



The Wake Review

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The Wake Review

literary magazine and club

Mission Statement: The *Wake Review* is a student-run creative journal at Wake Technical Community College which seeks to provide a forum for the students, faculty, and staff of Wake Tech to express themselves through literary and artistic means such as poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and visual or audio arts. At the *Wake Review*, we believe Wake Tech should always have a place for its creative voice.

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Ode to My Medication

-Maggie Hix

Damn you, happy pills!

A day without, I can manage.

Several, things begin their downhill

Roll, a week? Well...

Damn you for what happens next.

Each morning, I wake much less than whole

And stumble through the darkness until a finger

Brushes one of my many missing pieces.

Damn it, it's you! Always you,

With your sociable stench of serotonin,

And other things I lack.

I swallow my humanity,

Become closer to whole once more,

And wallah! Damn you for that.

Damn you and I,

And our perfect match.

The Girl in the Tower

-Yasmine Consolo El Khoury

It all started with a curse. A curse that fated an innocent girl to spend her days locked in a tower waiting for a knight in shining armor to save her and whisk her away to his far away kingdom. Only the last of the Wanderers remembered why, but what everyone did remember was that she was untouched by death and whoever rescued her won her hand in marriage. No one knew what she looked like, but her unattainable features gained her popularity among the young men. They would ride to the tower on gleaming horses and make way with a loud parade saying they would be the one to bring the princess home. But none ever did. Soon the girl fell from memory and was as forgotten as the Wanderers.

A long time ago when people still remembered the princess, her parents would come visit her daily, calling up the tower and telling her of all the ways they were trying to save her. They brought her homemade food to be sent up by basket and knights from faraway lands to save her. She never got to taste the food and the knights never saved her. She never told anyone, but as soon as anything from the outside passed through her window it turned to ash and floated down to coat her floor, a reminder that she was fated to stay locked up forever. Immortalized until someone could save her.

Vines wrapped her tower in layers plastering the struggles of those that came before as a sort of warning to others. Their armor and bright white bones stayed pinned up by thorns, swaying in the non-existent wind. An omen for all those that came after. Years passed and the princess' parents stopped coming, and the parades stopped coming, and the knights stopped coming. And yet the girl still sat in her tower untouched by the years surrounded by a floor covered in the ash of presents she couldn't enjoy.

Year after year the princess watched from up in her tower as the pile of white bones below her window grew and the shadows around the castle grew longer and scarier. The yard became unkempt and the vines grew out of control, spreading wildly across everything they could touch and devouring it in a spiral of green. Still more men came all pomp and circumstance, leading parades and delivering grand speeches about the princess they would attain as theirs. But the parades became funerals that marched home in sorrow.

The girl's hope slowly seeped away. It seemed to run out of her in dark rivulets and escape through the cracks in the rock to slither across the ground, creating a shadowed wall that none dared to pass. Not even the sun rays seemed to pierce it, bouncing off and falling across the yard, leaving the

tower to wilt away. Forgotten. The shadows rolled off of her in streams blackening the whole room. The tower was surrounded by a blackness that seemed to have no end. And slowly her legend was lost to everyone, and the shadows stayed dark as no one came upon the tower.

The girl gazed out her window and watched the world pass her by as her tower started to crumble and the stones started too groan in the night. She began to wish that the tower would fall and take her with it, but she knew it was a hope that wouldn't come true. It was on a cold winter's night when she was woken up by the sound of horse hooves. She crept to her window to see an old horse struggling to walk as a hunched figure swayed in the saddle. Watching helplessly she saw the lump in the saddle sway too far and collapse to the ground, landing with an unmoving thud. Gasping, she leaned out of her window as far as she could before her air seemed to evaporate and she was left gasping for breath. The horse neighed, tossing its matted mane and stamping its hooves, but the lump barely twitched. Slowly, the horse calmed and sank to the ground, lying as still as the lump that had lain on its back.

Watching from the window the girl wished for a voice, wished for a basket, wished for a way down. She wished until she felt mad at the gods and cursed her fate, but only the stars responded, blinking down at her. Tears streamed down her face to fall into her ash covered floor, making puddles of grey water that fell through the cracks and sank into the tower stone.

Keeping vigil all through the night, she stared at the odd duo under her tower and wondered at the wanderer that had tumbled upon her tower. The lump under her tower was a man, a young man. One who had set out to prove something and fight for something, but as he lay there, unmoving on the hard ground, he too cursed his fate and he too only got the stars blinking back in response.

He hurt. His body hurt from lack of food and sleep and the beating a group of stable boys had given him for trespassing, but most of all his soul hurt. It hurt him to breathe as he lay there and felt his dream slipping out of his grasp to fly away on the wind, seeming to mock him as he couldn't even lift a finger to try and grasp it.

He didn't know where he was and he knew he should care, but he could not find it in himself to. Just as the girl could not find in it herself to hope that someone would save her.

That night the world watched two lights wink out. And not the lights that flickered out as a life ended, but the snuff of a light that happened abruptly when a soul reached its limit and retreated back into darkness.

The girl had had a little hope left, enough to keep her soul warm and her tower from being cloaked in complete darkness, but watching the unmoving lump and the horse, she felt only dread because she knew no one was coming

to help them. She lived in a tower caged by vines, haunted by knights tangled in their thorns, forgotten by the world thanks to a curse she wasn't supposed to be a part of. No one had come in years; she was as forgotten as the Wanderers, the last of the storytellers, who had wandered the Old World. She was a legend long forgotten in a kingdom that didn't know how to save an innocent girl.

