

But for some reason I find myself hesitating at the doors. Their motion sensors activate and my body jerks. I can't conceive what could be out there, in the street and the darkness beyond it, yet I still need to take that slow, deep breath. And although the rest of my night is uneventful, I can feel the wind following me home.

I wonder sometimes if my dad would think I'm lonely. Everyone I know seems fit to comment on it, but I don't know if I've ever felt truly alone. Perhaps, I speculate, it's because I carry the memory of my father inside me. It is part of me, and it is something I'll never lose.

Still, I sometimes think about getting a dog. I think I'd really like one. When I'm in the park going on a run, my thoughts carry me away. With my imagination long gone, it's left to my observation to fill my head. Watching the other people and their dogs go about life distracts me from the pain of exercise. Perhaps if I get one then running won't be so awful, I wonder. I do enjoy petting them when I get the chance.

One day in the park, there's a kind lady with a perfect ponytail and a massive beast of a dog. He had the eyes of a wolf and fur as white as snow. How she kept him from getting dirty, I have no idea, but I don't ask those things. However, I do ask to pet him and fortunately enough she says yes. As I crouch down and extend my fist to what she claims is a white shepherd, I feel as though the dog's eyes are boring deep into my soul. His gaze feels unreal. All at once his presence consumes me, overtaking

everything around us and leaving only him. For a second I fear he might eat me. This fear is foreign, unreasonable. Life around me goes on as normal, people passing by, the woman gently smiling down at me, but I feel my cheeks grow hot and my skin is surely flushed. It takes everything I have to not give in to the fear that sends my heart racing for the moon. Suddenly the furry thing licks my hand and the whole ordeal is done. I laugh as the woman apologizes and I give the beast a few pets before going on my way. For some reason, I can't decide whether my father would've liked the dog.

More and more though, it bugs me. The little thought itches at the back of my mind, and I want to scratch at it. What truly awful thing could be out there that isn't made by man? Or were my father's words just poetry, not meant to be taken seriously? I don't know, and my curiosity is like an ever-present hum that won't seem to go away. A metaphorical ringing in my ears. This terrible tendency I have to hyper-fixate, which is surely inherited from my dad, refuses to let me rest.

That's just the way things are. There are things we can never ask, realities that we will never live through. Perhaps I fixate on the thought as a way of grasping my father's memory. A poorly constructed attempt to ensure that he never leaves me. That he isn't just a part of my past, but a part of who I am. Standing alone on the walkway, surrounded by the husks of summer trees and the occasional flickering lamp post, I stop to wonder if it matters whether I ever come to an answer. It feels as though I have suffered a deep loss, yet I don't even know that there really was an answer in the first place. More likely than not, it doesn't matter at all. I just want it to.

Maybe I'll finally stop picking at it and just let myself be. I still don't feel lonely, but I think perhaps this is a sign that I am.

And then in the darkness there is movement. The wind picks up leaves and makes them dance, forcing me to turn my head at the sound. Just off the path I see a shining reflection, but the lighting is poor and I've forgotten my glasses, so I can't quite make out what object it is that makes such an odd spectacle and startles me so. So I stare into the dark and wonder.

A small war wages in my head. Should I see what's causing the little light? Should I let it be? And the part of me that refuses to let anything go, that still wonders so many years later about a trivial thing my father once said, tells me I'll regret it if I don't take a peak. It's probably just a piece of metal stuck on a tree, but curiosity is more about the enjoyment of discovery than it is the significance of what is found. So I step forward.

And the darkness steps closer to me.

My mind, already venturing off the path of reality and toward the one of dreams, ponders. I don't suppose darkness, embedded with light, tends to move on its own. So I take another step forward, theorizing that it was only a trick of the eyes played by the darkness of night.

Still, the darkness moves after I do. This blackness, which has settled off in the woods as it is prone to do once the sun falls, is now moving out where it does not belong. It's approaching me as I approach it, coming closer to the light of the lamp post instead of away. And isn't that just the most curious thing.

A few more steps and I feel it upon me. My heart is calm, my thoughts having long since removed themselves from solid footing. But it's okay. I feel okay, because I am not alone.

There are few horrors in the world that aren't devised by men.

Moving into the light, the darkness is given some semblance of form. The blurry shine which caught my eye is now definable, a reflection off of a set of pointed teeth no shorter than the length of my face. Above the teeth are two elongated orbs, settled deeply in the abyss that now looms over me.

I feel breath on my skin. Cold, freezing puffs of air.

This dark creature towers over me and just like that I am unable to think — unable to move. I feel my breath slowly slip from my lips as its soulless eyes bore into me. Around me, the world is still, but inside me, my heart threatens to combust. I'm not alone, I realize, and for the first time that thought chills me to my core.

Finally, I am able to regain just enough control to voice the singular thought running through my head.

"Ah," I say softly to myself, "perhaps this is one of them."



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