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Editor: Robert Johnson

Guest Editor: Carla Mavaddat

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About BleakHouse Review

BleakHouse Review is an online literary magazine that provides a venue for studies in human liberty, both its deprivation and its achievement. Some people find freedom behind prison walls; others, ostensibly free, build prisons for themselves in their everyday lives. The interplay of persons and settings, limits and possibilities, form the palette on which our artists work, examining daily life with imagination and care. BleakHouse Review is edited by **Robert Johnson**. For the current issue, **Carla Mavaddat** served as guest editor and designer.

The Frequency Diaries.

by Cell Mate # 52639

By Jane Dempsey



"Ah," I can hear you say, "so it was all a build-up to bore us with his buggy jiving. He only wanted us to listen to him rave!" But only partially true: Being invisible and without substance, a disembodied voice, as it were, what else could I do? What else but try to tell you what was really happening when your eyes were looking through? And it is this which frightens me.

Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?

— Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man

Passion

Your mind imagines the fog
on a window
from hot, nervous breath.

Your skin waits for a touch
that will tell your soul
to awake from slumber.

Here I lie, on your bed,
listlessly watching you
pine for contact, be it
mixed with tears, blood,
all the hope & despair
you store in

Your body.



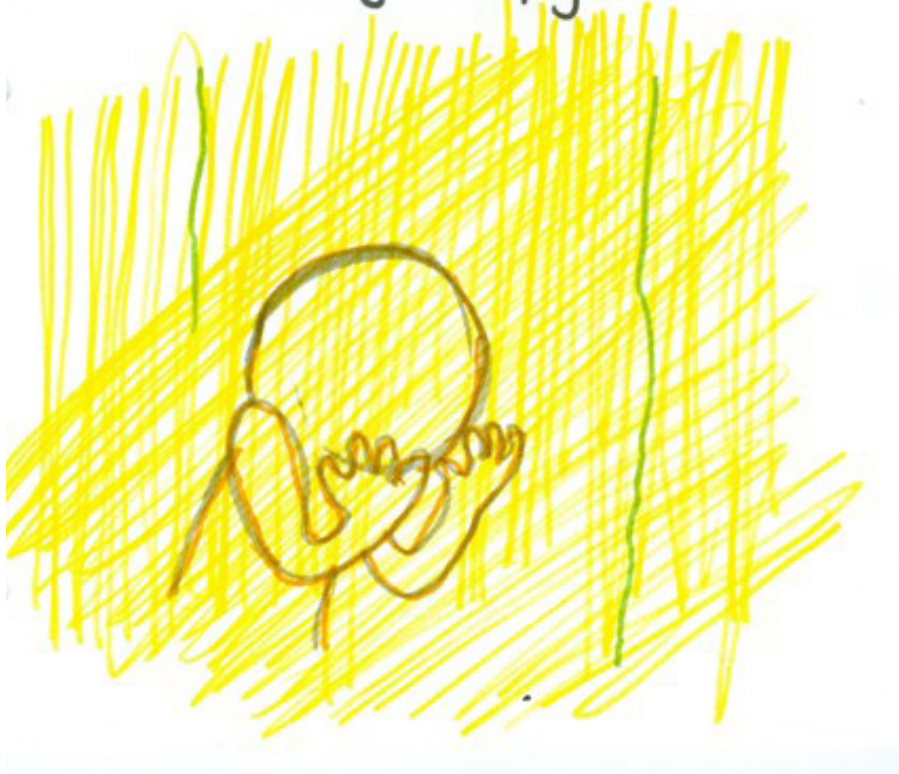
Faith.

The Lord is your Shepherd
And here is your holding pen.
There are mottled memories
Of Grandmother's hymns
Clasped wrinkled hands
Now a cloister smelling of urine
You're inside the whale now.
A twitching leper scabbed with
sin no one wants to touch
Close your ends, ends in your mind
the revelation only One
can control.



Panic

There's a room I'm here and I don't know what I'm
doing in here but I do I do I think about that
time it was fifteen ago but feels days ago Oh God
Oh God are you listening I ran that that day
Hey you why did she look that way hold me **FUCK**
I know I hate her I can't smell anything anymore
I forgot her middle name Oh God she looked like an
angel that night a halo of blood was also my hand
my hand my **FUCK SHIT** God I'm cold all I see
are these books I've read eight hundred seventy
three times I'm dying I'm dying I'm



FURY.

I see you.

Yeah, I fucking see you.
You think you're numb now?

We'll feel this.

It's her birthday today.

Was.

Isn't that funny?

That day ceases to mean anything.

Except in this goddamn cell.

You know, I think I see her

Over there, by the

filing her nails, laughing at you

punch it.

Show her, dead or alive,

who's boss.

Fucking king of this cage.



~~Despair~~ Despair.

Hello, friend!

I'm here where you left me,
on a stool you ignored to
Lie on your bed

But I'm here.

And always will be.

~~Make it end~~

Hey,

You could make our bond
stronger, take that shrapnel
and ~~pe~~ stab parade
your body with biting
kisses.

No?

Okay. Seems
no point. Let's stare
at this gray abyss
will one more
time.



HOPE

Rest, child, rest.
Rest because amidst this silence
butchered by your inner noise
I hear you.
That's all you need.
Rest, child, rest.
And in that rest you shall fight.



Prisoner #52639 was arrested for first degree murder of his mother on June 5th, 1995. He is serving a life with no parole prison sentence in the Maryland Correctional Adjustment Center. After being caught in a gang fight in 1997, #52639 was put into solitary confinement, where he still resides today.

Poems on Solitary Life

By Tim Gallivan

Part I: On Solitary Confinement

Solitary Fishing

Faint murmurs of life below
tell me the fish will bite.
The guards are busy talking
so conditions are perfect.

I bait my line
with imprudent hope
and focused desperation.

I stomp my foot
and they swim to the surface.
With mechanical precision,
I cast my line.

There is a tug,
and I let myself dream
that I've caught something big:
A semblance of connection.

A moment later,
I am greeted by a foe
who gruffly informs,
"No TV for a week."

Unbending rules
Have snapped my line.

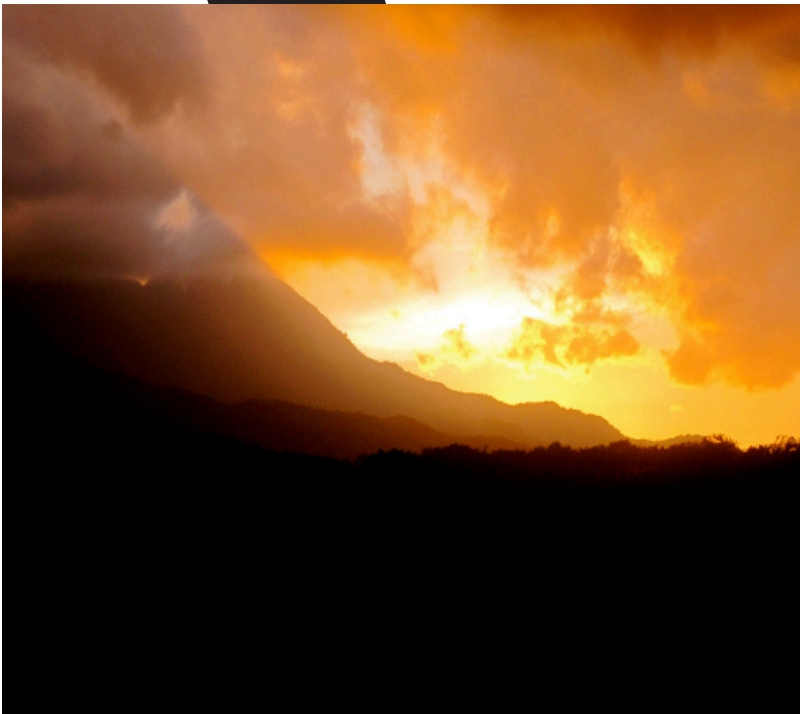
Companions

The air is stale,
unyieldingly oppressive,
unmoving and uncaring,
and heavy in my lungs.

The cement screams
in deafening dullness.
A message of emptiness
and irrecoverable purpose.

The light—the worst of them all.
Forever illuminating a reality
that I'd rather not know.
It penetrates my eyes
and burns white hot in my brain.

These are my only companions.
Concealed on the outside
but ever present
in my solitary world.



Mountains: Mindoro, Philippines
Carla Mavaddat

Part II: On Incarcerated Life

Hate

I would say I resent her,
but that's far too weak.
I hate her.

In your insulated world
you say hate all the time.
Without knowing, without feeling.

You hate traffic with vapid, passionless repetition.
You hate your boss, but you still shake his hand.

Real hate grows from the debilitating fear
that you are no longer your own.
That your life and your thoughts
belong to someone else.

Fear soon becomes
an unbearable tumor
that occupies the vacant real estate
where your humanity once thrived.

All that remains
is brutal, inexhaustible rage.
And very soon
someone becomes its target.

That is why
I truly hate the CO
who never makes eye contact with the animals she guards.

Swat

Blood pours from his body,
ravaged by the blows.
He is powerless,
pinned beneath two.

He moans for help,
and I start to move in response.
But gravity is too much.
I tell my arm to rise,
but it is still.

I think of the woman he killed,
the trouble he's caused.

I think of my children,
my wife,
and those lethal blades.

I think of how it would feel
to catch a knife
in my side.

So I call for SWAT
and watch the man slump.
See his eyes roll back
with the finality of death.

Maybe I could've stopped it,
but instead I watched on a grainy screen.

This poem was inspired by the experiences of Tammy Young, a prisoner at Taycheedah Women's Prison in Wisconsin. While incarcerated, Young "developed painful, bleeding sores on her scalp" from a MRSA staph infection. The Taycheedah medical staff failed to test Young for MRSA for eighteen months, even though she had frequently requested treatment for her condition. Young's story was made public during a 2006 class-action lawsuit that the American Civil Liberties Union brought against Taycheedah Women's Prison.¹

Taycheedah

My scalp is ripe and torn
with the deep red
boils that have burrowed
into its surface.

I told the guard about my pain
and the smears of blood on my pillow,
but she told me not to waste her time.
"This is prison not a goddamn resort,"
she needlessly reminded me.

Eventually, they would
find out that it was MRSA.
By then, of course,
it was too late.

Eighteen months had passed,
and my bacteria had spread through Taycheedah
like a wildfire of
bursting skin.

My only condolence
is that she too caught the flame,
and now feels the pain
just over her unsympathetic brain.

¹ The American Civil Liberties Union. "Women at Wisconsin's Taycheedah Prison Suffer Medical Neglect and Receive Worse Mental Health Care than Men."

The Show

Come one, come all,
the show is about to begin.
Where justice is served,
and man is punished for his sin.

The seats are packed,
full of ardent supporters.
All rooting for the same cause:
a restoration of order.

A father sits in the front,
his nose pressed to the glass.
He's brought his son
to this state-sponsored class.

The needle plunges
into the condemned's vein.

But the father notices
his son isn't entertained.
O what childish innocence
to question the inhumane!

Soon the boy will realize,
you reap what you sow.
He'll too sit back,
and just enjoy the show.

Freedom

I had longed for the outside,
built up into some mythical place.
Electric and dynamic,
teeming with excitement.

I soon realized,
that punishment persists.

It's hard to find a job,
When applications are designed
to label you and your kind.

Hard to learn
when you can't read.
Hard to love a child
who has never loved you.

Hard to start anew
when you're remembered only
for your greatest mistake.

Still, it's good to be free.

Part III: On Family

Child

Graduate,
make my mother proud,
raise my daughter.
These are things I'll never do.

I love you dear,
you made it,
you're free.
These are words I'll never hear.

Soft sheets,
your warm breath,
the cold tile in our bathroom.
These are things I'll never feel.

Redemption,
respect,
parole.
These are things I'll never have.

I pushed some drugs
and killed a thug
who murdered my friend.

These are things I did.
Things I'll be remembered for,
things I'll be condemned for,
forever.

Holiday Awe: Montreal, Canada
Carla Mavaddat



Blow

Blow

To my right eye.
Black and blue
for two weeks
because I said I hated
her new boyfriend.

Seven years old,
I didn't know any better.
I just wanted my dad back.

"But I saw him hit you, momma!"
I screamed through a mix
of missing and baby teeth.

She told me to "shut up."

Blow

The sweet, white powder
that exploded in my brain
and gave me joy
I'd never had.

Deal

On the corner
just outside my mom's
old place.
If I could get by
without the cash
I'd just stay home.
But I need the money.

And no one's going
to hire this ugly face.
With pits and scars
from years of meth,
crack, and mom.

Then the cops came.

I didn't want to go.
I wanted to fight,
to tell them
I used to be a straight-A stu-
dent.

A cute kid,
smart as a whip.
They wouldn't care.
They sat me
on the hard plastic seat
in the back of their car.
And they too
told me to shut up.

They went home that night,
and I made my call
to my mother,
who didn't pick up
and never came looking for
me.

Part IV: Divergent Viewpoints

The Other Side of the Road

I will never escape this.
She would have been nine today.
I would have made her
her favorite cake
and finally bought her the yellow lab
she always wanted.

Every day she thought of a new ambition.
Astronaut, ballerina, doctor, teacher.
"You can be anything you want!"
I promised her.

I want her back so much.
No one could possibly understand
what this feels like,
unless they have lived the emptiness
I now call life.

I want to kill him.
He is a depraved, soulless man.
He took the only person in the world
that I ever truly loved
and didn't even stop to hold
her bleeding head as she died
on the asphalt.

I walked onto the porch
to scold my baby for ignoring me.
When I saw her
my whole world collapsed.
They gave him involuntary manslaughter
and added just a bit more

because he couldn't be bothered to help.
It's not enough;
he deserves to die.
He deserves to be slaughtered.

I will never escape this.
I have been in here
slowly decaying
for two years.
My future died instantly
and left my body behind to rot.

I used to be a mechanic.
The "Best in Kansas city" was my moniker.
I earned every bit
of that distinction.

I want to go back,
but things will never be same.
My business is gone.
My family and friends have deserted me.

Why did she run in front of the car?
Why couldn't she look first?
I swear to god the sun blinded me;
I couldn't see
A damned thing.

I stopped for just one moment.
I could see that she was already gone.
Her mangled body in
its shredded jumper was lying lifeless.
All the blood left my stomach,
and my hands grew hot and sweaty.

I wanted to run to her.
I wanted to hold her and help
her,
but I was too weak.
So I drove.

When he gets out
she would have been thirteen.
She'll never see high school, col-
lege, or
any one of her dreams.
Her life ended on that pavement
because he was too distracted.

People tell me that she's
"in a better place now."
"It's alright," they say.
But they have no idea,
not a damn idea,
what this is like.

I will never escape this.

The next four years of my life
will be spent within these walls.
My daughter will be seventeen
when I leave.
She was eleven when I came in.

I would give anything to change what I
did.

I will never forgive myself,
never be forgiven.

I will always be "The Murderer."
Never again the "Best in Kansas City."

I will never escape this.



Chaos: Istanbul, Turkey
Carla Mavaddat

Born, Bred, and Bled for Prison

By Stephanie Tietz

Genetics

I share his blood
Why isn't that enough?
Is it for this blood
That he acts so rough?
Is it in the blood
What drives him so?
Is it in me too?
Does my mother know?

A Letter from the Judge
Bang! Bang! Bang bang bang! Bang!
Six shots rang out in the night
You emptied the clip
As you emptied your eyes
Your tears rained down
Uniting with the blood
Washing away two lives
For one

Bang, bang!
You sit before me
Your eyes have dried
As the blood has dried
But the pain, the sadness
Will never yield
My gavel seals your fate
Bang!



A Letter from the Judge

Bang! Bang! Bang bang bang! Bang!
Six shots rang out in the night
You emptied the clip
As you emptied your eyes
Your tears rained down
Uniting with the blood
Washing away two lives
For one

Bang, bang!
You sit before me
Your eyes have dried
As the blood has dried
But the pain, the sadness
Will never yield
My gavel seals your fate
Bang!

Bare Hands

These walls I've built since I was ten
Leaving the safety of the school yard
To prove I was tough on the streets

Another layer added at twelve
When I robbed some tourist for fun
With my friend's water gun

At fifteen I tried to break the walls
Bringing my pain to the surface
But the doctors brought me back

Until finally the last brick was placed
And these four solid walls surrounded me
Each crack, a reminder of chances lost



60 Watts

How many COs does it take to change a light bulb?
I guess we'll never know

Wall of Life: Mindoro, Philippines
Carla Mavaddat

Dear Father

Though I often wished
Death would find me
I never once asked
For Death to seek you

The dull, cold blade of hatred
You used to punish me
Cut through the tattered string
Of my humanity

It was you who taught me hatred
A man was killed to prove that true
But I will work for absolution
And I will be a better man than you

Absence

All this unrelenting time
 Buried beneath the ironclad walls of oppression
 Seeking to find the light
 Entering through the cracks of my words
 Not knowing where I am, who I am, when I am
 Can anybody hear me through the
 Emptiness of sound?

Existence

That look, those eyes
Once light with life
Now dark in death
A coffin with cold steel walls
Buries its victim
Beneath pale yellow lights
Driving the shattered into
The depths of his mind
How long can he survive
With that look, those eyes

Neglect

In the loud silence that follows death
Restless eyes now unseeing
Is this a nightmare, a dream?
Mind moves fast, mute in its thoughts
A cry for help, seems so lost
But through it all, limbs remain
Frozen

Escape

I dream of a place where green grass grows
Where rivers flow
And fireflies glow
As we undergo
The pain and the woe
That is the place where I will go

Solitary Confinement

Odysseus
To escape certain death
You asked to be "Nobody"
When Nobody escaped
Nobody was free

But me
I'd rather face that death
To be a Somebody
Than fear my own reflection
And see my demon is me

Odysseus
I know to save your life
You wished to be Nobody
But I would rather die
Than face the Nobody in me



Reflection: Antipolo, Philippines
Carla Mavaddat

Dear Mom

You asked me then
"Are you alright?"
I shrugged you off
Believing if I did not say anything
You wouldn't know
How much I hurt
How much I longed for you to care

I tried to look after myself
But the strain pushed me too far
And I broke

You can try to help me now
But the time has come and gone
If I had trusted you then
To care for me as I know you would have
My life may not be defined
By the empty walls that surround me
The only walls which have any hope
To fortify my broken soul

Who I Am

A life, frozen
Forever capturing
The one mistake
The one moment
Which defines my time
But myself
It does not define
I am more
Than that day
Than that mistake
I am more
Than what you see
My life, frozen

Songs of Cell Block C

There's a song we sing in Cell Block C
To pass the time
Create a life
Become famous in our own world

Singer: "A man came into my store one day looking for a watch."
Cell Block C: "A watch from the store?"
Singer: "A watch he wanted, clocked he got!"

Singer: "A man came into my bar one day lookin' for a shot."
Cell Block C: "A shot from the bar?"
Singer: "A shot he wanted, shot he got!"

Singer: "A man came into the store one day lookin' for a hanger."
Cell Block C: "A hanger from the store?"
Singer: "A hanger he wanted, hung he got!"

Singer: "A man came into the store one day looking for some bug spray."
Cell Block C: "Some bug spray from the store?"
Singer: "Some bug spray he wanted, off'ed he got!"