And the man, he was just a boy with a dream to prove that the legends existed. That the Wanderers still lived. They just hid because the world had moved on and forgotten about them. But lying there half dead, their hope died. Snuffed out. And the world seemed to get a little greyer.

It was a legend, a different legend, that the light of the world was determined by the happy souls and every time a soul got snuffed out the world became just a little bit greyer. But that's only a legend and we all know legends are only partial truth.

The sun rose, and still the horse and the man didn't move. Slowly, the girl got up and walked across her room, her heart heavy and her tears dried. The tower seemed to groan with her, understanding her anguish. The horse sat below, keeping its own watch, but unable to comprehend what it saw as the tower before him seemed to change to grey as if ash had seeped into the cracks and stained the white stone, changing it forever.

The girl sat on her bed, her demeanor as grey as the tower. She didn't even hear when the horse clopped away.

Now here is where our story takes a turn.

For the young man found a spark. He found it that night when he managed to roll over and see a tower that was once white, seeming to cry grey tears as they seeped out of the stone, forever staining the pure white rocks. He found it when he sat up and realized that he lay in a shadow of a tower when it was night. It was magic, he thought, and with that a flicker of his soul came back. And with that flicker he pulled himself up and rode his horse into the kingdom.

He healed and he researched and within two turns of the moon he was back on the road. His spark was still small, but he nursed it each day and kept it alive. The more he traveled, the larger his spark became, and soon it was back to a roaring fire.

While traveling, he stumbled on a hunched old man tending to a fire. He felt as if he could taste the change in the air. With a weathered smile and a tired wave the old man motioned for him to lay his pack down and sit by the fire. Before the young man could ask anything, the Wanderer started to speak.

His voice was deep and seemed to vibrate the air around him as he spoke. "The world is made up of legends, but we all know that's a legend, and

legends are only partially true. First there was the legend that stitched together the sky, then there was the legend of souls that brightened the world..." The old man talked on and on into the night, sometimes listing legends, other times telling them. All the while the young man sat by the never dying fire and blinked slowly as he listened, enraptured by the spells that were woven by the legends.

Days passed and the young man learned the ways of the Wanderers. He learned how to listen, how to tell stories, and how to keep the magic alive in a world that was determined to hide it.

On the fifth day the old man sighed and looked off into the distance, as if a great weight was on his shoulders. Turning slowly he said, "There is one legend left to teach you, but this one does not have an ending."

"How can a legend not have an ending?" the young man questioned, his voice a sweet lullaby compared to the old man's.

"It all started with a curse. A curse that fated an innocent girl to spend her days locked in a tower, waiting for a knight in shining armor to save her and whisk her away to his far away kingdom to make her his queen..."

The old Wanderer told the legend long into the night and the young Wanderer sat and listened, a great stillness creeping over him as he remembered all those years back when his soul was snuffed out, but a spark emerged because of a tower that cried grey tears.

"How...how does it end?" the young Wanderer questioned.

"The ending is up to you."

The young man closed his eyes and breathed deep as the old one had taught him, and when he opened them he was unsurprised to find the fire gone and the man as well. But in his place rested a cloak and a travel stick, and the young man knew without being told that he now was one of the Wanderers. One of the few who could keep the magic alive.

Picking up his travel stick and swinging the cloak around his shoulders, he walked into the unknown.

Now the girl, the girl finally gained enough courage to go and look back out the window, but even seeing that the horse and lump were gone she could not bring herself to care. And again she turned to the sky to curse the fates, and again only the stars blinked in response.

She didn't even notice that the tower had turned grey.

The little hope she had had seeped out of her, and the tower plunged into total darkness. Almost as if the tower became part of oblivion. Not even the stars could be seen.

For months the girl lived in total darkness, with only the bones of the fallen glowing in the night. On a night much like the one when she had been sentenced to her fate, a bird perched on her windowsill. Its chirp startled her,

and then to her surprise it flew into her room. She squeezed her eyes shut not having it in her to witness another death. Not hearing the slight rainfall of ash on her floor, she opened her eyes to the wonderment of the bird flying around her room. It circled twice before flying out into the world beyond.

And with that bird came back a spark. A spark that grew into a roaring fire. A spark that would grow to save her.

She didn't know what had changed, what had made it possible for living things to come into her tower, but something had changed. Instead of sitting and cursing the fates, she sat and planned. She planned and she sang to the birds that had taken up residence in her room, escaping the new fallen snow, her spark roaring.

One day she woke up and the tower was no longer encased in shadow. The sun shone through, melting the snow that sat on her window. The air turned to spring and the vines started to grow again, and the more they grew the more the fire inside her roared until one day the vines reached her window.

Singing goodbye to the birds, she grabbed her pack and took hold of the vine and slowly climbed out of her window. As she climbed, the sun rose behind her in the most brilliant and vibrant sunrise the kingdom had ever seen. The kind of sunrise that meant a curse had been broken. The kind that was lit from within by a soul that had escaped and magic that freed into the air.

The man was on the road, maybe a few days' walk from the tower, when he watched that sunrise. And he knew. He knew in his bones that the legend finally had an ending. The girl had saved herself.