Singer: "A man came into the store one day looking for some hip-hop."
Cell Block C: "Some hip-hop from the store?"
Singer: "Hip-hop he wanted, beat he got!"

Singer: "A man came into the store one day looking for some golf balls."
Cell Block C: "Some golf balls from the store?"
Singer: "Some golf balls he wanted, clubbed he got!"

Singer: "A man came into the store one day looking for some soda."
Cell Block C: "Some soda from the store?"
Singer: "Some soda he wanted, popped he got!"

For he with the best lyrics
Gets the second bowl at dinner that night

Envy

We are living a life delayed
 These restless nights
 And fearsome sights
 You tell me not to be afraid
 Now as you take your last slow breath
The look of peace
 Of sweet release
 I stare in envy, longing for death

Who I Am

A life, frozen
 Forever capturing
 The one mistake
 The one moment
 Which defines my time
But myself
 It does not define
 I am more
 Than that day
 Than that mistake
 I am more
Than what you see
 My life, frozen

A Time to Live, A Time to...

The angels came for me
Late at night
Won't look me in the eyes

They bring me down dark halls
Graves of stone
I know that it is time

Soldiers, they lead me
All dead weight
To the chamber which stole my soul

They want me dead, but
Can't they see?
That I had died so long ago

Author's Note: These poems incorporate themes drawn from the American University honors class, Justice Stories, taught by Robert Johnson in fall, 2010.



Opatja, Croatia
Carla Mavaddat

Do Not Resuscitate

By Courtney Scantling

Ricky Taylor, February 2010

You think they're pretty? Like Christmas lights? Fireworks? Carnival lights? That's how I know you ain't never been in trouble with the law. To you, they mean safety. They create curiosity. But didn't anyone ever tell you curiosity killed the cat? Ain't nobody gonna kill this cat. Those red and blue flashing lights? Yeah, they're just like a carnival. Cops playing games with us – seeing how many they can get down in one night, watching us clowns run around like chickens with our heads cut off. It's entertainment for them. Welcome to my life. The most sadistic, twisted carnival there ever was.

It wasn't always like this. When my mom was alive – God rest her soul – I stayed out of trouble. That woman was my life, and I was hers. But no one asked me what to do with her when times got rough. I was 17 and was frequently told that “minors can't make medical decisions on behalf of their parents.”

Bullshit.

No one cared about Ethel Virginia Taylor the way I did. I took care of her when she was sick. I bathed her. I made the funeral arrangements. Where were all the “adults responsible” for her during all of that? Nowhere. They were nowhere to be found. They didn't want that responsibility – that burden – of taking care of her when things got really bad. But I'm the one who can't make medical decisions on behalf of my mother?

Like I said before –

Bullshit.

Maybe I wouldn't be sitting here in the back of this goddamned police car – after six years of running – thinking about how my life is over if they had let this “minor” make the decisions. I might hate those mocking red and blue flashes, but I'd rather be looking back at them over my shoulder as I run away, dodging flesh-piercing bullets than sitting shackled beneath them, bathed in red and blue shame.

Ethel Taylor, March 2004

“Your last option is a heart transplant,” I heard through the haze that had recently become my life. Hold on: Did I say life? I meant my existence. I've been in and out of this godforsaken prison for a year, five months, and 22 days. That's not a life, and I refuse to refer to it as such.

“And if she doesn't go through with it?” I heard my son shakily ask the doctor.

“Son, this really isn't a matter for children...maybe you could call...” the doctor

began.

"There is no one to call! There's only me! Look at her! Does she –"

"Ricky..." I tried to calm him down, but no more words came out. First my heart failed me, now my vocal cords?

"No, Mom, don't talk. Save your energy. Don't waste it on this asshole," he responded, glaring at the doctor.

"Richard Taylor, do not ever let me hear you speak to another adult like that in your life!" I somehow managed to get out, even though it came as more of a weak whisper rather than the firm, scolding tone I had intended to use.

"Sorry, mama," Ricky replied, eyes downcast. "I apologize, sir," he said, turning back to the doctor, "but there's only the two of us. We have no other family. I'm the only other person there is to tell...Please..." he begged.

Doctor Felix sighed and rubbed his eyes. "If she doesn't get the transplant," he paused and shifted uncomfortably, "she's only got about three to six months left." I heard Ricky gasp in disbelief. My eyes rolled to the ceiling, but not before I saw the tears forming in Ricky's eyes as he, too, tried to hide his emotion. He was so much like me. I couldn't bear to see him hurting.

"So, how soon can we do the transplant, Doctor?" I asked the ceiling, struggling to keep my voice from cracking and giving away my fear. Ricky grasped my hand and squeezed, anyway.

"As soon as we find a match, Mrs. Taylor."

"Well, start looking! Why are you still sitting here staring at me in this hideous hospital gown? Find me a heart!" I begged weakly, glancing over at my pride and joy who was still gazing out the window as Doctor Felix left us alone. It wasn't my time to go, not yet. Not when I still had something – someone – to live for.

The room suddenly seemed a lot smaller. Everything I cared about in this world was sitting in the chair next to my bed, holding my hand, lost in the deep recesses of his mind. I was not going to allow that boy to feel abandoned by the last person he had left. I squeezed my baby's hand. He jumped, as though he'd forgotten me, forgotten where he was. I was grateful he could find such a quick escape even in the middle of all this. Once he looked up, I saw deep, cold sadness in his once warm brown eyes that most adults never experience in their whole lives, much less any 17-year-olds still in high school.

"Ricky, don't give up on me yet. As long as we keep on fighting, there's always hope," I urged, desperately trying to exude confidence that I, myself, did not feel.

Ricky Taylor, May 2010

Before this ordeal, I had hope and faith in the criminal justice system. I could have sworn I heard one of my old high school teachers tell us that everyone had the right to a speedy trial. But allow me to let you in on a secret: she lied. When I realized that, I lost all faith in a system, which, like my teacher, existed only to make false promises. Everything about this trial has been excruciatingly slow. Every day, I walk into this pre-prison disguised as a courtroom where people who haven't been convicted yet for their own crimes judge me and try to deliver "justice," while really just feeling grateful that they are not the object of scrutiny for one moment. Attorneys argue over every miniscule detail just to one up each other, while I sit here lost, trying to fake remorse I'll never feel for the jury that made their decision before the real arguments even started.

The prosecuting attorney and my own fresh-out-of-law-school public defender, Lauren Hardie, have been playing this very same cat and mouse game for months now. Picking the jury, questioning witnesses and experts who debate the possibility of temporary insanity, and all the motions, objections, and admissions of evidence have worn me out, and I'm not even a fucking lawyer. Lauren is doing a great job, don't get me wrong, but I'm going to prison. I'm not an idiot; I've just come to accept it. The question is for how long. If they plan on giving me life, they might as well just kill me, because I refuse to die in prison. There is no dignity in such a death. Meanwhile, this miserable existence of the last several months has made me numb to the entire process. Sure, when the judge calls my name, I sit up straight and answer whatever questions she asks, but for the rest of the time, I just sit back, zone out, and let Lauren run the show. After all, if my mother could wait for a heart while enduring the worst pain imaginable, I can definitely suck it up and be patient in court.

Ricky Taylor, June 2004

Baby blue should be the copyrighted color of this hospital. Walls, gowns, blankets, napkins, plates and cups, files, nurses' scrubs, curtains – even the waiting room walls are baby blue. I don't know if this is supposed to be a soothing strategy or a way of creating the least amount of stress on patients, but there is nothing soothing about any color. Whether pacing anxiously in the waiting room or holding a vigil next to the bed of the most important person in your life, you are helpless to do anything other than simply waiting and staring at a sea of baby blue. In fact, the monotony actually does the exact opposite of soothing those of us who spend more time staring at blue walls than enjoying the comforts of our own homes. It drives us crazy, creating a trapped, claustrophobic feeling from which we cannot escape.

Doctor Felix entered the room, interrupting my reverie. I didn't bother looking away from the window. "Do you have good news for me, Doc?" I heard him pick up my mother's clipboard from the end of her bed, where she lay sleeping. I sensed his hesitation immediately; he knew nothing had changed on that damn clipboard in the last 24 hours. I finally dragged my eyes away from the window and back to the baby blue hell of the Taylor family. "Well?"

He replaced the clipboard, glanced at my mother, and then turned to me. "We found a match, but there were three people on the list before your mother," he hesitated again. "Are you sure there are no adults you can call to come help take care of her?"

"It has been a month and a half since you first asked me that, Doctor Felix. Do you not think I would have contacted them by now if there were any such adults? I'll be 18 in six months. Why is it so important you need an adult now?" I pried, though I was afraid of the answer.

He ignored my first question. "Your mother never completely filled out her paperwork, and we need a responsible adult to do it for her in case something goes wrong."

"In case 'something goes wrong?' Nothing's going to go wrong, Doctor! I can do it. Give it to me. No one else is coming to do it for her, and she obviously is in no state to do it herself," I pointed out, motioning to my mother, who was paler than I'd ever seen her and not moving at all. That's how she spent most of her time now: sleeping or staring off into the distance at something only she could see. Meanwhile, I would wait and wait and wait. I would wait for her to stir; I would wait for good news; I would wait for some sign that my mother had not merely become a shell of what she once was. "Like it or not, I'm the only one here to make these decisions," I reminded him.

Doctor Felix simply shook his head and walked out the door. I resumed staring at the window's baby blue border while my mother rested.

I hate that damn color.

Ricky Taylor, July 2010

"The defense rests, Your Honor," Lauren had announced yesterday at the end of our case. She had walked back to the table looking a little shaken, but determined. I was afraid of how successful this petite young woman would be at convincing the jury of my innocence during her closing statement, but she proved I had absolutely nothing to worry about. That girl knows how to use what the good Lord gave her. She used her small frame to make a stark contrast between the intimidating persona of the prosecutor and her own gentle disposition. The jury members ate it up, and each looked like their own daughter was begging and pleading with them to believe her over the mean playground bully. Hey, whatever works, right? Let's see the prosecutor beat that.

* * *

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, take a good hard look at this man,” he said, pausing. I hang my head in mock shame as the balding prosecutor begins his closing argument, leaning over the jury box and stretching his already too-tight three piece suit so much that I wonder if a button will pop right off into the eye of juror number six. I hope it does. Shit, let it take some of the focus off me for a few seconds. Then I can stop pretending to feel sorry for what I did. The prosecutor continued, motioning to where I sat next to Lauren. “Look at this sorry excuse for a man. He is not to be pitied. He is a cold-blooded murderer. You can rest assured that he does not want your pity, so do not waste it on someone so undeserving.” The stubby hand he used to point at me falls to his side as he begins to pace in front of the jury box. “This man, this defendant, this offender, this criminal, this murderer, this...monster...is not even worth our time, yet here we are, discussing his crime as though it was a ‘horrible mistake,’ as the defense would have you believe. Ladies and gentlemen, I don’t know about you, but to me, a mistake is spelling ‘criminal’ with two ‘m’s’ on an elementary school spelling test. A mistake is baking a cake with salt instead of sugar. A mistake is locking your keys and cell phone in your car with no way of getting them out. A horrible mistake is forgetting to pay your electric bill and sitting in the dark for 24 hours.”

“These are all things we do out of ignorance, or without meaning to,” he pauses yet again and walks toward me until that insecurely fastened button that once threatened the sight of juror number six, was pointing straight at me as though one false move would render me blind and bloodied. He then leans so close to me that I can smell the scotch he had in the judge’s chambers on his breath as he opens his mouth. “What the defendant did,” he begins, lowering his voice to be sure the jury was hanging on his every word, “was completely intentional. He was not ‘temporarily insane.’ How do I know, you ask? Because he knew enough to elude the law for six years! He was 100 percent aware of what he was doing at the time and he meant not to threaten; he meant not to slightly harm. He meant – ladies and gentlemen of the jury – to kill.” I clench my fists under the table, wanting to show him how much I “meant” to kill him. Lauren touches my arm under the table; I unclench my fists and watch him walk back to stand in front of the jury box. “Slaughtering four of your very own relatives only minutes after your late mother’s funeral is not a ‘horrible mistake.’ It was a bloodbath and a crime. But don’t just take my word for it: consider the evidence you’ve heard today.”

Ricky Taylor, August 2004

It’s been five months since that incompetent doctor told us my mother had three to six months to live. In that time, no one’s come to visit her. No one’s called to check and see how she’s doing. You’d think five months was enough time for these dumb doctors to stop

trying to find other family members. I've lost count of how many times he's asked who he should call. They're all dead. Aren't doctors supposed to understand the permanence of death? It's not like they're on an extended vacation and will be back soon. They're not even in prison and getting close to the end of their sentence. They're dead. And they're not coming back.

I was suddenly aware that a new doctor I hadn't seen before had entered the room and had already started talking to me, mistakenly assuming I had been listening the entire time.

"...really been trying, but it doesn't seem like we're going to get a match in time. We're actually really surprised she's managed to hold on for this long, especially now that her other organs have been affected..." I tuned back out and looked at my mother lying there in the same catatonic state she'd been in for the last couple months while her condition deteriorated. She had always refused to let anyone take care of her, and she had always been such a sore loser that I didn't expect her to be any different now that this illness was threatening her life. If she had to go out at all, she would go out putting up a damn good fight; none of that "It's my time to go" bullshit.

"...listening? Ricky? Have you heard anything I've been saying? I can come back later –"

"No," I responded, shrugging off the hand that had crept onto my shoulder at some point. "What do you want?" New doctor or not, I'd spent too much time in this hospital to bother with the niceties anymore.

"I was saying that we've located your father, Jonathan, and your uncles. If you want to see –"

"You what!? I told you all to stop looking months ago. You're lying. I don't have any uncles, and my father's dead! What the hell –" I trailed off, just processing the sentence I had kept him from finishing. "What do you mean 'If I want to see...?' Where are these dirty bastards?" I yelled, getting to my feet. "Who do they think they are? Why didn't I know about them? Why haven't they been here before now?" I roared, my voice getting louder and louder with each question.

"They're in the waiting room, Ricky. They wanted to give you the choice of whether or not..." I didn't hear the rest of what the rookie doctor had to say; I was already racing down the nauseating baby blue hallways back to the waiting room. What the hell were they doing here, uninvited? They sure as hell weren't about to step within 100 feet of my mother. Not if I could help it.

I burst through the doors into the waiting room, and stopped dead. My eyes immediately fell upon four tall men, all of whom glanced up at the sound of the stretcher I'd knocked over in my haste. I suddenly felt as though I had been run over by an 18-wheeler.

Three of them looked like my mother without hair or makeup. The tractor-trailer backed up and ran me over again when I looked up into the face of the fourth, a face I'd only seen in yellowed, tattered pictures of my mother's past. I couldn't move, much less speak.

"Richard..."

"Ricky," I automatically corrected the face from the pictures. So now I could talk? Where was my voice when I first laid eyes upon this heartless monster?

He smiled. "Ricky, I don't know where to start..." he began, reaching out a hand to me.

I backed up instinctively. "Then don't," my voice cracking as I finally answered. "Walk out those doors right now, and don't come back."

He exchanged looks with the men I could only assume were my uncles. "Ricky, I only want the best for your mother, can you believe that?" He pleaded, feigning sincerity.

"The same way you believed my mother when she told you she was carrying your child!? When she was carrying me!?" my voice filled the tiny waiting room, bouncing off the blue walls in the confined space. "The same way you made her believe for almost 18 years that you were dead!? Get the fuck away from me!" I screamed at one uncle who had stupidly begun to walk toward me, hands outstretched like a cop handling a hostage situation.

"Son, why don't you go back to your mother while I talk to your father about your mother's care?" I heard from behind me. Doctor Felix had silently entered the waiting room, still covered in splotches of blood from a surgery he must have just finished.

"What were you thinking bringing them here!? That is not my father; I have no father! My father abandoned me – abandoned us – when my mother was only four months pregnant! He doesn't get to make decisions! I do!" Two nurses firmly grasped my arms, one on either side, but I didn't fight back. Doctor Felix walked past me, toward the four disgusting men now behind me. I walked with the nurses who had just let go of me, when a stronger hand grabbed my forearm. I spun around, only to look straight up into the face of the man claiming to be my father. "Get your filthy hands off me," I said, trying to wrench my arm from his grasp. Why was everyone touching me so much today? Do I look like I want to be touched?

"Ricky, they just need me to make some medical decisions regarding your mother's care, and then I'll disappear from your life if that's what you want."

"It doesn't matter what I want!" I barked at him. "But I'm warning you: if you all kill my mother, I will kill all of you." He dropped my arm without a word and stared as I left with the nurses.

Ricky Taylor, July 2010

“...my mother, I will kill all of you.’ You all heard Doctor Felix testify as to the last words anyone ever heard the defendant say to his father. Ladies and gentlemen, this was, without a doubt, a premeditated slaughter of four individuals who only wanted the best for their family. The defense wants you to believe that the defendant was the victim here – that he is guilty only of caring for his mother too much. Do you know what I say to that? We all care about our mothers or fathers or other friends and family members, too, but we don’t go around blaming people for their death and committing murder as revenge!” the prosecutor shouts enthusiastically from across the courtroom. I glance at the jury. Every last one is slightly nodding their head in agreement. He has them in the palm of his hand; whatever sentence he asked for, they would deliver it. By the look on Lauren’s face and the way her pale hands are shaking, I can tell she agrees. I watch as the prosecutor walks back toward the jury box, resuming his post in front of juror number six and lowering his voice, obviously going for dramatic effect. “You’ve heard what every other witness has had to say today. You’ve heard opposing counsel’s desperate defense for temporary insanity. So now, hear this: the defendant’s personal code of justice can clearly be summed up as ‘A life for a life.’”

“I say if that’s what he wants, let’s give it to him.”

Ricky Taylor, September 2004

“What’s wrong with her? Tell me the truth!” I insisted, following Doctor Felix around my mother’s suddenly overcrowded room. Extra nurses and doctors surrounded her bed, barking out instructions and demanding things I couldn’t even pronounce. “Why are all these people in here? Did you find a heart? Are they getting her ready for surgery? Is she dying? Why won’t you answer –”

“Ricky!” Doctor Felix stopped abruptly and whirled around, grabbing my shoulders and shaking me. “Your mother is sick – just as sick as she has been the last six months. These people are all trying to help her get better. You will know as soon as we find a heart, but right now –”

“So you didn’t find a heart?”

“Ricky!” he yelled so loudly this time that a couple of doctors and nurses glanced up from hustle and bustle around my mother. “Right now, you are only keeping us from doing our work. Now, go with Nurse Michelle, and –”

Doctor Felix never finished his sentence. One of the seven machines in the room had started to beep faster and faster. He turned back towards the bed, our conversation immediately forgotten. The team of doctors rushing around my mother now moved as though they’d been put into hyper mode, yelling things to each other over the sudden commotion.

I couldn't look from one doctor to another fast enough. Everything was a blur of baby blue mixed with flashes of metal medical tools. A firm hand pulled me backwards – Nurse Michelle, I remembered in my haze. I fought back. If something was wrong, I should be there. I was all she had left. I heard Nurse Michelle call to someone. I needed to get to my mother. She needed me. Another nurse joined the first. Together, they pulled me out the door, but not before I heard the dangerous beep-beep-beep-beep-beep become that one fatal noise no one wants to hear.

Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeep.