The Butterfly Effect

- Prisha Rathi



Looking Through the Racial Lens: Wilkie Collins in *The Moonstone*

-Joshua John

Wilkie Collins' novel, *The Moonstone*, is set during a time when Britain's crown jewel of their empire, India, was under constant turmoil, threatening to break free from its captors. With events like the Sepoy Mutiny, the annexation of Punjab, and the Opium Wars fresh in the mind of the British public, Britain's collective opinion on colored people, specifically Indians, was not favorable. Trailokya Mukharji best captured this attitude by explaining that "[E]very nation in the world considers other nations as savages or at least much inferior to itself," a perspective especially true of Britain, whose racist agendas were necessary to justify its colonial conquests (702). Though this judgmental attitude was widespread in Britain, Wilkie Collins held a far more sympathetic view toward Indians which he showed through his treatment of the Indians in *The Moonstone*.

Indians were often seen as mindless savages that were inferior to the English in both mannerisms and language, but Collins portrays the Indians as dignified individuals, defying English stereotypes of Indians. Perhaps the most obvious example of Collins' sympathy and respect toward Indians was their interaction with Gabriel Betteredge near the beginning of the novel. During the opening scenes of Betteredge's written account, he comes across three Indians who want to perform for Lady Verinder. While Betteredge does turn them away, he notes that one of the Indians "exhibited... the most elegant manners" (Collins 16). In Victorian society, appearance was of the utmost importance in maintaining class distinction. As a member of Victorian society himself, Collins was aware of the importance manners played in the social constructs of his time, so he provides the Indians in the novel with enough grace that even Betteredge, an Englishman's Englishman, is impressed by their social conduct. This reference to the Indian's proper manners suggests that Collins believed that Indians were more than the simple-minded savages Britain thought them to be. A far more common view of the Indian man would have looked more like the following excerpt from Sumanta Banerjee, where he describes the Victorian view of Indians as "a group of immigrants who typically used their skills to engage in such games, that helped them to overcome their sense of inferiority" (62). The language employed in this interpretation of the Indian man in Britain is telling of the common opinion held at the time: the words "immigrant" and "inferiority" highlight the alienation and disrespect the Indians faced. The Indian juggler stereotype is reinforced by Collins, but the skills and games the Indians play as jugglers are

not for escaping the suggested inferiority as a result of being an Indian. Instead, Collins demonstrates how the Indians use the juggler disguise to achieve their main objective, suggesting his respect for the Indians' intelligence and their tactics. By attributing proper etiquette and intelligence to the Indians, Collins crafts a respectable figure that defies the stereotypes of its group. Furthermore, Collins represents the Indians as capable members of a Victorian society, able to maintain their manners and appearances in public, something the common English opinion would deny was possible for an Indian savage.

To reinforce his positive portrayal of Indians, Collins showcases the inappropriate behavior of upper-class British society to show how far removed the Indians were from savages. During the events of *The Moonstone*, Rachel Verinder and Franklin Blake demonstrate their poor behavior and step out of their expected roles as upper class citizens. One of these instances is recalled by Miss Drusilla Clack, a relative of the Verinders; she witnesses an encounter between Rachel and Godfrey Ablewhite, writing, "'I will hear it!'... She started to her feet with a scream.... 'Don't speak to me! Don't touch me!' she exclaimed" (Collins 207-8). In her response to Godfrey, Rachel loses her temper and yells at a man. Her behavior is unacceptable on two counts: her position as a member of the upper-class and her role as a woman. On the first count, her behavior is inappropriate because she is meant to represent the "good breeding" of her family (Collins 260). Secondly, Rachel violates the role of a woman in the Victorian household. The Victorian woman was, as Deborah Gorham elaborates, "reared for domesticity, and prepared... for a dependent and subordinate position.... [playing] the complex role of Angel in the House (102). Instead of upholding these values, Rachel defies both of the roles of an Angel and a subordinate to man through her vocal demands of Godfrey. Her expected domesticity is abolished through her abrupt yelling, and her offensive stance in her argument with Godfrey further alienates her from the typically submissive Victorian woman. Rachel's rejection of these cultural norms would have her labeled as savage and uncouth. Moreover, Franklin exhibited behaviors that were almost animal-like when he saw Rachel again after her departure. In this meeting, Franklin approaches Rachel and the following scene takes place: "I saw nothing but the woman I loved coming nearer and nearer to me. She trembled; she stood irresolute. I could resist it no longer—I caught her in my arms, and covered her face with kisses" (Collins 338). Although Franklin was originally with Rachel to discuss the details of the Moonstone's disappearance, his attraction to her as a woman comes first and foremost. Franklin's description of the encounter even hints at a hunter stalking his prey. Employing words like "caught" and "trembled," Collins strengthens the allusion to an animalistic hunter-prey relationship

(338). To stress that Franklin's action is involuntary, Collins also adds that Franklin "could resist it no longer," showing that his outbreak of lust is purely instinctive (338). Driven entirely by his sexual instincts when confronting Rachel, he wholly ignores the Victorian view that such contact should not be based on raw impulse. Collins critiques Victorian society through both Rachel's outbursts and Franklin's impulses, showing that the members of the British upper class often fit the stereotypes of the savage animals they claimed Indians to be. Had either of these instances been from an Indian, he would immediately face British scrutiny and fall into the stereotype of the common Indian savage. However, by attributing such character flaws to the white members of British society while giving none to the Indians, Collins strengthens his belief that the Indian is no more a savage than the boldly rash and impulsively unrestrained main characters.

Collins also shows his sympathy toward Indians through his use and description of violence throughout the novel. Violence is a significant theme that is seen through various attempts at obtaining the Moonstone. While both the Indians and the British use violence to secure the possession of the diamond, the way Collins describes these violent acts contributes to his sympathetic attitude toward Indians. The first connection between violence and the Moonstone happens during the Storming of Seringapatam when John Herncastle attacks the Indians. Setting up a disturbing image of the battle, Collins writes, "A third Indian, mortally wounded... and I saw John Herncastle, with a torch in one hand, and a dagger dripping with blood.... [and] [t]he dying Indian sank to his knees" (4). The death of the Indians paints a cruel picture of colonial Britain's invasion of India. Through his grotesque picturing of the Storming of Seringapatam, Collins is "call[ing] attention to imperial crime—lawless acts committed in the name of the empire" (Nayder 140). Herncastle in the Storming of Seringapatam personifies colonial Britain in its prime, wreaking havoc and destruction on the native people for personal gain. The allure of the "virgin-like" Moonstone develops the analogy of "the colonial rape of a feminized India" as a result of the "male theft of the moonstone" (Munjal). With England as the overbearing assaulter, the feminine India is constantly subject to these unrighteous colonial actions. With the strong allusions to the questionable and criminal acts of the colonization of India, Collins drenches the narrative with innocent Indian bloodshed by the British. However, Collins' sentiment toward the Indians and colonization were not shared by his employer, Charles Dickens. Upon hearing of the Sepoy Rebellion, where around 100,000 Indians died, Dickens relished the fact that "wretched Hindoos [were] [being] blown from an English gun" (qtd. in Sutherland xii). He supported quelling the rebellion, and, unfortunately for the Indians, this opinion was widely shared by the rest of

colonial Britain. In truth, Dickens was likely the best representation of the dominant view in Britain since he was a male of the middle class. During this time, colonial Britain's racist views were widespread, as Catherine Robson explains: "The citizens of Great Britain were thus welded into a more cohesive whole. But few of them were ready to accept the peoples of the colonies (and especially indigenous nonwhite populations) as truly 'British'" (685). It is Charles Dickens' view, representative of the overwhelming majority in Britain, that Collins chooses to challenge in his writing. By emphasizing in the prologue the violence and bloodshed in India, Collins immediately brings into question the legitimacy and justification of Britain's actions toward the Indians instead of following the racist bandwagon colonial Britain rode.

In another example of violence regarding the Indians and the Moonstone, Collins emphasizes the intelligent and nonviolent nature of the Indians as they complete their objective of obtaining the Moonstone, showing that they are worthy of respect. The Moonstone, ever since it was in the custody of Septimus Luker, a dealer in ancient gems and carvings, had been in London under the close and conniving watch of the Indians. Around the same time, during his stay in London, Godfrey receives a note for him to visit a house for his charity work, and upon arriving at the house, he "felt himself suddenly seized round the neck from behind.... his eyes were bandaged, his mouth was gagged, and he was thrown helpless on the floor by (as he judged) two men. A third rifled his pockets, and... searched him" (Collins 196). The Indians needed to conduct a search of Godfrey's pockets, and in order to search his pockets, the Indians had to carefully plan a scheme that involved using a letter to deceive Godfrey into arriving at the house. Collins uses this short interaction between Godfrey and the three Indians to emphasize the thoroughness of their actions. The amount of time the crime took is also worth noting, as the description of the events only occupies four sentences, suggesting the crime was committed swiftly and efficiently. Godfrey also had no recollection of the Indians ever talking during his detainment, which pointed to the level of organization the Indians had before committing the crime. Collins could have portrayed the interaction as a typical street robbery, but this would only affirm the poor opinion the British had for the Indians. By instead showcasing a well-executed plan, Collins gives the Indians a level of intelligence that most of the British would deny. The same occurrence takes place in the home of Luker, where "[e]xactly what had happened to Mr. Godfrey in Northumberland Street now happened to Mr. Luker in Alfred Place" (Collins 198). The Indians carried out their attack and search in the quickest way possible, much like the first attack on Godfrey, but in this case, the Indians' endeavor was successful: they found the slip of paper they were

looking for. Both of these had taken place similarly, in each case with minimal violence. In both of the searches, they refrain from using any weapons, and the only forceful tool is the “tawny naked arm” of one of the Indians. Collins, again, could have easily given the Indians some sort of weapon, but instead, he chooses to show them unarmed, or rather, bare-armed. As Ashish Roy describes, this connection between unarmed Indians and innocence is rooted in the “Sepoy Revolt of 1857-58, which began as... an uprising and ended in widespread... [b]loody reprisals,” where hundreds of thousands of innocent unarmed Indians died to British hands. Collins also employs other examples of the Indians’ innocence, showing how the Indians do not kill or permanently harm Godfrey and Luker, something that may have occurred if the perpetrators were British and the perpetrated were Indian. By representing them in this manner, Collins brings out two key aspects: the Indians are intelligent and efficient in their crimes, and the Indians are characterized by innocence and nonviolence.

Collins uses great detail to elicit a reaction of, at the least, severe questioning of Britain’s violent actions in India; Godfrey’s murder is the third example of violence in connection with the Moonstone. The lack of detail here shows a level of innocence and righteousness from the Indians. Godfrey’s murder is given scant detail: Collins dedicates hardly a page to describing the Indians committing the crime. In a correspondence with Franklin Blake regarding the murder, Sergeant Cuff affirms, “[H]e was killed (while he was asleep, or immediately on his waking) by being smothered with a pillow from his bed - that the persons guilty of murdering him are the three Indians” (Collins 445). Even though the Indians did kill Godfrey, they did so in the most nonviolent manner possible: smothering him using a pillow. After going to great lengths to make the method of killing as mundane and innocent as a pillow smothering, Collins even adds the possibility of Godfrey being asleep while he was murdered, giving an even softer image of death. The fact that the death happened without the readers witnessing it in the text also lessens the severity of the killing when compared to the killings by John Herncastle at Seringapatam. In contrast, every violent action from the Indians seems to be covered by a film of innocence, as the killings are never gruesome. Collins’ suggestion of the possibility of a painless death seems to hint at his support of the Indians’ struggle, even if he is not supportive of the crime itself. When given an option on whether to support the Indians or the British, Collins clearly chose the Indians through his depiction of violence.