I stopped fighting. I stopped kicking and screaming at the nurses and looked up. Everything was in slow motion. The doctors had all stopped moving. Why weren't they helping her? I was subconsciously aware of someone still tugging on my arm. My eyes met those of Doctor Felix, and my legs collapsed from under me. I was now on the ground, staring at the ceiling and barely aware that a sea of doctors was now surrounding me as if I were the patient. Ricky! Ricky! I heard in my haze. I saw Doctor Felix kneel down next to me, dropping his clipboard on the polished tile with a reverberating clang. I saw "Do Not Resuscitate" stamped across the top of the form, followed by an unfamiliar signature: Jonathan Taylor. Jonathan Taylor? My mind reeled, thinking of the conversation he'd likely had with Doctor Felix the month before when we first met.

Ricky, can you hear me? Ricky?

This was his fault. He made the decision, and there was nothing I, nor my mother, could do about it.

He's in shock. They didn't get him out of the room fast enough.

She wasn't coming back. That's it. The end. Do not resuscitate. I felt myself being lifted from the ground and carried somewhere else.

Put him in the room next door.

My eyes shut, but "Do Not Resuscitate" and Jonathan Taylor's signature swam in front of my them. He wasn't going to get away with this.

Ricky? Come on, Ricky!

Do not resuscitate. I felt myself slipping away.

Do not resuscitate.

Do not resuscitate...

Ricky Taylor, July 2010

I'm dead. I'm so dead, I think, watching the jury file in from their deliberation. Three hours? Isn't there some sort of minimum time requirement for these things? No one looks at me. That was a bad sign. Lauren nudged me. I realized everyone was standing up waiting for the jury to deliver their verdict. I stood, knowing what I was about to be given. I didn't even

want to hear it. Could we just do this privately – just send everyone else in the courtroom home and have a bailiff handcuff me while he whispers my sentence in my ear? Did the whole world really need to hear how my life was about to end at only 23 years old? Was that too much to ask?

“Madam Foreman has the jury reached a verdict?” the judge asked. I guess it was too much to ask.

“We have, Your Honor. We, the Jury, find the defendant, Mr. Richard Taylor, guilty...”

* * *

Life without parole. I know what you're thinking. At least it's not the death penalty. Right? Of course, I'm right. Because you don't know that they're one and the same. The outcome – death – is the same. The amount of time that goes by is the same. Death by execution isn't immediate. Convicted felons sentenced to the death penalty spend more time in here filing appeals than they spent on the outside as a free man. The only difference is how the sentence makes the jury feel. They want to feel like they weren't directly responsible for killing a man, regardless of how guilty they think he is. They want to go to bed every night believing that justice has been served and that men like me will spend the rest of our lives behind bars. They think they've done me a favor.

The truth? They have killed me. They haven't done me any favors. They haven't saved my life. They've decided to force me to spend the rest of my existence in prison. They might as well have put the gun to my head and pulled the trigger. I won't be able to get married, nor have kids. I won't grow old surrounded by my family. I'm going to die here. Alone. They made that decision for me, and there's nothing I can do about it.

I won't be coming back.

That's it.

The end.

Do not resuscitate.

Stuck in Lodi Again

By Emma Lydon

Jeremy:

Jeremy peered through the thin window in his cell. He put his hands on either side of the window, kneeling on his bed with his face pressed against the Plexiglas. Sometimes, if he sat there long enough, he could almost taste the New Mexico heat. The toxic, sterilized air conditioning pumped into his room through the vents. Any freshness was eradicated long before the industrial air reached his room.

He would sit there, looking out, until first his knees cramped up, and then his legs screamed under his weight. Usually, the pain of isolation outweighed his physical discomfort. Jeremy gazed out over the unused basketball courts, over the maximum-security checkpoint, to the sidewalk, just outside the prison. A lone figure stood there, waving a sign. Today, it read "End the Military-Industrial Complex NOW!" Every day the same woman – delicate, with flowing prairie skirts and long salt-and-pepper curls – stood outside the facility with a different sign.

Jeremy felt uncharacteristically jumpy. He figured twitchiness was a side effect of solitary for three years, but he wasn't one to lose his cool. He had gone through his usual coping mechanisms – pacing the cell back and forth, exercise routines, watching television, reading, cleaning, and looking outside – but nothing worked. No matter how hard he tried to distract himself, today the past wanted to come rushing in and nothing he did could prevent it.

A scene flashed through his head. Eight-year-old Jeremy sat in the back seat of his father's Ford station wagon. It was the early nineties and his town, this town, was changing. Next to Jeremy a platoon of GI Joes were also buckled into their seats, tired after a long battle. They were driving back into Lodi, and passed a large construction site.

"Slow down, slow down," young Jeremy begged, straining against his seatbelt to see through the window. "Look at the tractors. And the construction workers. I want one just like that," he exclaimed, pointing at a bright yellow hard-hat.

His dad smiled back at him. "I'll look for one," He promised.

"What are they building? It looks bi-iiig," Jeremy commented, drawing out the last word for emphasis.

His dad looked back with a frown. "Well, you see," he said slowly, considering his words. "They're building a prison. For bad guys."

Jeremy's face lit up. "Really? Am I gonna see them? If I caught a criminal, would he go there? This is soooo exciting!"

"I don't know. The prisoners are going to be inside, so you probably won't see them. But yes, it is exciting. It'll be good for the town. And we'll have more business at the store."

“I don’t know. The prisoners are going to be inside, so you probably won’t see them. But yes, it is exciting. It’ll be good for the town. And we’ll have more business at the store.”

Oh, the store. Jeremy could still remember every inch of his father’s beloved store. The spartan sign outside read “Lodi General Store” in peeling green paint. Jeremy’s mother used to beg his father to let her repaint it. “Just let me spiff it up. It will be more appealing.” His father would shake his head and laugh, a deep, booming noise. “I don’t want it to be appealing. It’s not a store,” he tried to explain, “it’s a joint.”

Jeremy knew, even as a child, what his father meant. It was just your basic neighborhood spot – somewhere to get toilet paper and toothpaste, candy on holidays and the occasional snack. The only place in town, it had poor lighting and old dusty shelves which put out the wares in no particular order. But its provinciality was at the root of its charm for his father, who could imagine no better job than running his store. He would hire neighborhood boys to stock the shelves, boys who taught Jeremy to spit and swear. His father would chat up the neighbors – the town was so small, no more than a couple thousand people, that his dad always knew everyone. The busiest time was Saturday mornings, before the sun had risen. Men from all over the county congregated at the Lodi General Store to buy fishing lines and bait. These men, usually stoic and silent, would talk and laugh in the pre-dawn light. The topics they discussed – sports and fishing, occasionally business – held no particular significance for Jeremy, but he woke up early to be there every Saturday.

He would sit behind the counter, usually with his best friend Leo, in silence, as if they were watching some secret ritual. Those mornings in his store were the only times Jeremy ever saw the men of Lodi laugh. After school Jeremy would play in the aisles. Sometimes Jeremy and Leo would hide behind the counter in front to spy on the girls in their school when they came in with their parents. They played cops and robbers, running between the aisles of the store, hiding behind pyramid displays of canned corn and life size cutouts of the Michelin Man.

He shook himself out of his reverie. Jeremy’s home now could not be more different from his family’s joint in Lodi. Maximum Security Prison in Lodi was a modern, sterilized, high-technology center for California’s most dangerous and top-priority criminals. Now Jeremy watched Lodi through Plexiglas.

Elinor:

Outside, Elinor was melting in the unrelenting heat. Her simple sign – thick black sharpie on plain white poster board, stapled to a 12-inch wooden stick – weighed down her arm. She stopped pacing in front of the prison to sit down on the bench and wipe her brow. On August days like today, Elinor found herself asking why she still stood out here. Twelve August summers she had marched outside, protesting the empire before her. She didn’t know why – after more than a decade she knew the guards, greeting them warmly on their way to

and from work – it was more than clear to her that she was making no difference. Yet the consistency comforted her. The protesting allowed her an activity, a place to be. She was expected to arrive every morning. Three years ago, driven to bed with pneumonia, a CO had arrived at her house with a “Get Well Soon” card, signed by the guards from Cell Block F. One comment, left by a fresh-faced recruit, had read “We miss you on the front lines!” Considering this, the irony of her sign today, “End the Military-Industrial Complex NOW!” was not lost on her. Elinor knew that she, more than anyone, benefitted from this system. If tomorrow, Lodi High-Security Prison was shut down, the guards could find other jobs, doing other things. The inmates would be transferred to a different prison – most likely a better prison – to start all over again. Only she, Elinor, would be left without a next step.

Yes, the hypocrisy irritated her, but to be honest almost everything irritated Elinor these days. She hated Christmas music, and people who drove too fast in residential areas. Parents who brought their big, boisterous families to restaurants where she was trying to enjoy a quiet dinner were a particular object of Elinor’s ire. And this bloated prison system that infected everything it touched. That was the worst – Lodi High-Security Prison – a giant cement coffin for four thousand men.

Elinor remembered the announcement of the prison complex. It was the end of the 20th Century, and everything had a fresh sheen. Lodi Prison Complex was the answer to the dreams of the town. Backwards, poor, old-fashioned, Elinor remembered how trapped she felt as a young housewife. Her noisy teenage boys tramped all over the house leaving destruction in their wake. She worked part time as an elementary school art teacher, the culmination of a B.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design, where she had graduated with honors. “Elinor MacDonald is one of the most talented sculptors to pass through RISD,” read one recommendation for graduate school, back when she thought she might actually make it to graduate school. But instead she got married and had three sons in four years. By her 26th birthday Elinor’s dream had been replaced by a thoroughly average life in Lodi, California.

That’s not to say her life was bad. She had married young not out of desperation, but rather love. Tim MacDonald was a heartbreaker – good looking, fast-talking, and easily bored. He was a poet before he was drafted, but came back from Vietnam with medals and an unrelenting cynicism. They met in a bar. Elinor blamed her inner artist for loving him, the quintessential bad boy. A month after Elinor’s graduation, they packed up their life in New England and headed out west to California.

Their California dreams didn’t end up as planned. Elinor realized that dreams never turned out quite right, but the course of their lives seemed particularly cruel. Three kids, eleven jobs, and eighteen years later, Tim was no longer the dashing wild child he had once been. Stuck in Lodi, he drank incessantly and ranted to Elinor about his Vietnam days. . He couldn’t get work, but resented Elinor’s measly salary in her part-time job.

And then the prison came to Lodi.

Tim was determined to get a job at Lodi High-Security Prison. Elinor remembered the first time they ever discussed the prison. Tim was happy for once, optimistic about his chances. "I'm army, after all," he informed her, "I'm exactly what they are looking for. I mean, can you imagine anyone any more qualified? I was made to be a prison guard. That's what every ex-army does. I don't know why I never thought of it."

Elinor smiled at him. "It's a great opportunity," she said tentatively, "and there are lots of positions available. Just don't get your hopes up. People can be really stupid sometimes."

He kissed her cheek. "You worry too much. This prison is the best thing that's ever happened to this family."

He didn't get the job, of course. They were supposed to send a letter, informing applicants if they'd been hired. Elinor came home after work and dropping the boys off at football. Tim had taken in the mail. The television was on in the den – too loud. Everybody Loves Raymond was on, and the television was the only light in the room. It was only five thirty, but it was late November, a week before Thanksgiving, and it was already dark outside.

Tim lay on the floor, in front of the couch. He'd shot himself in the head, and his face lay in a pool of blood. Next to him, on the coffee table he had built, was the letter. The applicant pool was large, it explained, but he should feel free to apply again when there were more openings. And it finished, in the most polished, bureaucratic language, "Sincerest Regards, Elliot McClintock, Dean of Corrections, Lodi High-Security Prison."

When the police came they looked for a suicide note. Elinor tried to explain to them that the letter on the coffee table was the note, but they didn't understand.

"It was just a job, ma'am," one deputy told her. "People don't kill themselves over a job."

"Tim did." She replied flatly.

Elinor started protesting the next week. Living off the savings, and then the boys sent her money. She quit her job at the school. When the school asked why – a rather presumptuous question considering the circumstance, Elinor thought – she explained that statistically, one in 31 people end up in prison and she couldn't teach knowing that many of these children she taught now would live across town in the prison in ten years. They didn't understand.

But she was right. Elinor had kept track of the children who went from Lodi Elementary School to Lodi High-Security Prison. There were four – the Maxwell twins for drug possession and intent to distribute, Felix Martinez for spousal abuse, and Jeremy Atwood for grand larceny. She taught all four boys, and there was no indication, at least not in elementary school, that those boys would end up there. The Maxwell twins had a disinterested, bi-polar mother and no father, so they were always getting into scrapes, but they were very popular

boys that stuck together. Elinor never thought to worry about them. Felix Martinez liked to roughhouse, and he talked back, but his artwork was beautiful. She knew it had been hard for him to keep up in school with a family that spoke only Spanish, but he didn't stand out from the many other Latino boys in the school that were all met with these challenges. And Jeremy may have been the most unexpected – he was solidly middle class, his parents were a happy couple, they took Jeremy with them to church nearly every Sunday. Elinor couldn't explain it.

She didn't know what made good boys turn bad, or even if they had turned bad, but she knew that the prison was to blame for their stark futures. Thinking about those boys inside boiled Elinor's blood even more than the hundred-plus heat outside. "End the prison-industrial complex NOW!" she shouted as she got back to work.

Leo:

Leo was late for work again. There had been a disagreement over the frosted flakes at the breakfast table, and Leo had to rush to change and took a screaming unfed infant to preschool. And now he was late. His usual parking spot was taken and he was forced to drive to the other side of the complex to park. He rushed passed an exhausted-looking elderly woman holding a large sign. In this heat, however, rushing felt like trying to doggie paddle through a bowl of molasses. The air was too thick to inhale – he felt the oxygen melt on his tongue, leaving the tired taste of dust and concrete.

He slipped through security, flashing his badge. The shift before him would wait until he arrived before they left – there was a minimum number of prison guards that had to be in each complex at any given time. He smiled apologetically at the people waiting from the early shift, who left grumbling about incompetence.

"What took you man?" asked James Hinden. Hindy, as the guards knew him, was a coarse character, viewed with trepidation even by fellow guards. He was notorious to the inmates, who universally feared and hated Hindy. Leo was no softie – but even he admitted that the situation for prisoners in Lodi was a little pathetic. These hardened criminals dissolved in solitary – feral, vicious creatures that folded into shells of humans, driven insane by the endless company of their own minds. For the truly insane there was no greater torture, the stimulation of others having been the only anchor for their fragile minds. Leo would see them while he did his rounds, pacing back and forth. The physical walls of the prison were redundant – the inmates were already trapped within the walls of their own minds.

But Hindy saw none of this. Leo had known him since childhood – the bully on the playground. Leo, a sensitive, poetic child, had fallen victim to Hindy's more brutish tendencies in the past. He tensed up. Leo knew that an excuse about a misbehaving baby would not go over well.

“Whatever, dude. Don’t worry about it.” Leo snapped. “Let’s just get to work.”

They walked down the long cellblock. Men, caged animals, paced back and forth. Leo had taken the baby to the zoo over the weekend, and as much as he tried he could not avoid the inevitable comparison. Zoos had changed since he was a child – the tiny metal cages had been replaced with wooded enclosures, which included private areas for the animals and specially prepared meals. Prisons had changed as well. No private areas for the inmates – their enclosures had been replaced by spartan concrete boxes.

While Leo usually peered unabashedly into the cells of inmates, passing Jeremy Atwood he looked at his feet. In the three years since Jeremy arrived at Lodi High-Security Prison, not once had Leo looked in on him. He knew, from talk by guards, that Jeremy was a model inmate, a level 5 – he had been given all the privileges an inmate could earn, and he was months, if not weeks away from being transferred to a prison to be mainstreamed with the general prison population. Leo couldn’t wait for Jeremy to leave.

Jeremy Atwood was Leo’s best childhood friend. Neighbors, they had passed their childhood in Jeremy’s father’s store, a wonderful, small-town joint. Both small and dark-haired, they easily passed for brothers, a perception that was furthered by each other’s constant company. Together they boys had hatched a plan to leave Lodi – they pooled their money from an early age, planning to buy a truck and drive it away, as fast as they could. The Creedence Clearwater Revival song, Lodi, which had effectively put the Lodi travel industry out of business, had become a theme song for the teenage boys, who were, indeed, “Stuck in Lodi again.”

As they grew up the plan grew more refined. Both bright boys, they had thrived under the tutorship of an interested English teacher who encouraged them to apply to college. Leo’s parents had never been to college, but Jeremy’s mother had done a year at Chico State and provided the impetus for the boys’ dreams.

The dreams never came to fruition. Their freshman year of high school the prison was completed – as was the first wave of construction for housing developments. The next year a Barnes and Noble, housing for another 10,000 people, and a second high school took root in Lodi. But even then, as their town changed around them, the boys continued to plot their escape. Lodi had changed, but it was no more desirable than it had ever been. Even the bowling alley had been torn down, replaced by a bar for the prison guards to stop at on their way home from work. Junior year the Target went up right outside of town. Leo reckoned that this was the beginning of the end. Jeremy’s family plummeted from solidly middle class to barely hanging on. Not even a year later the Lodi General Store went out of business. While the prison

wrecked havoc on the lives of his next-door neighbors, for Leo's family it opened up new opportunities. His father got a job – his first in five years – at the prison. It was janitorial, but Leo's father embraced the town's economic transition whole-heartedly.

"We're prison men now," he told Leo. "It's where our future is. It's more than just a job, it's a profession."

Leo didn't bother to explain that it wasn't the right profession. He didn't come from a place or people where choosing a profession had ever been an option. Jeremy didn't finish out the year. He got a girl pregnant and took a job at the Target that put his family out of business to pay the bills. Leo graduated and took a job as a prison guard. A year later, Jeremy was locked up for bank robbery – a last-ditch effort to save his family. By then, both boys' futures were sealed.

Still, Leo couldn't bear to look in on Jeremy when he walked past. He knew that Jeremy had done bad, but he wasn't a bad guy. Hindy knew the past – he had bullied the two of them together after all – but he had never commented on it before. Today, however, he was looking to get back at Leo for his sharp tone.

"Poor Jeremy," Hindy started out, with an unsympathetic shake of the head. "That must've been rough. With the little boy and everything, right?"

"Yeah, I guess." Leo turned away. He did not want to have this conversation.

"And his wife. I've seen her around. She's a looker. They met in high school, right? Do you ever see her?"

Leo really wished Hindy would stop asking questions. His piggish blue eyes, small and too close together, glistened as he watched Leo squirm.

"Yeah, they met in high school. But I haven't seen her in years." That was a lie. They'd had pie on Tuesday. Lilla, the wife, was still very close with Leo, a relationship neither of them was keen to admit to anyone. Leo even spent a great of time with the boy, Phillip. They mostly stayed indoors – lest someone see them together – where they would play with legos, wrestle, and read books.

Leo sometimes felt bad for Lilla. The most beautiful girl in Lodi, she had been an object of the boys affection from a young age. They used to spy on her when she came into the store with her mother. By the time they entered high school, Jeremy's dashing looks and sweet temperament had won him Lilla's affection. Leo and Lilla grew close over the years, and even after Jeremy was sent away Leo couldn't bear to break ties.

She was visiting today – she had told him during his visit on Tuesday. Until this time she had managed to avoid scheduling visits when Leo was on duty, but it was Phillip's birthday and he wanted to visit with his father. Leo just hoped that Jeremy would be so distracted by his family that he wouldn't see him.