Collins contrasts the main characters’ selfish motivations to that of the Indians, who act to reclaim their religious centerpiece, rather than greedily yearning for self-gain. The first character with a clear motive to find the Moonstone is Franklin. Although the Moonstone has great monetary value,

Franklin's interest with the Moonstone relates to his honor. When the Moonstone is first declared missing, Franklin is the first to go out and fetch the police, making the search for the diamond a personal matter. Betteredge recounts Franklin's actions, explaining, "he first sent for the servants... Mr. Franklin suggested next extending our inquiries to Miss Rachel, and sent Penelope to knock at her bedroom door" (Collins 79). Franklin is the character who steps up when the knowledge of the lost diamond reaches the Verinder household. His immediate reaction of attempting to find it while other characters remain in a state of shock is because of his honor. Franklin makes it clear to Rachel that his main concern is with his honor when he approaches her a second time about the Moonstone, confessing, "If my honour was not in your hands... I would leave you this instant" (Collins 339). Franklin's obsession with preserving his honor is a driving force in the novel, but it ruins many relationships and family ties in the process, such as his relationship with Rachel for more than a year. Another example of a character trying to obtain the Moonstone for his own self-gain is Godfrey. He led a double life that he had trouble keeping up with financially, buying "a villa in the suburbs which was not taken in his own name, and with a lady in the villa, who was not taken in his own name, either" (Collins 448). Godfrey's expensive tastes and life of pleasure led him to need a large sum of money to make up for his expenditures, which he sourced illicitly from his beneficiary (Collins 449). Godfrey's actions throughout the novel in pursuing the Moonstone were all a result of his one goal: to get out of the financial disaster he led himself into. Out of all of the characters in the novel, the Indians' motivation for obtaining the diamond is the only one that does not serve their own interests. Long before the Moonstone was known to the **New World**, the "deity commanded that the Moonstone should be watched... by three priests in turn... to the end of the generations of men" (Collins 2). The entire lineage of the Indian priests was dedicated to the one task of keeping the precious stone safe. It is with this heavenly mandate of being keepers of the stone that the Indians were prepared to lose their highest class of a brahmin priest in the caste system by "crossing the sea; secondly, in disguising themselves as jugglers" (Collins 71). By showing they are readily willing to make profound sacrifices, Collins ennobles them, demonstrating their devotion to their holy duty. Collins crafts their narrative throughout the novel as virtuous and self-sacrificing, worthy of an English gentleman defying the stereotype of Indian inferiority.

Throughout *The Moonstone*, Collins goes to great lengths to place the Indians in the best possible light, and even when he uses common images such as the Indian juggler, they are far from the classic stereotypes widespread in Victorian Britain. To develop his different narrative of Indians, Collins gives the Indians novel attributes that go completely against English stereotypes,

presenting the Indians with traits of manners and intelligence. He even contrasts these with the downfall of the white main characters, who, at times, act like the savages Britain likens the Indians to. Although Collins never voices his concerns over British colonialism and the treatment of the indigenous population, his characters and his descriptions of their behavior lead the reader to question the acts of the British. By going against the common picture of an Indian and defying stereotypes at every turn, Collins develops the Indian as worthy of respect and care, showing that Collins, at the least, had a degree of sympathy and did not agree with the racism toward the Indian community and the actions that Britain took against India.

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Work of Arch

-Jessica Hartman



Ana

-Loren Cocciolone

I strive to be a collection of the misconceptions and self perceptions of perfection.
Molding into the cold, fake gold outside appearance that is reflected by this defected mirror.
I only see what I want to see.
A me, full of seeping flaws, creeping through my skin and weeping their insecurities.
I spend days laying in bed, a slave to the sayings in my head
Wishing I were dead.
Because dead is better than obsessed.
Never getting dressed in older clothes.
Stressed over the messed up press of this dress on my body
I mold myself into wishes and desires.
With the higher standards that are required I sacrifice every lovely taste for losing waste.
I waste away by every pound.
I feel the heartbeat in my chest ... pound,
As I continue counting down.
107, the highest I've ever been
100, only one week in.
97, I messed up again.
93, I start to feel thin.
Week 4 begins and I am tired.
Tired of these thoughts wired always to food.
But I must continue because I'm too far to turn back now when I'm so close to the finish line,
Ana whispers in my ear..
I've deftly avoided death so far,
But I don't know how far I'll go before my heart decides to stop.
Misaligned rhythms of my heartbeat.
Matching misaligned thoughts
Mismatched memories.
I can't remember the last time I was happy with me,
The true me,
Not this folded, pressed, and sewn up doll

Cloth made of crippling cries clinging to uncertainty
Sewn up with that sharp satisfaction of looking in the mirror dragging the
thread of not eating.
Not a single taste should touch my sacred tongue.

It's been years of the back and forth.
And, trust me, I'm doing my best to survive.