Lilla and Phillip:

It was Phillip's fourth birthday. Lilla was exhausted – she had been working double shifts at Target to pay for the party she was throwing for him. But before his big birthday extravaganza, Lilla had promised Jeremy that she would bring Phillip to Lodi Prison to visit his father.

She walked down the hallway to Phillip's room. He was asleep, tucked under a hand-made quilt that depicted jungle animals frolicking in nature. The giraffes towered above yawning lions, whose paws touched the trunks of a large group of sleeping elephants. She had sewn the quilt herself, by hand, during the last few months of high school after she learned she was pregnant. Jeremy and she got married the day after she graduated high school – she was already five months pregnant.

Lilla woke Phillip with a soft touch. "Hey sweetie, good morning," she said softly. Lilla always spoke softly. She figured it was the product of living in Lodi – the unbearable heat prevented most people from displays of excess emotion. Lilla figured it took all the energy anyone possessed just to make it through the days, it made little sense to expend it on anything unnecessary.

"Hi Mommy!" Phillip said with a bright grin. He always woke up happy, wrapped in his safety quilt.

"Do you know what today is?" She asked.

"Oh, goodness!" Phillip exclaimed, "It's my birthday, isn't it?"

"Yes darling, it is. Are you excited for your big party?"

Phillip nodded, chewing on his star wars pajamas. "All my friends are coming, right?"

"Right. Okay, get up. We have to go see your Daddy so he can wish you happy birthday too. And then we're going to come back here and eat lots and lots of cake."

Phillip leapt out of bed. "I'm getting ready right now," he promised.

"Good. Your clothes are set out on top of your dresser."

As Phillip slipped on his tan corduroy pants and striped sweater, Lilla thought back to his previous birthdays. Jeremy had missed them all, entering prison three weeks before Phillip turned one. They had been so excited for his first birthday; Jeremy had already ordered an ice cream cake. But then Jeremy had been caught robbing a bank and he was sent to prison. Phillip didn't get his party.

Lilla chose her clothes carefully. As much as she loved seeing Jeremy, she hated visiting the prison. Lodi Prison had a feeling of death surrounding it. Even if people made it out alive – which was rare – their souls were usually destroyed from being alone for so long. Lilla put on her favorite necklace, a fragile gold locket given to her by her mother for her sixteenth birthday. With it she wore a light summer dress, tan with red and blue flowers, and a large straw hat with a red bow.

She re-entered Phillip's room. "How do I look?" she asked with a twirl.

"Real pretty!" he replied with a smile.

"Alright, then. Let's hit the road, Jack."

"And dont'cha come back no more, no more!" Phillip added.

Jeremy:

It was time to see his family. The guards came to his room to get him. There was a knock on his cell door – an unusual courtesy in prison – and he couldn't help wondering who would be so gracious.

"Come in." Jeremy yelled out.

The guards entered. He recognized one without pause. Hindy was the most hated guard in Lodi Prison, just as he had been the most hated boy on the Lodi Elementary schoolyard. The other guard was slight, and hidden behind Hindy's bulk.

"You ready?" Hindy asked gruffly. "If you don't hurry you're going to miss your visit."

"Let's go," Jeremy replied, throwing his arms in the air in a sort of surrender. As they left the cell Jeremy finally glimpsed the other guard, and couldn't help letting out a small gasp.

"Leo?" He asked, his voice coming out in a whisper.

Leo:

The next few moments were not the proudest time in Leo's life. He heard Jeremy's piteous whimper, but pretended not to. They were close to the visiting room anyways, and he figured it was easier to not do the whole emotional thing.

The trouble started the moment after they entered the visiting room. Another inmate, having just finished a visit, had been made aware of Hindy's presence and came packing the means for revenge. His shank, a fierce knife made from a chiseled toothbrush, pierced Hindy's chest with surprising force. Leo, who had waited by the door while Hindy brought Jeremy to his seat, grabbed his taser. He rushed into the thicket of bodies, his taser held before him – a brandished sword of sorts.

Afterwards he realized what a bad idea that had been, but in the moment it was his only solution. He had never liked Hindy, but an attack on a prison guard, any prison guard, was an attack on the whole institution. And Leo was part of the institution now. He was blinded by the crush of bodies, and with his hand, located the offender. The taser was turned all the way up. He tased Jeremy instead, hitting him squarely in the chest. Jeremy collapsed onto the ground.

"Oh god." He said, in a whisper not unlike the one Jeremy had uttered only moments before.

Elinor:

As Elinor packed up to leave, she heard the sound of sirens. An ambulance arrived and several EMTs rushed out carrying a defibrillator between them. Elinor shook her head. Just another death in this industrial coffin.

When she was younger Elinor would categorize each day as successful or unsuccessful. She stopped doing that years ago, after she came to the conclusion that she was honestly making very little impact. Now instead she spent each day reminding herself why she was fighting.

First she thought about the taint of the prison in Lodi – the bookstores and developments built on prison money, the favorite fishing lake converted into part of a golf course. She thought about all of the prison checks in the mail for the men and women who worked in Lodi High-Security every day. She thought of the men, thousands of them, locked up in cages inside, screaming to get out. And finally, she remembered her husband sprawled out in front of the television, the gun still in his hand.

Elinor took one last look at the prison, a towering complex that was the skyline in Lodi. Guards were leaving as their shifts ended. A few raised their hands in greeting. She smiled back. “See you tomorrow,” she promised.



Hope: Antipolo, Philippines
Carla Mavaddat

Call me Ishmael

By Ellen Miller

“Call me Ishmael,” he says, “and I will tell you a story, a story that you may question. You may find that you do not believe this story, and yet I assure you that it rings with more truth than the movies children today watch like Alice and Wonderland and Beauty and the Beast. You will say, “No, this cannot happen in our world, our world filled with free societies and individual rights. But I tell you that it can happen. That it does happen. Because it happened to me. We live in ignorance, going to religious services on the weekends, reading the paper with our Starbucks in one hand as we prepare to start our forty hour work week, and god, doesn’t it suck that we only get two weeks off a year? Some people would be grateful for that, I tell you. Some people have not lived to tell their stories, and it is theirs and mine that I beg of you to hear tonight. Open your heart and I will tell you a story of sandy dunes, heroism, and fear. Sit down, young ones, and perhaps your generation will be able to make a difference in this situation.

⌋

The days pass slowly. Each day sliding away, ticking time off his sentence and his life. Fifteen years the sentence. Seven years before that. Seven years in which he had not seen his wife, the child they had made growing in her belly. His daughter, a stranger to him. Betrayed by his own government and people, he asks what he has left in this world. When he finally is released-- provided he isn’t killed first-- his daughter, his baby, would be grown up, married.

⌋

He remembers the day that they came, pounding on his door, yelling loudly, waking the neighbors. He remembers soothing his children back to sleep, convincing his wife to wait in their bedroom while he dealt with the person at the door.

He remembers how his home looked as they ripped it apart, shattering picture frames and ripping canvases hanging on the walls. He remembers the inky blackness of the night as they dragged him to their vehicle. He remembers the wail of his children as they flew to the front door, trying to figure out what was going on.

He remembers.

⌋

“Call me Ishmael,” he says, “and I will tell all, how they stole my life from me before it even really began. How they took me away from my children, reduced me to nothing. How I am a pathetic shell of the man I used to be, could have been.”

⌋

They came like a thief in the night, no warning that they were on the way to destroy his life. That's how it always was. Watching. Waiting. Like a snake, slowly coiling back, waiting for the perfect moment to strike its prey. No one was safe anymore; the government was too paranoid for that. First the political opposition. Then the journalists. Now the citizens. Would there be an end in sight?
Inshallah.

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He imagines what he would do if he were ever to be released. Kiss the ground, kiss his wife, kiss his two sons and his baby daughter. Spin in ecstasy. But all while watching over his shoulder, ever conscious that "out of prison" did not equal freedom.

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He imagines a free nation, like America. He imagines freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, even freedom of religion. He imagines a better life for his sons and daughter. He imagines utopia.

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Five years later he has abandoned hoping about the future. He has abandoned all images of a free society, of a utopia. Because wasn't that the point of the book? That it couldn't exist? He couldn't remember anymore.

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"Call me Ishmael," he says, "and I will tell you how day turned into night, light into darkness."

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While the beatings they put him through are painful, it is the separation from his family that is the true torture. He misses them. He misses the way his wife's dark hair falls like a curtain in front of her face when she leans down to pick one of their children up. He misses his children whispering loudly in the mornings, arguing about which cartoons to watch. He misses soccer games, going to the mosque, celebrating monumental life events. He misses laying down to sleep knowing what tomorrow will bring.

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Five years after that he begins to battle overwhelming depression, beating it back as if with bludgers from a Harry Potter novel. He beats and beats but it is always there, on the fringe, waiting for the opportune moment to attack him at his most vulnerable: a birthday, a holiday, his anniversary. No matter how optimistic he tries to be, he can't anymore. Has his wife remarried? Are his children healthy? The questions eat him alive inside.

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He dreams at night, the pleasant dreams alternating with bone shaking nightmares that leave him gripping the wall in agony. He dreams of the time they went to the beach in the south, how much the babies had loved the water. He dreams of his daughter, what she looks like now. He dreams of yesterday's pain, the crunching and snapping of bone resonating in his ear drums. He dreams of fleeing the country, joining friends in exile. He dreams, and while he dreams he wishes he couldn't dream, couldn't think, couldn't be.

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The fifteen years have come and gone, and his sentence is extended two years, no reason given. His daughter is now twenty, and will continue to age as he rots in jail another two years, possibly longer.

He succumbs to the depression.

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"Call me Ishmael," he says, "and I will tell you stories more powerful, more horrifying than Melville himself. No whales, just the onward passage of time and the unrelenting theme of hopelessness, like waves crashing against a ship in a storm that never ends."

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He sleeps most of the day now, only waking when he needs to use the so-called facilities or when they drag him out of his cell to "question" him. His sleep is dreamless now. The lines of his wife's face are blurry. He isn't sure he remembers what color eyes his children have anymore. He isn't sure of anything, anymore. Is he married? The band around his left ring finger indicates yes. His heart hurts.

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Seventeen plus seven, the number of years he has served for some still unknown crime. 8,760 days. Two hundred and ten thousand, two hundred and forty hours after his arrest he is finally allowed to walk onto free soil. There is no one to greet him since the date for his release had never been officially set and he had never been allowed to contact his family. He walks to the corner, the dust whipping around his beaten and bruised body. Hails a cab, praying someone will be home to pay the fare when he arrives. His mind slips away as the cab traverses the thin streets, wondering what his home will be like. Will his wife have replaced the brown curtains that hung in the windows that she hated so much? He hopes his brother has been honorable and has taken care of his family while he has been forced away from them. He asks the driver to wait, walks to the door. Knocks. A tiny face peeks through the window and his heart breaks just a little. Then the door is thrown open and his wife is in his arms sobbing, sobbing. His brother embraces him tightly and introduces his wife and son, the boy who looked out the window.

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“Call me Ishmael,” he says, “and even if you do not believe I will share with you what I know. For perhaps you will believe, or perhaps your neighbor will believe, or perhaps your son will believe, and we will be able to stop this nightmare.”

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Nilufar: Antipolo, Philippines
Carla Mavaddat

Poisoned Air

By Jack Curtis

Nobody knew if this guy was crazy.

That was the problem. Michael could deal with crazy. Crazy was his job. Crazy made it easier, actually. When you have to walk a man to his death, knowing he's a wack job is the kind of thing that makes you think that maybe your career had gone the right way after all. Not everyone could handle knowing that there were people out there who would kill because they didn't know better or couldn't learn better. Michael was sure that he could take it. It was written on his face, really, in the wide face and the sad eyes. He didn't have a strong jaw, didn't have that brick-wall physique of some of the guys, but Michael had "stoic" etched in every wrinkle of his face.

He knew it, too, and he repeated it to himself as he walked down the hallway, silently, over and over. Michael had never been given to introspection when he was younger, but working in a prison made you appreciate the ability to get lost in thought. Never when he was working, of course, Michael wasn't that stupid, but just walking down the hallway? Yeah, it was better to be able to think. Never mind the smell, halfway between a hospital and a sweatshop. Never mind the echoes of the occasional shout, the squeak of his boots on the smooth floor. Never mind the disorientating rows of cells that made it hard to tell whether you were walking forward or the hall was moving past you. Master the art of getting lost in thought, and as soon as you were off the clock you were out of San Quentin.

Unfortunately the only thing Michael could think right now was this: nobody knew if this guy was crazy.

And then Michael was standing in front of the cell of Leandress Riley, and Leandress Riley was looking him in the eye, and Michael still had no idea whether this guy was crazy. Riley was tiny, he looked half-starved and shrunken. A black man in his late thirties, under a hundred pounds, less than five feet tall and one eye that didn't look like it saw very much. Riley stood up slowly, rising from the mattress on the floor with all the balance and grace of a man forty years older. Michael remembered hearing that Leandress Riley was deaf in one ear, where his mother had shoved him into the edge of a table, but Michael wasn't sure if that was true or some line Riley had fed to one of the shrinks. One look at Riley and you believed that he was deaf, at least. One-eyed, one-eared. When Riley finished standing and

stared at Michael, you could see that the two weren't looking at the same world.

Riley stepped forward and laid a hand on the bar. As soon as he did he stood straighter, more solidly, like touching something had grounded him. Just for an instant Riley saw San Quentin as clearly as Michael did. Then Riley realized he was eyeballing a guard and dropped his half-focused gaze to the floor. Michael decided he had learned as much about Leandress Riley as was good for him, turned, and strode off down the rows of cells. This time he did not let his mind wander, any more than he would when escorting a prisoner to the gas chamber. Michael told himself that Riley had just reminded him that he was in a prison full of killers and rapists and violent nutjobs. Michael was not afraid of what he would think about if he let his mind go rambling. Michael wasn't allowed to be afraid, not in here. It was in his job description.

Michael got home ten minutes late that night. He grabbed beer, then grabbed another. Took both over to his couch, sat down, and pressed the first can to his forehead. He popped the tab on the second with one hand and took a sip. Michael kept the refrigerator cranked way up, so cold that flecks of ice formed in his milk. Two cans of Milwaukee's Best that had been in Michael's fridge for a week were like a hyper-engineered radiator for the human brain. Michael had been doing the same ritual for twelve years now, and it had taken him three to figure it out in the first place. There's a piece of folk wisdom that says that eighty percent of your body heat is lost through your head. It's a load of crap for absolutely everyone in the world but Michael. By the time he'd finished the first beer he felt human again, and he hadn't taken his time.

Michael stared at his living room. Most people would have said that it was remarkably clean for a man living alone, but those people don't understand that there are two types of life-long bachelors. The first doesn't care much about what his house looks like, so everything he owns is strewn around the floor, table, and every other horizontal surface. The second kind is just like the first, but they never bothered buying enough stuff to actually make a mess. Michael owned just enough casual clothes to fill a single load of laundry. He took clean clothes out of the dryer, ironing them one at a time. He put dirty clothes in the washing machine. It worked well enough. Michael took care of his uniform, mostly because the guards who escorted prisoners to the chamber were expected to be presentable for the viewers. That didn't happen every day, but at San Quentin it happened often enough that Michael figured he might as well keep up the habit.

The only mess in Michael's house was the pile of papers strewn across his desk. He did not stare down at them dramatically. He did not look at them at all, because he did not

need to. Michael sipped his beer.

“Defendant was charged in separate counts with (1) robbery and (2) murder. He pleaded not guilty and not guilty by reason of insanity to each count.”

Translation: Riley knocked over a restaurant and shot some random delivery boy in the heart. He believes that the state is not aware that he is a wack job. He has been misinformed, probably by a lawyer. Or a book written by a lawyer. Or a book written by a guy who got drunk with a lawyer one time and was pretty sure he knew what he was talking about, thank you very goddamn much.

“In a proceeding initiated, pursuant to section 3701 of the Penal Code, to determine the sanity of defendant Leandress Riley, who was then incarcerated in San Quentin under a final judgment imposing the death penalty, a jury found him to be ‘presently sane.’”

Translation: The good people of California knew what an insanity plea was, or thought they did, and they weren’t going to let some one-eyed tiny psycho with skin like he was born in a coal mine dodge the chair. It was the gas chamber, in this case, but Michael felt he could forgive the good people of California their ignorance. They did pay his wages.

“During incarceration at the state prison and while awaiting execution, defendant became somewhat uncooperative and uncommunicative.”

Michael didn’t think that bit needed translating. Frankly, he was surprised that more of the death row inmates weren’t “uncooperative and uncommunicative.” Sometimes he’d wondered about that, walking down the rows of cells he couldn’t see, breathing month-old air he couldn’t smell. But it was a wonder what two cold beers did for wondering.

“Such conduct on the part of defendant created some doubt in the warden’s mind as to defendant’s sanity, and he called six psychiatrists to examine defendant. The view of these experts were submitted to the jury in the present sanity proceeding.”

Translation: The new warden got jittery, and knew more of the law than was really good for him. Michael liked the guy anyway.

“They were not entirely in accord in their conclusions.”

Translation:

Michael did not like that part. He had done some thinking, and concluded that deciding if someone was crazy was really the most important part of a psychiatrist's job. If you couldn't tell who was crazy, you couldn't tell who to treat. If you couldn't tell who to treat it probably wasn't a good idea to be treating people, particularly with stuff that had more X's than vowels in the name. Being a reasonable sort who wasn't about to call a doctor an idiot, Michael had decided that psychiatrists were probably very good at determining whether people were crazy. But with this one-eyed, one-eared little black man who said his mother thought there was a demon inside him, the psychiatrists didn't know.

Michael finished his second beer. In defiance of the laws of thermodynamics, it tasted colder than the first one. This is a little-known law of nature. The more you need a cold beer, the colder it tastes when you finally get one.

Michael woke up on the couch the next day just under half an hour later than he needed to get to work on time. If he was half an hour late for work, he knew he'd get some unkind stares from the warden. Under half an hour, and people would let it slide. Side benefits of a fifteen-year history with the prison. He was out the door seven minutes earlier than average, since he'd slept in his uniform. It was remarkably un-rumpled. Anywhere else the smell would have been off-putting, but Michael worked in San Quentin. The guards would understand, and the prisoners had long since lost the ability to tell.

When Michael walked through the rows of cells this time he had three other men with him, his team and his only real friends. They did not look at each other. Their feet hit the ground in step, but it was not the frightening precision of a military march. Rather, they walked together out of old habit, long since adjusted to the pace. Look down the hallways of San Quentin with a horse's blinders and you can't see the cells or the bars on the windows. At the right time of day the sun doesn't stream through the bars to cast imposing shadows, but only adds a warmer note to the fluorescent bulbs. It is still a prison. You can tell by the smell, if nothing else. But where your blinders, wait for the right light, stare down the hallway at Michael and his companions, and their professional camaraderie almost suits the view. But take the blinders off and bring back the rows of cells stacked on top of each other, and the calm of the four men as they walk through a gallery of caged humans inspires a quite kind of fear.

They reached Leandress Riley's cell and stood around the door. Riley put his hands through the bars and accepted the handcuffs. Michael opened the door and led him out

with a hand on his arm. The man was unbelievably small, but not childlike. He was a man in miniature, the proportions of a grown man shrunk down to a ninety pound body swimming in the prison's smallest jumpsuit. Michael could feel a tenseness in Riley's arm, but the muscles were more yarn than wire. It was hard to feel threatened, really, but Michael was having no problem keeping alert. Even sluggish from life on death row, there was an intensity to Leandress Riley once you got this close. Something about his eye, really. Not the bad eye. That one was glassy and unfocused, unpleasant but not disturbing. But Riley's good eye darted back and forth with an incredible energy, as though he could compensate for his bad eye out of sheer effort. On the few instances where that eye settled on him, Michael couldn't think of anything else.

They reached the gas chamber quickly. Michael did not look at the doctor or the priest, and he certainly did not look at the people who had come to witness the execution. It didn't feel right, somehow, to acknowledge they were there. The chamber didn't look like something meant for the public eyes. It was squat and broad, a cylinder of metal, glass and seals. It was built along the lines of industrial equipment, meant to do its work day after day and never break down. Michael didn't like to look at the chamber any more than he liked to look at the audience, but the heavy iron was like a lodestone for the eyes. The glass window offered enough of a view to see the steel-framed bed with its leather straps, but hid the mechanism for actually starting the gas – a bucket of chemical pellets over a larger bucket filled with some unknown liquid. The executioner would pull out the bottom of the top bucket, the pellets dropped in, and Leandress Riley would be breathing poison. The first time he saw it Michael thought the device was laughably simple, but he had come to appreciate it. He realized that the prospect of a big vat of poison gas released at the turn of a valve had some unwelcome associations. The bucket contraption was almost silly, but it worked. And it meant that a broken piece of plumbing wasn't going to flood the chamber with Michael inside. Not likely, but it was still better to keep the poison where you could see it.

Riley was docile as Michael and another guard lifted him onto the bed. The back was propped up, facing the window so that people could see Riley's frantically moving eye. Michael tightened the strap on Riley's left wrist until it hit the smallest buckle. The loop was barely smaller than Riley's hand. It was leather, old leather that had soaked up more sweat than Michael wanted to think about. His hands felt greasy every time he touched that strap, but Michael knew better than to let it show. Riley's hand slipped back and forth in the leather strap, but there was no energy to it. The other guard had already left the gas chamber, and Michael turned to do the same. The instant he turned, Leandress Riley screamed. "Don't kill me! Don't kill me, I don't want to die!"

The scream echoed in the cast-iron chamber with an impossible clarity, like there were a thousand Leandress Rileys calling out at the same time, a huge mob of prisoners shouting down a long steel tunnel. Riley thrashed against the straps, still screaming, his body arching and twisting until he wrenched one arm free. Frantically Riley started tearing at the buckle on his other hand, but by that time Michael was there to hold him down.

It was remarkably easy, Michael thought, to get Leandress Riley under control. All that furious energy was still trapped in a ninety pound frame. But Riley kept screaming, the same thing over and over,

"I don't want to die!" Like he thought they were all confused on that point, like he thought that if Michael knew he didn't want to die he couldn't possibly kill him. But Riley was not a bright man at the best of times, and he was wrong about Michael. Michael had not really known that Riley did not want to die, but that didn't mean Michael wouldn't kill him.

Michael forced Riley's wrists back into the foul-smelling straps, tightened them as best he could. The straps were no more secure than last time, and once Riley tested them again he would figure that out. Michael released Riley and backed away, both eyes on the screaming little man who had lost all shame in the face of death. He could not see the audience, but knew they must be horrified. Horrified that the pageant didn't have the dignity they wanted, the restraint and calm they had come to expect. Horrified at the refusal of this half-blind, half-wild little man to sit still for his own death.

Riley kept thrashing and pulling against the straps as Michael slammed shut the door to the gas chamber. He turned to the technician.

"Go. Do it."

"He's going to get out again. The gas doesn't work that quickly, it won't kill him before he escapes the bed."

"The straps are too large. There's nothing we can do except get this done."

The technician had done this job long enough to recognize when they were out of options. He pulled his little string, and the bottom fell out of the little bucket, and the all the little pellets of hit the bigger bucket and the mixture started to hiss as it filled the room with an invisible poison. Leandress Riley had torn himself from one of his straps again, but didn't bother to try and work the buckle on the other. He just twisted his arm and wrist and pulled it through the greasy leather. He turned to the straps on his ankles, and threw himself at them so violently that the bed tilted and fell to one side, dropping Riley out of view. All this time Riley's screaming had not stopped. By this time it was just a wordless cry, but Michael

could still hear the meaning in it.

When Leandress Riley finally freed his legs and stood, Michael did not flinch. And when Riley slammed his hands into the window, Michael did not start. They were old hands, much older than Riley, covered in calluses and scars that showed even through the thick and distorting glass of the gas chamber. Riley had gone back to words now, though Michael barely noticed.

"Don't kill me. I don't want to die."

Riley's voice was weaker now, and the thick walls made it weaker still, but the desperation in his movements was no less intense. He still clutched at the glass like it might fall away at any second, flood the room with the poison gas that was killing him. Michael wasn't sure what would happen, then. The gas might be too dilute to do them all any harm, but he doubted that. More likely the audience would panic and sprint to the door, clawing at each other, trying desperately to be the first one out. He wondered if it would take six psychiatrists to tell if the audience was crazy or not.

Riley slammed his hands one last time into the window of the gas chamber. His screaming had stopped, but his good eye still rolled rapidly back and forth, drinking in as much as it could. The glassy blind eye just stared at nobody in particular. When Riley slammed the glass everyone flinched but Michael. It was not that Michael was not surprised, or that he was particularly controlled. Michael was letting his mind wander. He was out of San Quentin, out of the gas chamber, already on his way home. By the time Leandress Riley died, Michael was couldn't even see him any more.

Later Michael told the warden he was leaving. The next day he did not come back. But Michael did not leave San Quentin that evening, because he had already left. Michael was finished with the place just before Leandress Riley was. He had not seen the rows of cells on his way to the warden's office. He had not smelled the air, or the stink of his own uniform. Most guards learned to ignore the voices of the prisoners, but to Michael they might as well have been birds chirping in the distance. When Leandress Riley died, Michael knew that he could not spend another minute in San Quentin State Prison. He was lucky that he did not have to.

Some people say that none of the guards that brought Leandress Riley to the gas chamber could ever work another execution. These people are called optimists, and they are wrong.

Some people say that Riley's death was not important, that the system kept going the same way it always had. These people call themselves realists, and they are also wrong. Mind you, they are not far off the mark; but it is important to remember that these people never met Michael.

A Pathway to Hope

By Susan Nagelsen and Charles Huckelbury

“Holy shit, Deb. You gotta see this.”

I held my place between the pages of my book and looked over at Mary Lassiter, elbows on the window sill and face pressed close to the dayroom’s bars. “What?” She glanced over her shoulder and waved me toward her. “You’re not gonna believe this. Get over here and take a look.” She pointed toward the yard two stories below us.

The diffused February sunlight coming through the glass was warm on my arms and face, and I was just getting into the second book of Larsson’s trilogy. I wasn’t interested in any prison drama. Still, Mary was a good friend, so I slipped a bookmark between the pages and got up. “This better be good,” I told her. “Lisbeth is getting ready to kick some serious butt.”

Mary grinned at me. “Oh, it’s good.” She pointed with her chin toward the yard. “Tell me it’s not.”

I don’t know what I expected, but when I got to the window and looked down on the yard, it wasn’t five dogs in blue vests prancing around on leashes, all held by women, including a nun in a Dominican habit. I rubbed my eyes and looked at Mary. “All right, Lassiter, you slipped some magic mushrooms into my tea this morning, right?”

She laughed and went to her bunk. “You aren’t tripping, honey. Those are sure enough dogs, and I’m getting my ass down there and pet one.” As she started pulling on her socks and sneakers, she stopped and looked at me. “Well don’t just stand there. I’ve heard all your dog stories and seen all the pictures of Misty, so get dressed before those people, whoever the hell they are, haul ass and we miss it. God knows when we’ll have another chance.”

She was right. The only dogs we ever saw were the state police’s drug dogs, and we weren’t allowed to approach any of them. For my money, I think they’re just pets that belong to someone in the prison, probably the warden or some of the guards, because I’ve never seen or heard them bust any dope inside. Once, when we all had to stand outside the dorm while the dogs made their sweep, a handler came out carrying a backgammon game that had been confiscated because it hadn’t been officially checked out of the game room. I still had a pretty smart mouth then, and I couldn’t resist a shot at the handler, “Hey, I’ve seen drug dogs and explosives dogs, but this is the first time I’ve ever seen a

backgammon dog." The whole dorm broke up, but that bastard wasn't laughing when he gave me thirty hours of extra duty. No sense of humor, these guys.

Mary and I got dressed in a hurry and ran down the two flights of stairs ahead of maybe a dozen other women. As soon as I made it outside, I stopped ten feet from an older woman with a black Lab puppy on a leash. Okay, I admit it: I'm a fool when it comes to dogs, especially puppies, and as soon as this one saw me, his tail started wagging like a metronome on meth! I ran over to him and got down on my knees while he jumped and licked my face. I rolled around in the grass, getting puppy slobber all over me, puppy nips on my hands and arms, and bits of grass and leaves down the back of my blouse, but I didn't give a damn. Just inhaling that sweet puppy smell was enough to make me forget where I was. After a couple of minutes of unconditional love, I finally remembered my manners and spoke to the woman who had him, still holding the puppy in my lap.

"Uh, excuse me. I kinda got excited when I saw the dogs." I held out my hand. "I'm Debra Eaton."

The woman bent down and shook my hand. Her eyes showed me a kindness I wasn't prepared for. "I'm Nancy Berard, and this is Joey. As for apologizing, not necessary. I react the same way whenever I see a puppy, no matter what the breed."

I rubbed Joey's ears until he squirmed and licked my face again. "We don't see puppies in here."

Nancy nodded, her eyes softening even more. "You're going to see a lot more. We're part of a pilot program coming into the prison." She pointed toward the nun. "That's Sister Pauline, and the whole operation is hers. She already has programs up and running in eleven other prisons."

"Programs?" I asked, still puzzled.

Nancy nodded again. "To train service dogs for disabled people. I think the initial plan here is to pick ten handlers and assistants for five dogs for anywhere from a year to eighteen months for each class. The handlers will learn training techniques, and the dogs will have to pass sort of a final exam to get certified. We've turned out some terrific dogs everywhere else we've tried it."

No way, I thought, would the warden ever allow this program inside. She had a well-

deserved reputation for being a hardass when it came to amenities for us, and I couldn't see her signing off on something this good. Then Nancy dropped the other shoe. "The warden's already approved it. I think there's supposed to be some sort of announcement either today or tomorrow, and then you're supposed to apply if you're interested." Nancy grinned. "And it looks to me like you're definitely interested."

Interested hell, I intended to do everything I could to be a part of this program. I looked at Mary standing a few feet away with a silly grin on her face. She read my mind and nodded, "You go, girl." For the next twenty minutes, I was in heaven. I played with each of the six dogs, the oldest only five months old. The one exception was Sister Pauline's personal dog, Renni, a gorgeous female Doberman, three years old and about seventy-five pounds. When the tour ended, I found Nancy and thanked her for everything. Then I scooped up Joey to kiss him goodbye. Ten minutes after they left, I was filling out a request slip to join the program. I was still giddy that afternoon.

"Aren't you coming up on your anniversary?"

Mary and I were sitting across from each other in the dayroom, her with her coffee and me with a cup of green tea. I nodded. "Yeah, I'll start number eight in four more days." Mary blew out a breath. "That's a piece." She had three in on six for coke sales and a little hooking on the side, so anything bigger than that seemed like forever to her.

"No shit," I said, "but I don't even have the dust blown off it yet."

Mary was quiet as she sipped her coffee. She put down the cup and looked at me. "You ever regret killing your ex?"

Good question. Actually Donnie became my ex only after I killed him. We were still married when I gave myself a present for my twenty-third birthday by shooting him after he beat me up for the last time. I shrugged. "In a way, I guess. I mean, I'm in here, and that sucks. I miss a lot of things but... ." I trailed off while Mary picked at a rough place on the table top.

"But what?"

I took a deep breath. "It's kinda hard to explain. I didn't discover what a basket case I was emotionally until I got into a few groups after I came to prison. Donnie was a nasty piece of work, a real control freak. It took me a while to get it."

Mary nodded. "Been there and done that."

I kept talking. "I was too young and inexperienced to avoid all the traps people like him set. Anyway, I had learned to deal with the beatings and abuse, but when he strangled my dog in front of me—to teach me a lesson, he said—I sort of snapped. Misty was just a mutt, but she was the sweetest thing who wouldn't even bark at a stranger. The thing is, that bastard laughed at me when I came out of the bedroom with his gun."

Mary lifted her cup in a salute. "Bet he quit laughing right after that."

I laughed and snorted some tea through my nose. After I stopped choking and wiped my face, I got serious again. "Yeah, he didn't beat me or laugh at me anymore."

"And you got ninety-nine years? Jesus, you even called 911. Your lawyer couldn't do better than that after all the stuff about the beatings and killing your dog?"

Again I shrugged. "I guess he did the best he could. The law in Florida lets premeditation be measured in seconds. The prosecutor said that when I went into the bedroom to get the gun, that showed I intended to kill him. The jury went for it." I drank some tea. "Actually, I got a hundred and two years."

"What's the other three for?"

"For the gun in the commission of a felony."

Mary shook her head. "Like that makes a difference? For my money, you should have gotten community service."

It was my turn to lift my cup to her. "Could have used you on my jury, Kid." Mary changed the subject. "So what's your take on the nun, Sister Whoever? Is that Doberman really hers?"

"Pauline," I told her, "and yeah, the Dobie's really hers. She's gorgeous, isn't she?" Mary wasn't sure. "I guess, but she kept looking at me like I was a piece of sirloin."

"That's your imagination working. She's really a love." I sat back and rested the cup on my knee. "So is Sister. I grew up a good Catholic girl, learned my catechism, and made

my first communion, the whole deal, so I'm sort of used to nuns. This one looks the same, only she's got a sense of humor and seems more human, if you know what I mean."

Mary shrugged. "Never been around any of them and never went to church after I was about seven, I guess. We were Methodists."

"Nuns can be scary." I smiled at a memory. "Shakespeare talked about 'no beast so fierce' in one of the *Richard plays*, I think, but believe me, even those crazy-ass suicide bombers got nothing on a nun with a Dobie for sheer fear factor. Makes you want to fall down and beg for mercy."

"But Sister Pauline's different?"

I sipped some tea. "Yeah, I can't put my finger on it right now, but there's just something about her, maybe in her eyes, or maybe it's because she loves dogs so much. She's obviously got a lot of empathy for us on the inside, almost like she knows what it's like. I got a feeling that this thing with the training, as crazy as it sounds, is gonna work out." I put my head back. "I goddamn sure hope so."

And it did. I made the list for trainers, and Mary came onboard as an assistant. Sister Pauline proved to be an organizational and persuasive wonder. She convinced the warden to make the program honor grade, which meant allowing all the potential trainers to live in two specific cottages, four women in one, six in the other. Maintenance even modified the areas around the cottages, constructing exercise pens and potty areas before the dogs arrived. To get in, we had to be free of any disciplinary action for a year, have more than two years left on our sentences, and explain why we wanted to participate. The first two were easy, and I had to make myself stop talking after twenty minutes during the interview for the last part.

Once we were in, we met Dee Gardner, our professional trainer and some of her staff. She showed us a movie on training techniques, and we sat through an hour-long lecture about expectations, what to do, and what not to do with and to the dogs. Dee also gave us some books for reference.

The plan was for her to conduct weekly training sessions for the duration of the program, tweak the training where needed, and provide updates on the program in general. Once the dogs had begun their training, volunteers would take them out for a day twice a week, to malls, parks, anywhere they would see more people and dogs. "We don't want the dogs

becoming institutionalized," Dee told us, as if they knew where they were. When we were as ready as we were going to get, the big day dawned clear and sunny.

A little past eight, the trainers and assistants assembled in the gym, all of us nervous as expectant mothers on the way to the delivery room. I knew the other women, and I have to admit to being a little mystified about how some of them ever passed the vetting process. But I shrugged it off as soon as I saw Dee and her people walk through the doors with four standard poodles.

"Poodles?" said the woman next to me. Carrie was a redhead about five ten or so and a reputation to match the hair. She turned and looked at me nine inches below her.

"Poodles can be service dogs?"

"Beats me," I said. "These are standards and not the small versions, so I guess they can do all the things big dogs do. I don't think Sister and Dee would have picked them if they couldn't." Carrie didn't say anything else, and we started walking toward the women and the dogs.

Mary caught up with me and put a hand on my forearm. "Poodles?"

"Yeah, poodles," I told her. I think I was hoping for a Lab or maybe a dog that reminded me of Misty, but I soon lost the attitude that poodles were somehow fluffy airheads.

Once everyone was inside the gym, the trainers were called up individually and presented with their dogs. I got Jasmine, a chocolate with golden eyes, and from the start, I knew it would be an adventure. Camille, one of Dee's trainers, confirmed it, "She's our class clown."

"Class clown?" I asked her.

Camille smiled as if she were about to divulge a state secret. "You'll see. She's always into everybody's business, and she would rather play than eat." She leaned over and whispered, as if Jasmine could understand her. "I think she's got a touch of doggie ADD."

I didn't even know there was such a thing, so I just said, "Yeah?"

Camille nodded. "It's like she just checks out." She tapped the side of her head. "Like ev-

erybody packs up and leaves. You can see it in her eyes." Then she reached down and hugged Jasmine. "But she's such a love it doesn't matter."

She was right, it didn't matter to me after she handed me the leash. I called Jasmine to me, and she hurried to my side just like she belonged there. All four dogs had been groomed recently, and Jazz, as I began to call her, still had a puppy clip, all puffy and perfumy, and a lot softer than I expected. As long as I had my hand on her, she was content to sit by me, but if I lifted my hand at all, she tugged at the leash, eager to go explore the rest of the place. That would be the thread that united us, that independent spirit and her perpetual desire to want to see what was on the other side of the mountain.

The program got off to a great start. We were encouraged to take the dogs with us everywhere on the grounds to help socialize them and get them used to new faces. I was a library clerk and took Jazz with me every day. At first, she was curious about everything that moved, but after I let her explore the shelves and the general area, she settled down. I found out some of the women had bad experiences with dogs and were even afraid of the poodles. I never tried to force some sort of therapy on them, but one woman took the initiative.

"I got bitten when I was five," Martha said. She was standing on the opposite side of my desk and looking at Jazz, who was comfy on the floor beside me and working on a rawhide chew toy. "I've been scared to death of dogs ever since. This is the closest I've been to a dog in maybe twenty years."

I tried to make her comfortable. "You don't have to worry about this one. She wouldn't bite if you stuck your hand in her mouth." Martha nodded slowly. "She's really pretty. I don't think I've ever seen a dog with yellow eyes like that."

"Yeah, it's unusual, especially in a poodle." I waited for a minute while Martha got used to being that close. "Would you like to pet her? You can just lean over if you want to." Martha thought about that, started to reach, but then pulled her hand back. "Maybe later," she said."

"Sure. Whenever you're ready." I ran my hand across Jazz's back. She looked at me once and went back to her rawhide. It took Martha nearly a month before she could bring herself to touch Jazz, but once she took that first step, the rest was easy. After another two weeks, she was pestering me every day to walk Jasmine.