Thomas Paine and the “Nothing in Particulars”

-Richard Holme

The religious makeup of America is changing. The Pew Research Center found that the American Christian population has fallen “12 percentage points over the past decade” to 65% (“In U.S.”). The Pew Research Center also found that “the religiously unaffiliated share of the population” has grown to 26% which is “up from 17% in 2009” (“In U.S.”). This group of religiously unaffiliated Americans includes atheists, agnostics, and the fastest growing subgroup, “nothing in particular” (“In U.S.”). Lexico gives the definition of atheist as “a person who disbelieves or lacks belief in the existence of God or gods” and agnostic as “a person who believes that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God or of anything beyond material phenomena; a person who claims neither faith nor disbelief in God.” However, the definition of “nothing in particular” is a little harder to track down. Fortunately, because the “nothing in particulars” do not self-identify as atheist, or agnostic, or as being a member of any traditional organized religious group, a definition for the “nothing in particulars” can be found using the process of elimination: a person who may believe in God or higher power but has no affiliation with organized religion. So, this is a completely new, unique, and exciting movement going on in America, right? Well, like most things in life, it has all been done before. In fact, the foundation for the “nothing in particulars” was actually laid shortly after the American Revolution by the famed journalist and political activist Thomas Paine in his work the “Age of Reason.”

In the “Age of Reason”, Thomas Paine claimed he was a theist. Paine said, “I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life” (696). Paine also spoke of God when he described what he claimed was the “true theology:” a “natural philosophy, embracing the whole circle of science... [which] is the study of the works of God, and of the power and wisdom of God in His works” (699). David Hoffman wrote in his article “‘The Creation we Behold’: Thomas Paine’s the Age of Reason and the Tradition of Physico-Theology” that “Thomas Paine was a ‘scientific deist’ who believed that the omnipotence and benevolence of God are evident in

the structure of the universe” (281). According to Hoffman, Paine “criticizes scripture for not furnishing as good a proof of God's existence as Creation” (296-297). The term scientific deist is just a fancy way of saying that science can help prove the “existence of a supreme being” (“Deism”). It was Paine’s argument that nature and science in and of themselves provided all the evidence necessary to prove that God exists. To simplify things further, if the theological terms theist and scientific deist are removed from the equation above, the picture being painted is that of a man who endorses the idea of a Creator. However unorthodox for his time, Paine accepted that something greater than himself exists.

Even though Paine believed in God, he certainly did not believe in Christianity or any other organized religion. Paine said that “I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of” (696). He was also quite outspoken as to why he felt this way: “[a]ll national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit” (Paine 696). Paine had a deep-seated mistrust of organized religion. On top of this, he was also skeptical about the origins of organized religion. Paine said that “[e]ach of those churches show certain books, which they call revelation, or the word of God” (697). However, Paine believed that if “something has been revealed to a certain person, and not revealed to any other person, it is revelation to that person only” (697). In short, if Paine did not see it, he did not believe it. Even though Paine’s ideas were widely unaccepted by 18th century America, he was unafraid to openly reject organized religion.

Now, fast forward a few hundred years and Thomas Paine, except for those well-versed in American history, is relatively unknown to the average American. I had certainly never heard of him. However, his ideas sound strangely familiar to my modern ears. After stripping away the details, the fundamentals of Paine’s beliefs are this: some kind of God or higher power exists, but this God or higher power does not exist within the confines of organized religion. Bernie Sanders, a 2020 Democratic Presidential front runner, is quoted by *CNN* saying, “I am not actively involved in organized religion” (qtd. in Burke).

According to the *Washington Post*, “Sanders said he believes in God, though not necessarily in a traditional manner” (Frances and Wagner). Sanders also said, “I would not be running for president of the United States if I did not have very strong religious and spiritual feelings” (qtd. in Burke). So, Sanders claims to be spiritual and believe in God, but he is not attached to any traditional organized religious group. Does the Bern keep a copy of the “Age of Reason” in his back pocket during interviews? Probably not, but this where a connection is beginning to form. The beliefs of Sanders qualify him to be a member of the “nothing in particulars.” It is my exposure to the beliefs of the “nothing in particulars” that made the rhetoric of Thomas Paine’s the “Age of Reason” resemble that of a long-lost friend.

Nearly one in five modern Americans self-identify as “nothing in particular” (“In U.S.”). Most “nothing in particulars” claim to believe in God or a higher power. Corinna Nicolaou, in her article “Spiritual but not religious” writes, “[w]e may believe in a higher being, though we might call it ‘the universe’ or ‘the divine intelligence that created all this.’ Most of us have reverence for a power greater than ourselves and crave a deeper understanding of its significance.” The Rev. Lillian Daniel wrote an essay for *The Huffington Post* where she spoke about a hypothetical conversation with a “nothing in particular” in which her companion was “telling me that he finds God in the sunsets” (qtd. in Oppenheimer). Nicolaou’s use of the phrase “the divine intelligence that created all this” and Daniel’s hypothetical companion who sees divinity in nature is a reference to the idea of intelligent design. Intelligent design is a close relative to what Hoffman described as Paine’s “scientific deism.” In the words of Paine himself, the summation of these two relatives is “the study and contemplation of the works of creation, and of the power and wisdom of God revealed and manifested in those works” and was his greatest argument for the existence of God (699). Then Joseph Mirra, a self-described None whose beliefs are more accurately defined as “nothing in particular,” in his short poem said that only a “numskull” would believe that “Almighty God did not per se exist.” While Mirra’s tone was a little snarky here, a comment from Paine reveals that he carried a similar sentiment: “[n]o one [can] deny or dispute the power of the Almighty” (697). Whether the “nothing in particulars” refer to God as Him, or

Her, or the Sun, or my dog Spot, they certainly believe in God, or at least, they believe in something greater than themselves.