Most of the guards supported us and thought the program was a terrific idea. Some

even stopped to pet the dogs while we had them out for exercise or just for a walk. After all, who can resist a cute dog, and besides, we were training them to help disabled people, including vets coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan. I mean, it was a no-brainer where everyone wins. But, prison being prison, we had a few exceptions, most notably Lieutenant King.

King was only a few inches taller than I am, maybe five six in boots, and he was one of those guys who never forgave nature for making him short. Everything was patent leather: boots, belt, and all the little pouches that held his cuffs and flashlight. The little bastard even wore sunglasses all the time, and they weren't Oakleys either. They were mirrored aviator shades. Mirrored shades? Gimme a break. That shit went out with Cool Hand Luke. Then again, King was probably sixty, so that was probably his favorite movie. I think he must have been a bodybuilder at one time, because his forearms were pretty thick and he shaved the hair on them. I guess he had given up the steroids when I met him. Maybe that's why his chest sagged and his butt jiggled. He had this little paunch that he tried to suck in when he was around any of us. I was always amazed that he didn't turn blue and pass out. Sixty and with dyed, blow-dried hair. Jesus.

Anyway, King was a pain in the ass from the get-go, always harassing us about the dogs, telling us we weren't training them properly. Oh yeah, he claimed to be a dog trainer himself, among a gazillion other things he was an expert in. Once, when Jazz and I were practicing retrieval, he walked around the corner and pointed when she picked up a plastic bottle and trotted back to me with it.

"Eaton, get that animal on a leash. She shouldn't be chasing things like that."

I took the bottle from Jasmine and looked at Mary standing a few feet away. "Why not?" He shook his head in disgust and held up one finger. "One, if she makes it—which I doubt—she'll never be off the leash." He folded that finger down and held up another one. "Two, if you teach her to fetch, anytime she's out with, say, some eighty-year-old woman on a cane, and someone near her drops something, she'll charge over to get it and pull that old woman off her feet." He folded that finger down and held up a third. "And three, I just told you not to." The prick.

The next time Dee came in, I told her that I was getting conflicting advice on how to train Jazz. She asked, just like I had planned, and I told her about the retrieval episode. When I got through, she looked from me to King, who had insinuated himself into the conversation. Dee's brow furrowed. "That's ridiculous. Service dogs are trained to bring things

to their companion.”

I put on my best Mary Sunshine look and said, “Well, if we're being told conflicting methods on how to train the dogs, who do we listen to?”

Dee is a formidable woman, and she pulled herself up until she towered over King. “You listen to the people who train dogs for a living.”

“And that would be you?” I asked sweetly.

“That would be me,” she confirmed. At that, she turned to our program manager, Mrs. Crawford. “Are we all on the same page here?” Mrs. Crawford stared at King, who was busy turning red enough to set off the fire alarm. I think there must have been some sort of power struggle going on there, and King was on the losing end. Then she looked back at Dee. “I'll take care of it. There won't be any further incidents.”

Well, maybe not with the dogs, but King never forgets when someone calls attention to his stupidity—which was pretty regular. After that scene, he searched our rooms and tore up our cottages at least once a week and screamed if any of the dogs were too frisky. He wrote petty disciplinaries for the slightest things, most of which got tossed out. Lassiter claims she once caught him in her underwear drawer sniffing her panties, and I believe it. More than one other woman said that they had seen him creeping around outside the showers and trying to get a peek.

Jazz didn't like King; she knew that he was out to get us. I don't know how she knew, but believe me she did. Consequently, there were times, especially late at night, when he came through the house creeping around, that Jazz would bark. I think she was trying her best to warn us. One morning I awoke at my usual time, 4:30, and I headed over to Jazz's crate to let her out for our morning ritual. This was our time together; we would sit quietly and snuggle, with me rubbing her belly while I thought about, well anything and nothing. I loved this time of day; there was silence and darkness, and I had the world to myself with my girl, Jazz. As I started to open her crate door, I noticed a piece of paper sticking out of the crate. I recognized it at once. It was a disciplinary report. I opened the paper and started to read. King had given Jazz a disciplinary, a B ticket for insubordination for barking at him. I started laughing out loud.

“Well, girl, this should be interesting. I guess you are going to a hearing.” I whispered to her as she came out of her crate and climbed on to my lap for her tummy rub. She just looked at me with her golden eyes.

Three days later, I was giving Jazz a bath and getting ready to groom her so she would look beautiful for her hearing in the morning, Lassiter was helping.

“So, how do you think it's going to go?” Mary was trying to take this hearing seriously, but she was having a difficult time.

“Jazz is going to plead not guilty and let the chips fall where they may.” I said with my serious face on pointing the clippers at her.

“Do you think they will kick her out of the program?” Mary was a little worried about that possibility.

“Nah, not after the last incident we had with King; Dee would never let that happen. Trust me; this is going to be a walk in the park.” I rubbed Jazz's ears. “You're going to be just fine, aren't you girl.”

The morning of the hearing, I gave Jazz a final brushing so she looked absolutely beautiful, then I put on her service cape so she looked professional. I clipped on her lead and ran her through a few drills just to get her tuned up for our big moment. I wanted her



Afternoon Nap: Istanbul, Turkey
Shahbaz Mavaddat

sharp, not checked out for the hearing. She was right there with me, and I was talking to her the whole time. “You're doing great, girl, you're going to be just fine.” I told her. “We'll

show them that you were just doing your job.” I rubbed her ears, and bent down to give her a kiss on the snout. “Ok girl, it’s time to go.” With that, I picked up her lead, and we headed out the door and across the yard toward the hearing that would determine her fate.

We were sitting waiting for them to call Jazz’s name for the hearing, and I was talking quietly in her ear, reminding her that everything would be just fine, and that she was just doing her job when the door opened and the unit manager stepped out into the hall. “Ms. Eaton, you and Jasmine can come in now.” I brought Jazz to heel and with her head held high we walked into the room. The unit manager, the head of security, and the counselor in the unit were sitting at a table at the front of the room. I brought Jazz to stand in front of them and gave her the hand command to sit; she sat.

The unit manager was the first to speak. “We are here today to discuss the disciplinary report filed by Lt. King. The charge is 37-B, insubordination. On October 12th, while making his rounds, Lt King walked past Jasmine’s crate and she barked at him which he took to be intimidating and an act of insubordination. How does Jasmine plead?”

I could tell that it was difficult for the three of them to keep a straight face, but then they are all cops and stick together, so this is the way it was going to be. I turned to Jazz and said, “How do you plead, Jazz?”

She answered clearly and loudly with a resounding singular bark.

“I am confident she is pleading not guilty.” I offered.

“A plea of not guilty has been entered.” The unit manager said. “Is there anything you would like to offer on her behalf before we impose our sentence Ms. Eaton?”

“Yes, there is. I would just like to say that Jazz is a wonderful dog who will be an excellent service dog to some deserving person, and that she was really just doing her job by alerting to someone in her space.”

The three of them conferred, while Jazz and I stood and waited. It took about thirty seconds, and then the unit manager spoke. “We have decided to reduce the ticket to a minor violation and sentence Jasmine to loss of canteen for one week and extra drills for two weeks so that her barking outbursts can be curbed if possible.”

The unit manager smiled for a split second and then added one last comment. "Ms Eaton, keep up the good work with this one. You are both free to go."

With that said, Jazz and I turned and walked out of the door and headed back to the cottage to tell everyone what had happened.

When we got back to the house, everyone was waiting anxiously to hear what had happened and to love on Jazz.

Brenda was at the door when we walked through, "Well, what happened. We've been on pins and needles."

"You should have seen her. She was great. When they asked here to plead, she barked loud and clear, Not Guilty! The uniforms could hardly contain themselves, I could tell they thought it was silly, but you know how they are; they have to stick up for their own.

Everyone wanted to know what sanctions they had imposed, and when I told them they just howled.

They tousled Jazz's head, rubbed her belly and told her not to worry. "We'll all slip you treats when no one is looking. Don't worry, sweetie, we've got your back."

No matter how hard King and a few others tried to kill the program, it didn't work, especially with Sister Pauline riding shotgun for us. The dogs responded like champs, and even Dee said she was surprised at the progress.

Winter fizzled, and spring lasted about a week, before morphing suddenly into summer, and in Florida that means NASTY. I discovered that Jazz got dehydrated quickly, maybe because she was always moving, but I carried an extra water bottle with me whenever we went outside. Dee and Sister Pauline both said she did fine in the malls where the AC was running full tilt, so I never worried about her out there.

That year was the quickest I've ever spent in prison. When Dee told us that three of our four dogs would be graduating in a couple of weeks, I choked up. Jazz had become such a huge part of my life, even sleeping in my bunk with me after the last count had been made. She went where I went and even ate what I ate—don't tell Dee. I had assumed, and had begun to act, as if Jazz were really mine and we would be a team for

a long time. Sure, I knew going into the program that the day would come when I would have to tell her goodbye, but I didn't think it would be so goddamn quick. But there we were, prepping for her last exam. Hell, I even thought about sabotaging her final, but that wouldn't be fair to Jazz or Dee or Sister Pauline.

"Suck it up, Eaton," Mary told me the night before. "We're in this for the long haul, and Sister Pauline's already made arrangements for five more dogs to come in. You'll have a dog as long as you want one."

I was sitting on the floor next to Jazz, stroking her head and neck while she slept. I couldn't talk for a few seconds. "I know it's silly, but I can't help it." I bent down and kissed Jazz on her muzzle. She groaned a little and opened one eye to see why the hell I was bothering her, then shifted a little and went back to sleep. I kept stroking her. "God, I love her so much."

Mary nodded. "I know. I know. It's hard on all of us to say goodbye, but think how happy she's going to make someone."

I didn't give a shit about anyone else's happiness at that point. All I knew was that I was miserable and would miss Jazz more than anyone could begin to understand. I still got a few visits from friends, but even then, I couldn't wait for the time to be over so I could get back to the cottage with Jazz. I sat in the floor next to her all night, just looking at her and crying when I couldn't help it.

Dee had arranged for local press coverage of the graduation ceremonies, and the department of corrections showed up in force. Even the commissioner was there, along with a few politicians. Sister Pauline had Renni in tow, which kept a lot of the bullshit away from her probably just like she planned it. Also on hand were the vet who had taken care of the dogs and a lot of the people who had donated food, supplies, or money to the program. The ceremony was in the chapel, and I had never seen that many people in there before.

Sister Pauline was the keynote speaker, followed by Dee and the commissioner. After that, we put the dogs through a ten-point drill that Jazz aced with ease. Only one dog didn't make the cut, a male with a tendency to nip, despite the best efforts of Dee and her people. But even he wasn't a total loss; Sister Pauline found him a good home with some people in Tampa.

After the ceremony and test, we had a nice buffet prepared by one of the vocational cooking classes. Naturally, I had to sneak Jazz a few choice morsels. Dee busted me once but just smiled. She knew how difficult seeing her go was, and no matter how I tried to slow down the inevitable, the time came.

Wendy was the handler who would take Jasmine to the airport for the flight to California and more specific training. From there, she would be matched with an appropriate partner who needed her special skills. I couldn't say a thing when Wendy clipped the leash onto Jazz's collar and handed it to me for that last walk together. We went through the door together, Jazz at her usual place beside me in the heel position. As we made it down a flight of stairs to the CP5 control room where we would part company, I wanted to turn and run with Jazz. It was silly, I know, because we were in a hundred fenced acres with no place to hide, but the urge was there and getting stronger the closer we got to the door.

Finally we were there. The electric lock clicked open, and the guard in the control room waved to me. She was always glad to see Jazz on the days when she and the other poodles went into the city. I bent down and hugged her, put my face in her hair, then lifted her chin and kissed that sweet dog right on the mouth. I didn't care what anyone thought. I loved her and was going to miss her. I stood up, tears streaming down my face. Wendy held my hand and said, "I know it's hard, but think of how much good she's going to do." I didn't care; a part of me, a very big part, was leaving with her. Wendy took the leash and went through the door, followed by the other handlers. Dee and Sister Pauline had stayed behind for a few minutes, talking to the commissioner about the next group of dogs. The door shut and the lock on the outside door buzzed. The entire wall was Plexiglas, so I could watch Jazz until she disappeared. Just before she reached the other door, she pulled Wendy back to the wall and looked at me, as if to ask, "Are you sure this is all right?" I squatted down until I was level with her face and waved. I was choking, but I managed to get out, "It's all right, baby. It's all right."

With that, Jazz turned around and pranced, yes pranced, through that door with her tail and head held regally high. That was my girl all the way.

I was inconsolable from that point. I didn't eat and barely paid attention to my work. Whenever someone would ask about Jazz or the dog program, I would break down. Finally, people stopped asking and left me the hell alone, which is exactly what I wanted, to wallow in my misery. I thought it would help when Sister Pauline sent me pictures of Jazz and progress reports, but that made everything worse. I've never had kids, but I thought I knew what it felt like to have a child kidnapped or given up for adoption. Three weeks later, Mary

found me in my room at two in the afternoon, lying on my back and staring out the window, my hair oily and stringy and my legs with a week's worth of stubble on them. She sat down on the edge of the bed and looked at me. "You're a fucking mess, Eaton."

"Yeah, well," I said without moving.

"Get up, wash your hair, and take a shower. Crawford wants you and me in her office in twenty minutes."

"Pink slip?" I guessed I was about to be bounced out of the program, maybe Mary too.

Mary shrugged. "Didn't say. All I'm doing is delivering the message. She said twenty minutes, and from the looks of you, you'll need all of that." She slapped me on the leg.

"Move your ass."

With Mary nagging me, I dragged myself out of bed, showered, and shampooed my hair. The legs would have to wait. Besides, I was wearing the standard jeans anyway. With Mary pushing me, we made it to the program director's office with two minutes to spare. Her secretary told us to go in.

Elaine Crawford sat behind the usual institutional desk, the top empty except for a phone and blotter. A computer and printer occupied a work station directly behind her. A radio played soft rock from somewhere. She motioned us to two chairs while she finished a conversation on her cell. She broke the connection and put the phone on her desk.

"You look terrible," she told me. I automatically touched my hair, then remembered my broken nails and folded my hands in my lap.

"I've been better," I said.

She turned to Mary. "You can't do anything with her?"

"Not much to do since Jasmine left."

Crawford nodded. "So it's the dog?"

Why did I have a feeling that she knew that before Mary told her? But I played along.

"Broke my heart, Mrs. Crawford." I started to tear up again, and she handed me a Kleenex from a box in her drawer. "Sorry," I muttered and blew my nose.

"Don't be." She came around the desk and stood in front of me. "I called you two over here because I need your advice on something."

Mary and I looked at each other. Since when did a program director ask inmates for advice? I balled up the Kleenex and waited. Mrs. Crawford walked to her office door and opened it. "Come on in. They're both here."

In walked none other than Sister Pauline. She had a leash in either hand, and on the end of the right one was the blackest poodle puppy I had ever seen, straining with all her might to get to us. At the end of the other leash was the cutest puppy in the world, a parti-colored little guy who was doing his damndest to get to me. Sister dropped the leashes, and both puppies ran for us. Mrs. Crawford made the introductions.

"The little girl on the right with her paws on Mary's knee is Kiki, and the little boy on the left, who seems determined to sit in your lap, Debra, is Rocco. They're both ten weeks old, and we're thinking about bringing them into the program. Dee had some reservations because they're so young, but after we talked, she thinks we can adjust things like their food and potty breaks, plus our facility has a lot of open space for them to run and play."

I probably didn't hear a tenth of what she said. I had Rocco in my face and was loving all over him, while Mary was busy trying to keep Kiki from climbing on the top of her head. I heard Sister Pauline's voice and held Rocco still in my lap.

"I'm sorry. What did you say?"

Sister gave me a radiant smile. "I asked what you thought about taking in puppies as young as this. It will be harder than with the first dogs, because they'll have to learn everything. You'll lose some sleep, and you won't have a lot of personal time like you did with Jasmine."

I hugged Rocco to me and kissed his head. He settled in against my chest and looked up at me. "Please," I nearly whispered.

I could see Mary nodding vigorously. "Yes," she said.

Mrs. Crawford looked at Sister Pauline. "You were right."

That was two months ago, and things have never been happier. I still miss Jasmine and have her pictures up on my board, but Rocco and Kiki have definitely filled the hole and helped the atmosphere in this cottage. Well, we did have one incident that's worth mentioning.

About a week ago, King stalked into the cottage on one of his "routine" searches. Ever since the "disciplinary incident" with Jasmine he had been a real problem for us. There wasn't a day that went by when he wasn't working hard to make our lives difficult. Maybe it was the spit shine on his boot that drew Rocco's attention, but he had been out running and then gulped down almost an entire bowl of water, so it wasn't entirely his fault. We were all so proud of him because he had never raised his little leg to pee before, but he went straight to that boot and emptied his bladder like it was the most natural thing in the world. For the first time in his life, King was speechless.

A couple weeks after the "pee incident," Mary came running in after work, so excited that I thought she was going to pee her pants before she told us what was going on. Finally I said, "You gotta slow down and take a breath or you're gonna blow a gasket. We aren't going anywhere. Just breathe, but this must be pretty damn good, so hurry up cause we really wanna hear what the hell's got you so exercised."

She took a deep breath, exhaled slowly and began. "I was finishing up at work this morning when Lt. Provoda came in to talk to my boss. Well you know how it goes; they act like we aren't even there. You will never guess what happened to Lt. King?" She paused there for effect, wanting us all to beg her to tell us, but she couldn't wait. "He got transferred to the East Unit in Starke."

We all fell on the floor laughing. It was the worst, meanest prison in the entire system. The meanest of the meanest men were there.

"Well, it couldn't have happened to a nicer guy." That comment came from Sally, King's most recent victim.

I walked over and grabbed both Kiki and Rocco in my arms. I brought them up to my face and whispered in their ears; no more worries my little ones. I gave them each a big kiss and put them down on the ground and watched as they began to bark and play tug of war. Life was as good as it gets in here.

It Didn't Matter At All

By Rachel C. Cupelo

In the end, it didn't matter. Or, it did, but not in the way I expected it to. You see, she had felt it coming a long time, known what she had to do, known it wouldn't be easy. The rest of us were clueless. She turned out ok, of course. She always did. But the road to ok was difficult, interesting to say the very least, borderline insane...as crazy as he was. To this day I'm not sure quite what happened, but I did learn this: details are fluid, and usually, in the end, they just don't matter.

As I walked around the backyard, watering flowers on that balmy June morning, it never occurred to me that anything might change, even though life often flows in that particular direction. I was blissfully unaware of any problems in the world. I continued to water the fragile hibiscus trees and already-monstrous, cherry-red geraniums, laughing when I stopped to watch my three little dogs roughhouse on the still-damp grass, dyeing the white fluff on their paws green.

And then, I looked at my watch. I'd lost track of the time, it was already 9AM. Where in the world was Andy?

Andy was a dear friend of mine. Every two weeks, for a little extra cash, she would clean my house. Normally I wouldn't ask such a thing of a friend, but she'd made the arrangement with more than one mutual acquaintance, always with satisfactory results, so I hired her too. She came every Friday morning at 7:30. But not this morning. Finished with the flowers, I went inside to check my cell phone and found a voicemail waiting for me. Before I could listen to it, the house phone rang. Startled, I hurried across the kitchen to grab it.