Though the similarities between Paine and the “nothing in particulars” do not stop here. While it is common for the “nothing in particulars” to believe in God or a higher power, another key piece of their identity is that they are unaffiliated with organized religion. Rev. Daniel continues in her essay about the hypothetical “nothing in particular” saying, “I dread the conversation with the person who finds out I am a minister and wants to use the flight time to explain to me that he is ‘spiritual but not religious.’ Such a person will always share this as if it is some kind of daring insight, unique to him, bold in its rebellion against the religious status quo” (qtd. in Oppenheimer). Nicolaou, who was simply raised ignorant to religion and is not marching in the boots of a rebel said, “[t]he number of religious services I attended growing up could fit on one hand, with enough fingers left over for a peace sign. I hardly know a Catholic from a Protestant, let alone the belief systems of other world religions.” Nicolaou also explained how her views on sexuality caused her to question traditional organized religion: “I can’t wrap my head around a God who is more concerned with our private parts than with the content of our hearts.” Nicolaou’s preference for personal judgement over doctrine and her willingness to openly reject what she does not believe was shared by Paine when he said, “[m]y mind is my own church” and “it is necessary to the happiness of man that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe” (696). Continuing with Mirra’s poem, after breaking from organized religion Mirra continued the practice of prayer and used his newly open Sunday schedule to reflect on the “bad things religion’s done”; a reflection shared by Paine when he spoke of the many “mischiefs that the Christian system has done to the world” (699). While the reasons the “nothing in particulars” give for not participating in organized religion are not as “fist shaking in the air” as Paine’s, the “nothing in particulars” stand in unison with Paine when it comes to rejecting organized religion.

So, what does all this religious jargon boil down to? When I read Thomas Paine’s “The Age of Reason” I was struck with how familiar his ideas felt to me. I instinctively knew I had heard something like

this before. Paine said that he “saw the exceeding probability that a revolution in the system of government would be followed by a revolution in the system of religion” (696). While I do not believe this “revolution” has occurred in America’s systems of religion, I do believe there has been a “revolution” in the minds of the American people. When Thomas Paine released the “Age of Reason” into the American ethos, over the centuries it gestated and formed the now prominent and recognizable demographic called the “nothing in particulars.”

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Guiding Light

-Vanisha Lodhia



Forgive Me

-Anonymous

I awake to the sound of my brother not being good enough.
Aroused from slumber into arctic winds – into temperatures
beyond mortal ken.
A deep bass thunders, and his inadequacies are laid bare.
Doors closed. Eyes closed. Headphones.
A prayer to keep my candle aflame.
I am asleep. I am gone. I am dead.
It flickers and I flicker. I huddle into warmth and it warms me.
My room is a bunker, my fortress, well prepared.
Doors closed. Eyes closed. Headphones.

It's not my fault.

The winds howl shrilly, my sibling's voice cannot carry over
The tempest of his own creation. He has provoked the gods.

What shelter can I give that will not be destroyed?
I am made of mud mixed from sand and blood.
What use can you make of me?
When the angel and the devil both whisper, "Unworthy."

It's not my fault.

Suffocate me with your silent cries, your shadowed dreams.
like ice sliding beneath my skin –
I turn away and breathe my candle in.
Let it slough away the days, the months, the years,
The moments when you were my kin.

I am not my brother's keeper.

Let it burn. Let it engulf me.
Let it incinerate all that I am.

Make it so I will never be cold again.

Jaimasi

-Lauren Bell



At the Risk of Opening Pandora's Box

-Christian Cale

Occasionally the dominant culture will impose its values onto a society to an extent they are engrained too deeply for most to consider the option of questioning them. This is most often achieved through force, co-opted with calculated rhetoric meant to indoctrinate the population throughout the succeeding generations. This was the chronicle of Greece and most of the Mediterranean as the Catholic church and its army conquered the region. It seems unthinkable in the progressive society we live in that one could address another person and say that the religion they follow is ludicrous to the degree we categorize it as mythology. This ethnocentric line of thinking has been the burden of not only Christianity but is indicative of all organized religions throughout most of history. Although organized religion and Greek mythology are considered to be opposites, they are actually quite similar when considering the categories of anecdotal allegory, ambiguous interpretation, and civil preservation.

Anecdotal allegory is the art of storytelling with the intention of teaching a lesson. Many of our nation's notable universities, including Harvard college, were founded on the basis of educating the common man in an effort to better understand the Bible on a personal level. Ironically, they saw their endeavor as an opportunity to advance society by making the wisdom of the Bible more accessible, not advancing human knowledge in the subjects of math or science. Organized religions have bestowed fundamental teachings to their congregations via their respective holy books since the dawn of theism. Christianity teaches of the necessity to abstain from persuasion and lust in the story of the first woman, Eve. Adam and Eve, the first man and woman created on Earth, were gifted by God all the facilities needed to sustain life with only the fruit from the forbidden tree prohibited to them. Eve is persuaded by a serpent to disregard God's word and commits original sin which damned all human life thereafter. Greek mythology features Pandora, the Earth's original woman, who is gifted a box containing all the evils and hopes of the world under the instruction to never open the box. Upon her insubordination, all life on

Earth is damned forever to live with the escaped evils of the box. These stories make evident shocking similarities not only in content, but in the purpose of serving to set a precedent for the repercussions of disobeying God's will, furthering the notion that both organized religion and Greek mythology use anecdotal allegory to educate their adherents on the basics of humanity.