All I heard on the other end was sobbing. "Hello?" I asked, confused.

The person on the other end took a gasping breath. "Portia?"

"Andy? Andy, where are you? What's wrong?"

"Tia, you gotta help me. It's Ben."

Ben, her husband. A strange one, that guy. Loved to hike in the woods by himself. Worked

odd jobs when it suited him. I wouldn't have put up with it, but Andy confessed she didn't need his money, and after all, he was a dear. They'd been having problems lately, but it didn't seem too terribly serious. In any case, Ben took the dogs whenever Dave and I went on vacation, let them run wild on his and Andy's property on the edge of the state park. When the dogs came back dirty and deliriously happy, I forgave him his eccentricities.

"Portia?"

My mind had drifted. I snapped back to the present, tried to pay attention. "What's going on, Andy?"

"It's Ben." Another sob escaped her throat. "I told the lawyer to send over the divorce papers on Sunday, because Ben doesn't drink on Sundays. I was planned to be moved into a friend's place by then, out of his hair so he could make a decision. The god-damn lawyer didn't LISTEN."

I swallowed hard, felt something drop into my gut and harden. "Honey, what are you talking about? Since when are you guys getting divorced?"

She took another deep breath. It sounded as if she was calming down...or going numb. Who knew the difference when everything went down?

"I went to see a lawyer last week. He was drinking too much, Tia, and he wasn't hurting me YET, but he was hurting his throat and the walls with all that yelling and throwing shit. You remember what I told you about my first marriage. I couldn't go through it again."

"I understand," I replied. I winced at the grating clip of my voice. I'd intended to be more soothing, but I was too anxious.

"Anyway, so I told the lawyer to have his people deliver the papers on Sunday, when Ben's not drinking, because he's at least thinking straight when he ain't drinking, ya know? But they delivered the paperwork LAST NIGHT, Portia. I was working the last shift at Steve's. I would have been home to stop them, but the bartender that was supposed to be on shift called in sick and I wanted the extra tips and – "

"Andy," I interrupted, "what happened?"

At this she started to wail again. "He went CRAZY, Tia! I came home and he was all quiet,

sitting in his chair, drinking straight out of the bottle of Jack – Christ, he never does that, Portia, NEVER. So I knew exactly what had happened. He threw the papers in my face, and the bottle at the wall and, JESUS, Tia, there was booze everywhere. He started screaming, and threatening me, telling me I couldn't leave him. And then he went in the other room and got his rifle – “

I gasped. “Holy fuck, honey, are you ok?”

“Yes,” she moaned, “and no. I don't fuckin' know. He just went absolutely nuts. He was waving the rifle around, screaming about how I was abandoning him, and how he couldn't let it happen. And then he pointed it at me, and told me that if he couldn't have me, no one could. I ran, Tia. I ran outside and locked myself in the car. He followed me out there and just kept waving that goddamn gun around and screaming, banging on the car door. Finally he shot two holes in one of the tires, scared the shit outta me. And then,” she heaved a sigh. “Then he just stopped, and ran into the woods. And no one has seen him since.”

“Jesus Andy.” I heard my breathing relax a little. “Did you call the cops?”

“Of course I did! They wouldn't go in there after him, not with the dark and his gun, and...well, you know how he knows those woods. I was too hysterical to tell them anything. They had to give me a shot to calm me down.”

Oh boy. I bet she loved that. “So now what?”

“Now I have to go down to the station so they can interview me.”

There was a pause. “Would you like me to take you?”

I could hear the smile in her voice. “Thank God. I didn't want to ask, but...yes.”

I hung up and looked around at my kitchen, my home. My big, shining, warm home that I shared with my wonderful husband. With a grateful sigh, I ran upstairs to grab a quick shower before I went to pick her up.

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The forty-five minute drive to Andy's house felt shorter than normal. In a very rural area the next county over, the house was surrounded by hundreds of acres of woods and fields.

Twenty of those belonged to Andy and Ben. The remainder was state-protected wilderness park. Ben would go north if he wanted to hunt deer in the fall, but the remainder of the year he left his rifle on the rack and trekked through the park, pretty much every weekend, all weekend long.

I pulled up to the house and shuddered when I glanced at the trees, so thick and dark you couldn't see anything beyond the first line of evergreens. No wonder Park Police didn't want to go in there after a madman with a gun – the madman knew the park better than they did.

Andy was already outside, waiting, looking paler and thinner than usual. She got into the car without a word, her hands shaking as she pulled a light summer sweater closer around her tiny frame. It was already 87 degrees outside.

“You ok?” I asked her.

She shook her head. “Not particularly. I'm just, trying to keep my story straight in my head.”

“Andy, you didn't do anything wrong. Don't worry about it.”

She looked up at me, her eyes desperate. “You don't understand, Portia. They didn't believe a word I told them last night. And you know how it is on those *Law and Order* shows – one wrong detail and all of a sudden you're a suspect. Maybe I'm already a suspect!”

I shook my head, though I knew that, were I in her shoes, I would be similarly irrational.

“It'll be fine,” I told her. “You'll see. They'll figure out what to do.”

The police station was old. Everything about it felt slightly antiquated, with desks and chairs and even ceiling moldings and linoleum that felt as though they had been popular around 1957 or so, but certainly not since. I sat on a hard wooden bench out by the reception desk while Andy was taken to the back for her interview.

I must have dozed, because the next thing I knew it was an hour later and I could hear Andy's voice, shrill and panicked, behind me. When I opened my eyes and saw that she was being led to a holding cell, I jumped up and tried to go with her, but one of the

cops that brought her out stopped me.

"You can't."

"Well, what the hell is going on? You're not actually arresting her over this thing with her crazy fucker of a husband--"

He shook his head. "We're still investigating that. Look," he took me by the upper arm and led me away a bit, "there was a warrant out for her arrest. She was pulled over last month, and she got charged with a DUI when we tested her and found high levels of narcotics in her system. They were prescribed, but she was intoxicated. She had her court hearing this morning at 8:30AM, and she didn't make it."

I looked at my watch. "It's not even 1PM!"

"It doesn't matter. She missed it so she's under arrest."

I sighed and rubbed at my forehead, which suddenly felt tight and pounding. Andy had been a pillhead for as long as I could remember. She indulged frequently and with abandon, to the point when, one day last summer, she stole a bottle of Vicoden from my husband. He had expected, naturally, that when she came to clean she would help herself to one or two, and as he didn't need them particularly frequently for his back injury, he didn't mind at all. He had, however, been more than annoyed at the entire bottle, new from the pharmacy, that had disappeared off the top of his dresser. I was going fire her for it, until she promised to replace them and get her stuff from another source.

In remembering that particular incident from the year before, I was not exactly surprised that she'd gotten herself into this mess. However, given what had occurred last night, I thought the whole thing was pretty unreasonable. I expressed as much to the police officer.

"You're right," he agreed, "but the judge is a hard-ass. She needs to stay here until he decides what to do with her Monday morning."

Great. I looked over at her, in the holding cell, sitting on the bench, head down, completely defeated.

He followed my gaze and sighed. "You can see her at the county jail on Sunday af-

ternoon. Visiting hours are two to five."

I nodded, and walked out without another word.

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I knew what I had to do. I just wasn't sure that I could get away with it. Even Dave, who had little regard for rules he found particularly useless, looked at me like I'd gone completely crazy when I asked to borrow a few of the Vicoden from the bottle on the dresser, shoving them under the lining in the waistband of my jeans.

"What if you get caught?"

"I won't," I replied, though of course I had no clue.

"I just don't think it's a very good idea."

"Of course it's not! But I can't bear the idea of her detoxing in there alone."

Andy had explained painkiller detox to me once. I shuddered at the thought of what it entailed. No way, not in front of strangers, people who wouldn't protect her.

My nerves were shot by the time I got to the jail. I tried not to jump when the female guard went to pat me down. Miraculously, I passed through, and was brought to the visiting area. The place was devoid of people, except for one couple in the corner, sitting across from one another at a tiny table, their foreheads pressed together, murmuring, their eyes closed, hands clasped tightly together – the closest they could get to an embrace.

Andy came out of a door in the corner, and I could tell immediately that she was in bad shape. She was shaking so badly that she had difficulty sitting in the wobbly metal chair across from me. I grabbed the pills from the inside of my waistband when the guard's back was turned, holding them in my closed fist until I could grab Andy's hand and drop them into her palm. And just in time, because the guard turned back to look at us through the shatter-proof glass then, narrowing her eyes at the couple in the corner, banging on the window-frame and motioning for them to sit a few inches farther apart.

"You gotta take those before you go in back," I murmured. She nodded, pretending to cover her mouth and cough, slipping them between her lips and resting her cheek in her palm, elbow on the table, to obscure the chewing, not hesitating in the least at the bitter

taste.

I couldn't believe we'd gotten away with it. I smiled and gave her other hand a conspiratorial squeeze.

"They can't find him." She told me suddenly.

Of course not. They'd only dared to start looking this morning, and not without considerable caution. They were searching the fields first, going into the trees only a few hundred feet. They'd never find him that way.

Instead of expressing what was obvious, I only said: "But they will. They have to."

She looked at the table top. "I suppose."

"Oh, Andy – "

"Everything is a mess, Tia. I don't know what I'm going to do."

"I called your lawyer," I confessed. "He's going to take care of everything in court tomorrow, explain what happened Thursday night and how you were expected at the police station the next morning. You were overwrought and couldn't possibly have remembered the hearing. They'll have to understand."

She smiled, without humor. "You make everything sound so simple. It's just not. It never will be again."

"Please, Andy, don't get like this – "

"You don't get it," she interrupted, though gently. Then: "You should go, Portia. I'll call you if I ever get out of here."

I did as she said, secretly relieved to be released from my duties for now. Later I would scold myself – after all, I wasn't an easy friend either.

** ** ** ** ** ** **

Andy was released from jail Monday afternoon, thanks to the brilliance of her attorney. I only found out because a friend of mine, another police officer with the county, called to tell me.

I didn't hear from her after that, so I was surprised when she showed up at my house to clean. I told her she didn't have to be there, and frankly, I wasn't expecting her. But I didn't even have to ask why she'd come anyway. She smiled at me wanly and said, simply, "Well, I still have to make a living."

The dogs scratched at the back door and the wind ruffled the hem of my terrycloth miniskirt as I let them in. They jumped onto Andy's legs, and before long she was letting the mopped hardwood floor dry, sitting with me at the kitchen table, feeding my fattest dog little pieces of cheddar and eating the snack I normally provided - slightly burnt toast smothered in cream cheese and strawberry jam.

"I'm glad you're out of jail, at least." And I was. It had been so unnatural to see her in that jail that day, slipping her painkillers so she wouldn't be driven out of her mind in her cell.

"You were right," she said. "That lawyer is a fucking genius. I paid a fine for missing my first hearing, and my next one isn't for another month."

I nodded. "It's about goddamn time you caught a break."

She shrugged, but gave me a little grin before she snatched the last piece of toast. I laughed and got up to make more.

The shrill of the doorbell made us both jump. The dogs tore out of the kitchen, momentarily forgetting their snack in the excitement and possibility of making a new friend. I went with them, not all that surprised to see the same officer I spoke to at the police station staring back at me from behind the glass of the storm door. I let him in.

"Ma'am," he greeted. "By any chance, is she here?"

I nodded, leading him into the kitchen.

Andy was busying herself with a piece of toast, slathering it with more cream cheese than any human could possibly require in a week. She was reaching for the jam jar when the officer cleared his throat.

The knife dropped from her hand. She turned and paled. "Either you've come to

arrest me again, or you found him.”

“Ma'am, you should sit down.”

Snack forgotten, Andy fell into her chair at the kitchen table, hands clasped so tightly together the knuckles turned red, and then yellow-white.

The officer sat down as well. “Ma'am, I regret to inform you...” And then he didn't seem to know how to continue.

“My husband is dead,” she blurted out.

“Yes.” The officer heaved a breath, having been released from something difficult. “We found his body in the park, about three miles in. He succumbed to a...a rifle slug to the head.”

Her face went powder-white, but she mastered herself, and her only other sign of distress was the desperate way she clutched her glass. “So, he killed himself.”

The officer nodded. “Yes ma'am. The forensic tests prove it. Now...” he braced himself again, as if to discuss something delicate. “He was exposed to the elements, and the... animals...for quite some time. It isn't my place to suggest, of course, but you may want to consider a closed-casket funeral.”

She nodded quickly, staring at her glass with a concentration I'd never seen from her, as if, by focusing on it, everything would right itself.

The officer cleared his throat one more time, getting up to leave. “Again, I'm sorry for your loss. Of course you'll need to come by the morgue to formally identify the body, but you can do that any time today or tomorrow.”

She nodded again, rote, as if she were doing it merely to please him.

The second he left, she began to cry. She didn't stop crying for seven hours, and when she was done, she slept on my couch for two days, taking a break only to take the trip to the morgue. But when she woke up the third day, she ate, smiled, and talked, and I finally figured out what that strange expression in her eyes had been that morning she found out Ben was dead.

It was relief. Pure, unadulterated relief.

She ended up having him cremated. She'd refused a funeral ceremony and the usual reception that followed. Instead, a week later, she'd had a party for all of their family and friends, displaying his ashes on a table with pictures and other mementos.

"SIX urns?" I said incredulously. "Why in the world didn't they just put him in one?"

She shrugged. "Apparently ashes are really heavy, and I would have had trouble lifting the one urn if I'd wanted to take him anywhere."

"I suppose that's a good point."

"So," she smiled slyly. "Which one do you think has the ashes from his dick?"

We both looked down at the six tiny stone urns, sitting somberly on a dark blue tablecloth, and burst out laughing.

** ** ** ** ** ** **

A month later the weather had turned dry and unbearably hot. Andy came by after her hearing, carrying her bathing suit and a bottle of the cheapest chardonnay the grocery store offered, that we could also stomach.

"So what's the damage?"

We were outside, laying our towels on the lounges, pouring chardonnay, readying our floating chairs for the pool. She pushed herself backward onto her hot pink, inflatable chair and grabbed her glass of wine before answering.

"Not much at all. Mandated drug and alcohol therapy for the next few months to assess my 'substance abuse problems.'"

I rolled my eyes and grinned. "Christ, have they MET you?"

She laughed. "I'll fake it like a good girl, and get on with my life. Whatever it takes

to get it to go away." She gulped her wine and grinned at the look on my face. "Don't worry, therapy doesn't start until Wednesday."

I smiled, because sometimes you just have to love people, just the way they are.

"What are you doing with the house?"

Andy shrugged. "Sell it, probably, after Mom and I clean it out. I don't need all that room, and I certainly don't need all that crap. I'm such a packrat!"

I snorted. Packrat indeed. Andy was a world-class hoarder. I was amazed they weren't just giving up and taking a match to the place.

We sat out for a few hours, until her freckles connected and I went a dark brown. I turned to her again. "You doin' ok, honey?"

"Jesus, Tia, awful lot of questions today."

"I'm just worried, Andy. You know how I am."

Her smile faded. "I know. And I'm fine. Or I'll be fine. Same difference, really."

I looked at her for a moment, really looked at her, and when I saw the light in her eyes, the ease of the muscles in her face and arms, I had to ask the question that had been nagging at me since that day.

"So..." I looked at her again, mastering my expression first, my face carefully neutral, measuring the meaning of the words before they left my mouth. "Did you do it?"

She looked back at me, one eyebrow raised. She sipped at her glass of chardonnay, cheap and yellow and dry, smacking her lips and adding a Percocet, swallowing it whole. And then she smiled fully. "Does it matter?"

I smiled back, because, well, No. No, it didn't. In the end, it didn't matter at all.

Discovering the Body, Discovering My Own Voice

By Shirin Karimi

At the recommendation of a mentor, I carefully opened the Amazon.com package to reveal the newest addition to my library. *Body of Work: Meditations on Mortality from the Human Anatomy Lab* by Dr. Christine Montross. As I dove into its pages, I found that this exquisite memoir by a first year Brown University medical student captured even more than its title imparted. While Montross pondered the body's hidden and intricate mysteries with the guidance of her selfless, inert lab cadaver, she in return grants her living audience a wondrous gift. Montross bestows upon us a book that encompasses an experience akin to a first dissection. We hold the book in our hands, knowing that we are about to be educated on a completely foreign experience. We stand with only questions of what we are about to encounter filling the expanse of our thoughts. And with every turned page, we find something quite unexpected.

While we previously thought about our bodies as foreign cavities that should not be explored or intruded upon, we now see that these shells harbor within them something deep and pure, untainted by the world we trod them through. In the stillness of the body and the beauty of Montross's lyrical musings, we bear witness to truth, logic, and perfection. With every bone, every valve, every complicated intertwining of nerves, muscle, and fascia, there is a brilliant design, a crafted engineering, and a divine artistry. The wondrous aspect is that without Montross's careful eye and sublime communication that offers a bridge from the detached language of medicine, we would be ignorant of this knowledge. We would continue to steer our bodies, our silent and steadfast bodies, throughout the stress and chaos of everyday life with no notion of gratitude or compassion for their tireless operation. Montross's courage to shed hidden light on those aspects that cause us discomfort, and to do so with both grace and sanctity, is a gift to all readers. She gives us the courage to face our own discomforts, to trod into unknown places, and to seek out and pay respect to the beauty that inevitably resides there in the shadows but very much alive.

With Montross as my guide and her brave words resounding in my ears, I began to find similarities in medicine and the justice system, two seemingly disparate fields of knowledge that both carry associations of sadness, but also hope and even triumph. Within the ugliness of a growing tumor or a bleak prison cell, I saw that with some effort, one could find the same beauty that lies deep in the foreign environment of the body. Whether one examines a tumor that wreaks physical damage throughout the organs or the isolation of a prison cell, one still finds a spirit that may stand immune to metastasis or to depression. My

thoughts on these subjects culminated in a book to be published this past spring entitled *Enclosures: Reflections from the Prison Cell and the Hospital Bed*. Three of the poems from my collection are enclosed in this edition of BleakHouse Review. I dedicate them to Dr. Montross with profound gratitude for giving me a little bit of her courage in my own life.



Venus: Washington, DC
Carla Mavaddat

Seedlings

I can see her garden.
Little seedlings
Sprouting from the shimmering surface of her head.

They are tiny,
So wispy
One breeze could carry them far away
And she would be left with nothing again.

But no malicious wind, no malignant character dare touch her.
For beneath those gentle seedlings
Lies the strong, fertile soil,
A breeding ground that anchors the seeds deep
Never resigning, never relaxing its grip.

The soil is she
Resilience herself.



Life: Naples, Florida
Carla Mavaddat

Eve's Apples

Well, Blanca and I never really got along so they brought in a new cellie. I want to start off on the right foot this time, so I'll try and think of her as a college roommate. Something I never had. I'll be nice and patient. Maybe she'll be nice too, maybe she won't be the shankin' type. I've had enough of those, thank you very much.

I'm a little nervous, I mean, what if she doesn't like me? What if she's an addict and gets me to start doing stuff with her? Shit, my counselor would be real disappointed after a whole year. Well, I shouldn't scare myself, they're opening the door, I'll just extend my hand and welcome her to her home.

Fiona. That's her name. Fiona. Pretty name. Much better than Eve. She's a new fish, she's delicate but not brittle like the others. Her hair is clean and falls to her shoulders in waves, like in *The Birth of Venus*, that was a pretty painting in the book. And she says hello to me, not in a growl, not in a timid mutter, but in a musical rhapsody that I haven't heard for 20 years. Wow, she is young, probably 18 or 19. She looks like an athlete too, not one of those lumbering gorillas on the rugby team, but maybe a gymnast or a ballerina. The way she moves endows the tiny cell with something I've never seen before. I think they call it Grace.

I can't really see the rest of the body on account of her saggy uniform. But the uniform has been recently laundered so it actually looks good on her. She has one of those hourglass figures, I bet. I always liked those, run your hands on those curves like an undulating wave in the ocean, up and down, enjoy the ride. My body? Pathetic after three bastards and a shit-ton of crack. I don't think I am anything to be admired, but her...

Maybe we'll get real close like best friends. Dare I say, girlfriends? I'll start by giving her an innocent hug after she starts to trusting me. And then...I'll start to linger a little more on the hugs, my hands resting on her toned shoulders, drifting to that collarbone. It'll take time to pick the apples though, can't rush the apple picking season. But once it happens, I know I'll never taste anything as sweet.

Weightless

There was a lake behind the gardens
Of our summer home in Montauk.
And there was an ancient weeping willow at its edge
Her long branches gently caressing the still water
Always protecting the water from intrusion,
From disruption.

But that didn't stop my dad from hanging a strong rope From the highest branch
So James and I could spend hours on end
Swinging from the wet grass
Into the crisp water with a loud holler.

There was that initial fear,
Maybe the rope wouldn't hold our weight
Maybe the branch would break.
All was forgotten when we let go and
For that one second, we were
Weightless, like astronauts or angels.

The closest I came to seeing God outside the Church.
And then, the icy relief of the water, reminding us of the Powerful sensation of being alive.
I will swing again soon.
But this time,
There will not be anything to catch me.

Tea with Gene

By Zoé Orfanos

He called honey Sunshine in a Bottle. Can't you see the liquid life? He'd ask through the clouds hanging above our tea. He said he could feel it spreading every time he took a drink. I spent each Sunday taking sips of the sun, surrounded by the neatly-framed faces of those who could no longer take Sunday tea and those who preferred coffee. He didn't trust coffee. A whirl of dying white in a bitter current; no sunlight. He asked me between cups, What are you doing? I showed him a fatigued list, a battlefield of slashed words and fresh ink. He found his name and looked back at me. What are you doing? My eyes hovered on the border of broken phrases and sliced sentences surrounding three words:
Tea with Gene.
I am here, I said, drinking tea. Why? He asked.
I asked him to pass me the honey.



Dupont Circle, DC
Carla Mavaddat

Cigarette

Searching eyes find an excuse and slip out the door
The back pocket of his jeans reveals a used pack of cigarettes,
the front pocket coughs up a lighter.
It's quiet outside tonight, even the stars stayed indoors,
But he's outside like clock-work,
he doesn't even like to smoke
Just the air, the forgiving air
that reaches in and solves his problems
searching out every tense word or moment
and easing his pain.
Eyes on the sky, he flicks the ash off of the end of his cigarette
and leans against his truck.
The light from the house finds the gray working through his hair
like the smoke curling from his hand
over years and years.
Light sounds from the television slide through open windows
And are ignored by ears closed by the dark.
And then the window closes
and smoke rises from the little cemetery of worried thoughts
as he turns his back on the night and shrugs through the doorway
of another day.

Rhapsody in Red: An Essay on the Human Body Under Assault

By Saba Tabriz

Our world is enclosed by the thin layers of skin, tissue, and muscle that comprise the human body we inhabit. The protection afforded by the human body is at times quite limited. Through a close analysis of the texts, *Stiff*, *Body of Work*, and *How We Die*, written by Mary Roach, Christine Montross, and Sherwin B. Nuland, respectively, I delved into the precarious and at times frightening world of assault on the human body in both life and death.

The response of the complex human body under assault is impressively simple. As Hippocrates directly stated, “Man is an obligate aerobe,” meaning that our bodies continually depend on air to sustain life. Oxygen is inhaled from the environment and strategically carried by red blood cells through the chambers of the heart and to each vein, capillary, and tissue of the body. The body under assault endures shock, with the result that the flow of oxygenated blood is inadequate to sustain certain tissues, which ultimately die. The extent of cell death varies by the severity of the method by which the shock is administered. There are various ways by which an individual can experience shock, however the body under criminal assault, and more specifically, murder, presents itself as far more common, brutal, and intriguing than the rest. ¹

Murder has a long-standing history. As scientists worldwide first explored the anatomy of the human body, the demand for freshly deceased bodies skyrocketed as their supply quickly diminished. Scientists were willing to pay great fees in return for any fresh body, no questions asked. This prompted risky “body entrepreneurs” to go about murdering civilians and delivering them to the scientists engaging in this silent, subrosa exchange. One of the most famous cases still referenced by many today is that of Burke and Hare. After discovering and selling a dead lodger from the boardinghouse they ran, this grim pair soon took to creating their own corpses for profit. One lodger, for example, was suffocated by a pillow and Burke’s considerable body weight. Some fifteen bodies later, the two were finally brought to justice. We do not know if their bodies, in turn, were placed in the service of science. ²

1 Nuland, S. B. (1994). *How we die: Reflections on life’s final chapter*, p. 118. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

2 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, p. 48-49. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Modern day homicides of the sort carried out by Burke and Hare have continued to occur as recently as the last 20 years. As lower caste individuals in Colombian society, termed "disposables," were being murdered for the purpose of "social cleansing," the story of a garbage scavenger who survived leaked to the public. Hernandez, the garbage collector, recounted awaking in a vat of formaldehyde surrounded by fifty corpses in various stages of decay. How did he get there? He merely arrived at the Universidad Libre for a trash-collecting job, only to be battered over the head and stored away for the purpose of fulfilling the needs of science.³

The craze for fresh human corpses to serve as subjects of dissection has largely passed. These days, people donate their bodies to science on a regular basis these days, at least in the West. As a result, the majority of murders are products of personal vendetta and mental illness. One jarring instance in particular is that of an institutionalized paranoid schizophrenic, Peter Carlquist, who was responsible for the death of a young girl named Katie Mason. Katie was attacked in broad daylight, at the center of a street fair, her face viciously mutilated with a seven inch long hunting knife. Mercifully, the assault induced traumatic shock and she presumably felt no pain.⁴

Graphic murders like this one have been dominating the media world. On the other hand, suicide, or self-murder, has crept its insidious way into popularity among youths. According to the United States government's Centers for Disease Control (CDC), "suicide was ranked as the 11th leading cause of death among persons ages 10 years and older" in 2006."⁵ And in 2007, CDC also reported that 29% of high school students considered suicide in a span of 12 months.⁶ Of the methods used, firearms, poisoning, and suffocation are most commonly relied upon when executing a suicide plan. Hanging is by far the most vulgar method of suicide, as it acts directly, with deadly and ugly efficiency, on the body's inability to function without a sufficient source of oxygen. As suicide victims hang themselves, their body weight tightens the noose around their neck and obstructs the upper airway. The blood above the noose remains deoxygenated and builds up pressure in

3 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, p. 50-51. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

4 Nuland, S. B. (1994). *How we die: Reflections on life's final chapter*, p. 124-129. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2006). [Graph illustration 2006] *Twenty Leading Causes of Death Highlighting Suicide Among Persons Ages 10 and Older, United States*. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/statistics/leading_causes.html.

6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2007). [Graph illustration 2007] *Percentage of U.S. High School Students Reporting Considering, Planning, or Attempting Suicide in the Past 12 Months, by Sex, United States*. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/statistics/youth_risk.html.

the head, causing an unsightly, often ghastly, scene.⁷ As Nuland describes it best, “the discovery of a grotesquely hanging corpse whose swollen, sometimes bitten tongue protrudes from a bloated blue-gray face with hideously bulging eyes is a nightmarish sight.”⁸ It is astonishing to imagine that over one quarter of teens consider a fate such as this; however, the sad truth is that 13.6% of youths actually attempted suicide in 2007, many by hanging.⁹ Nevertheless, the number of teen suicides continues to grow.

Lethal and non-lethal assaults on a living human being, criminal and personal, are exposed on a daily basis through the media, word of mouth, and even direct personal experience. But the body, even in death, is not free of assault. Before one can explore this world of assault on the dead, it is important to first understand the meaning of death. Though it is a seemingly simple term, death has a very conflicting, complex, and ambiguous past. The confusion over the determinants of death began centuries ago as scientists searched for the exact moment at which a human being became a corpse. Originally, this moment was characterized by the cessation of a heartbeat, that is, when the heart could not be heard at all with the rudimentary tools that were available at the time. Ultimately, the fear of live burial and vivisection drove scientists to take extreme measures in order to validate the death of a human being. From the slicing of foot soles and needles pressed underneath toenails, to rhythmic tongue pulling and sharp pencils jammed inside the nose, the cadavers in question were subjected to great abuse.¹⁰ It is painful to even imagine what one would experience should they be falsely believed to be dead and consequently endured these intimate assaults.

Fortunately for the bodies of the dead, putrefaction eventually became the most reliable method of verifying death, a standard that required no gross violation of the would-be corpse.¹¹ Yet this clear standard did not settle matters for good. Soon different forms of death were established: clinical death, brain death, and legal death. Clinical death occurs in “short interval after the heart has finally stopped, during which there is no circulation, no breathing, and no evidence of brain function, but when rescue is still possible.” When an individual experiences brain death, on the other hand, their brain has lost full function while the heart continues to circulate blood through the body. Finally, to

7 Nuland, S. B. (1994). *How we die: Reflections on life's final chapter*, p. 159. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

8 Nuland, S. B. (1994). *How we die: Reflections on life's final chapter*, p. 159-160. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

9 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2007). [Graph illustration 2007] Percentage of U.S. High School Students Reporting Considering, Planning, or Attempting Suicide in the Past 12 Months, by Sex, United States. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/statistics/youth_risk.html.

10 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, p. 170-171. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

11 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, p. 172. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

be declared legally dead, one must have undeniable evidence that the brain has permanently lost all function. In cases such as this, all support will be removed from the body and the heart will eventually cease to function.¹²

Paradoxically, the majority of assaults the human body endures may occur not in life, but in death. As early as 12th century, and as recently as 2002, cadavers have been victims of cannibalism. Beginning in Arabia and China, cadavers were steeped in honey and used topically and orally as medication. As the recipe in the Chinese *Materia Medica* very specifically describes, “the subject does not eat food, he only bathes and partakes of honey. After a month he only excretes honey and death follows. His fellow men place him in a stone coffin full of honey in which he macerates.” Mummification in this manner was very common in the earlier years. Recipes for “mummy elixir” were provided for “drying, smoking, and blending the flesh” to cure palsy, vertigo, and most commonly, bruises. Further pharmaceutical uses of cadavers included the wrapping of skin to prevent cramping, fresh blood to treat eczema, gallstone to stop hiccups, the naval to cure a sore throat, and infinite uses of cadaver feces.¹³

Cadavers continue to assist the medical world as their bodies, in pieces and as a whole, are the staple of anatomy labs in every medical school worldwide. As students enter medical school each year, they are faced with the mentally and emotionally tolling task of dissecting and examining each nook and cranny of the human body. Christine Montross beautifully describes this gruesome yet revealing journey through the human body as she strived to become a doctor. In Montross’ third year, she participated in an autopsy that was so disturbing it left her with night terrors, much like her experience in the anatomy lab. Montross, bringing us with her into the autopsy room, watches as the autopsy technician “slides his thumbs beneath the cut he has just made...and peels the scalp down over the face...He has essentially turned his face inside out, so that where the young man’s features should be is instead the yellow-and-red underside of skin, hair curling oddly from beneath, at the level of his mouth...caus[ing] her to gasp.” The rest of the autopsy included slicing away at organs and ripping them out, only to stuff the body with sheets and “sew the trunk and scalp back together with wide stitches.” As a result, “[t]he skin stretche[d] taut with each pull, like hide.”¹⁴

12 Nuland, S. B. (1994). *How we die: Reflections on life’s final chapter*, p. 121-123. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

13 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, p. 221-232. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

14 Montross, C. (2008). *Body of work: Meditations on mortality from the human anatomy lab*, p. 193. New York: Penguin Group.

The process Montross observed in medical school is similar to that of a mortuary in preparation for burial. Mary Roach, too, observes this quite brutal process, which includes stuffing the eyelids with cotton and caps, and suturing the jaw and anus shut. In her year-long exploration of “the curious lives of human cadavers,” Roach also watched as cadavers were used for surgical practice, as car crash “dummies,” and ballistic targets.¹⁵ Roach reports that fresh cadavers have been decapitated for “refresher courses” on facial anatomy and common surgeries such as face-lifts and nose jobs.¹⁶ In particular, she observed a plastic surgery seminar at which forty cadaver heads were shaved and placed on roasting pans, neatly displayed for the surgeons.¹⁷

“The collective cadaver résumé,” according to Roach’s text, also “boasts contributions to government legislation for lap-shoulder belts, air bags, dashboard padding, and recessed dashboard knobs” in addition to the “non face-gashing windshield.” Cadavers are preferably used in crash simulations in the place of classic metal dummies because they can provide researchers with far more accurate data. Crash dummies can only provide researchers with how much force they were hit. Instead, crash cadavers, as it were, are able to depict the actual impact of these forces on each body part and illustrate the precise effects of the whipping motion involved in every car crash. In doing so, cadavers experience broken and shattered bones, tears, leaks, and “sloshing” of the brain, as well as a number of other ruptures, lacerations, and abrasions.¹⁸

Cadavers have further helped science by acting as targets for ballistic experimental studies. Research of this sort has been performed since the early 1800s as the French, German, and Swiss armies shot at cadavers to test the impact of weapons. As for the Americans, Captain Louis La Garde of the Army Medical Corps performed multiple cadaver-based ballistics tests to compare the physiological effects and incapacitation capabilities of the army’s weapons. In his experiments, a number of naked cadavers were “suspended from a tackle in the ceiling of the firing range, shot at in a dozen places and with a dozen different charges, and autopsied.”¹⁹

15 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, subtitle. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

16 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, p. 23-24. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

17 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, p. 19-20. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

18 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, p. 87-93. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

19 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, p. 131-133. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Cadavers have surely proved themselves to be tolerant and silent sufferers. From medical research and car crash studies, to injury analysis and weaponry, their selflessness has provided researchers with the knowledge to protect the lives of future generations. What, then, is a suitable end to these selfless endeavors? How should these stolid, stoical soldiers of science be laid to rest? As a practical matter, the choices are burial, cremation, and human composting. Cremation and burial are the most common forms of disposal of cadavers, whereas composting is less traditional but certainly just as brutal.²⁰

Cremation, which reporters often referred to as “a bake oven” and “a large cigar box,” involves the burning and vaporizing of human flesh into ash. Burial, on the other hand, works more indirectly. The body is ultimately putting itself under assault. The enzymes that once were under strict control by the body's cells begin breaking down the body's cell structure. The bacteria that once inhabited the stomach and maintained a healthy bowel system “stop feeding on what we've eaten and begin feeding on us.” Their digestion produces gas that builds up in the body's cavities, including the abdomen, mouth, and genitalia. Eventually, the body is so entirely digested that it collapses and dissolves. Human composting is a process that involves freeze-drying the body to remove all water, uses waves to break down the body into pieces, and freeze-drying these pieces into compost. Despite the harsh nature of this process, it is the most environmentally safe and is often used to grow a memorial plant. No matter which route is pursued, disposal is the last and final indignity a cadaver must endure. Cadavers may well deserve better, but it would seem their fate is to be selfless in death and in their final repose.²¹

20 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, p. 251-254. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

21 Roach, M. (2004). *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers*, p. 61-68, 251-266. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Meet the Authors

Rachel Cupelo is an alumna of American University, where she majored in Justice and Public Policy studies. Currently, Rachel is a legal assistant with a small international law firm. She has been practicing her other passion, writing, for much of her life. She is the proud recipient of the 2008 Tacenda Magazine Literary Award for Best Poem, and the GLBTA Resource Center 2009 Academic Award. Her work can also be seen in *Lethal Rejection: Stories on Crime and Punishment*, and *BleakHouse Review* 2010. In the future, Rachel plans to attend law school.

Jack Curtis is studying Philosophy at American University. He often forgets where he is going when he walks, and has a patent pending on a beer-based brain cooler. **Jane Dempsey** is a Theater Major and French Language Minor at American University. Jane has always had an interest in the darker side of humanity, and the two classes she's had with Professor Robert Johnson have cultivated this interest. She's loved drawing since she was little, and hopes to make a living out of art and theater. Let's see how that goes.

Jane Dempsey is a Theater Major and French Language Minor at American University. Jane has always had an interest in the darker side of humanity, and the two classes she's had with Professor Robert Johnson have cultivated this interest. She's loved drawing since she was little, and hopes to make a living out of art and theater. Let's see how that goes.

Tim Gallivan recently graduated with a B.A. in Political Science from American University. He graduated summa cum laude and with University Honors. Gallivan is now working at the Burton Blatt Institute, a Syracuse University-affiliated organization that aims to advance the civic, economic, and social participation of individuals with disabilities. He plans to attend law school in the fall of 2011, and he ultimately intends to pursue a career in public interest law.

Charles Huckelbury is a life sentence inmate and a widely published poet. His first collection of poetry, *Tales From The Purple Penguin*, was published by BleakHouse Publishing. Huckelbury also writes an op-ed column for the *Concord Monitor*.

Shirin Karimi is an award-winning honors student recently graduated from American University with a degree in Literature while also pursuing the Pre-Medical Program. She is the Editor in Chief of Tacenda Literary Magazine, the co-editor for the Catalyst science magazine, and a volunteer at Georgetown University Hospital. Her book, *Enclosure* (BleakHouse, 2011), has been widely and favorably reviewed.


Emma Lydon is an American University student double majoring in Political Science and American Studies. After she graduates, she hopes to go to law school. Ellen Miller is a senior at American University majoring in Justice. She works at the Talon yearbook as editor in chief following a year abroad spent in New Zealand and Italy. In her time at AU Ellen has interned at the Metropolitan Police Department, the US Attorney's Office, and D.C. Citysearch. She aspires to become a published author and eventually an editor at a publishing house or magazine in New York City.

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Courtney Scantling, originally from southern New Jersey, is an American University student majoring in Justice with a minor in Psychology at American University. She loves reading and writing short stories, but ultimately hopes to become a criminal defense attorney and work with juveniles.



Saba Tabriz is an honors Pre-Medical student at American University majoring in Psychology and Business Administration. Her interests span a number of disciplines, but Tabriz is particularly interested in the human anatomy as understood by science, as well as abstract notions of life, death, and everything in between.

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Meet the Editors

Robert Johnson, Editor is a professor of justice, law, and society at American University and a widely published author of fiction and nonfiction dealing with crime and punishment. His short story, "The Practice of Killing," won the Wild Violet Fiction Contest in 2003. His best known work of social science, *Death Work: A Study of the Modern Execution Process*, won the Outstanding Book Award of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

Carla Mavaddat, Guest Editor, is an undergraduate, at McGill University with a passion for photography, and design. She is originally from Montreal, Canada, but grew up in Washington, DC. Carla is interested in human rights, in social justice, and is a strong advocate against poverty.

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