Ambiguous interpretations are ones in which there are several possible conclusions to be drawn. In John Carpenter's *The Thing*, audiences abroad were left to decide for themselves whether the alien lives or dies with the famous closing line, "why don't we just wait and see what happens," as the screen fades to black. Organized religions have utilized this facet of narration in their legends. Before King Henry VIII of England broke away from the Catholic church, it was illegal for the Bible to be printed in English. Historians hold the belief this was chiefly a product of the Catholic Church's attempt to keep the word of God inaccessible to the population in order to prevent them from forming individualized opinions conflicting with those of the church. As a result of a broader population's comprehension, the true meaning of Christ's words have been debated in a comparative fashion to our constitution and our Founding Fathers' implied meanings. In the Book of Matthew, there is a story where Jesus instructs his disciples to tear out their own eyeballs if it causes them to sin; this could be interpreted literally as it is by many or metaphorically in the sense that if one has a problem, he should abstain from said vice in order to become closer to God. Throughout Greek mythology, human beings have communicated with gods via oracles. Oracles were humans chosen by the gods to speak through and relay messages to the population. These messages, however, were often vague and left much to the imagination in terms of application. King Acrisius was visited by an oracle whose only warning was that he would be murdered by a grandson, leading Acrisius to live a life permeated by paranoia. This story could be a lesson pertaining to paranoia, contentment, civility, trust, free will, or several other human tribulations. Both organized religions and Greek mythology use ambiguous interpretations to educate adherents on an array of topics.

Civil preservation is the act of maintaining order within a society. The majority of modern societies maintain order through a codified system of laws integrated with an informal set of morals the society holds intimately.

Organized religions have long assumed the responsibility of facilitating this function on account of civilization. Incorporated into the Jewish Torah is a distinct example of this in the story of Moses receiving God's Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments serve the overt purpose of providing guidelines to follow in order to live a godly life. These commandments restrict actions that are deemed immoral by society and are detrimental to its continuance, such as murder and thievery. Christianity promises compensation in return for abiding by these same ten commandments in the form of eternal life, alternatively threatening eternal damnation as a consequential effect of disobedience. The intention of maintaining order in Greek mythology is manifested precisely the same way. Although the teachings of Greek mythology are encompassed in numerous tragedies of independent literary works as opposed to a single holy doctrine, they serve the identical purpose of providing instruction for living an ideal life. Greek mythology's focus was teaching humility and respect for elders, as evidenced in the story of Icarus. Icarus was warned by his father to not fly too high or he would surely fall, a warning not heeded by young Icarus. Icarus eventually flew too close to the sun, melting his wings, causing him to plummet to his death. Hubris was considered taboo by the ancient Greeks and was the most undesirable trait one could personify. The story of Icarus serves to teach the lesson that youthful hubris proves detrimental to members of society and the larger whole of society itself. Organized religions and Greek mythology are both catalysts for civil preservation.

When new cells are formed in the presence of cancer cells, the cancer cells attack the newborn cell before it ever has the chance to flourish; this is a comparative function to the one bigotry has played in the course of human civilization. When a child is born into circumstances of hatred and enmity, he internalizes these beliefs and forms his own around them. This cycle is the foundation of oppression and can take decades to break when these malevolent thoughts entrench themselves into our institutions, such as religion. There was a moment in time unbeknownst to its constituents where religious toleration was facilitated out of necessity due to the overwhelming variety of forming religious groups. Today's generation should realize the importance of this occurrence and be grateful to live in a society where we can worship our deity of choice without trepidation of

persecution or ridicule. Unfortunately for the ancient Greek Pagans, intolerance has been the enduring Achilles' heel of mankind.

Forgotten

-Ryan T. Starling



I Smell You on the Sheets

-Andrew Kearns

I still smell you on the sheets

Not the smell of sickness

Of diseased cells spreading and multiplying

Nor the slightly antiseptic smell of hospitals

That lingered long after you came home

Just you

Shea butter and Chanel

The faint traces of the dinners you cooked for us

Pages of old books from the stories you would read

Paint from the portraits and landscapes you loved to
work on

I still smell you on the sheets

And I can't bear to wash them

But you raised me to make my bed and change the sheets

Shattered Beauty

-Jamini Kharwa



Memories are Fickle Things

-Madysen Rufener

“What sane person could live in this world and not be crazy?” – Ursula K. Le Guin.

Unlike most others, Lillian Bonner was born twice (metaphorically speaking). Her second birth lacked the usual sterile-white hospitals, a mother’s bloodcurdling screams, or queasy onlookers that one may find at the beginning of life. However, it did begin, as all babies do, with a decision: ready or not? Lillian, at the age of twenty-four, had decided on the former, thrown a few necessities into a bag, and opened the driver’s door to her used-to-be-white-now-gray Honda Civic and drove away from it all, away from her crumbling Raleigh apartment that she couldn’t afford but bought anyway, away from her fruitless job hunting and useless bachelor’s degree in nineteenth-century literature (really, what was she thinking?). She left behind her already loveless fiancé she thought she knew but didn’t, and a note explaining, *You’re right, Mark. I am crazy. See you in Hell. Yours Never, Lily.* She hoped he wouldn’t see it until morning, which would give her enough time to reach her sister’s place before he woke up, as long as she booked it. She didn’t want him chasing after her or begging her to return, but deep down she knew... he wouldn’t care enough to try.

The hour-long drive to her sister’s was always a pleasant one, though Lillian hadn’t visited in several years, despite the relative nearness of their homes. She hadn’t realized this until now, how long it’d been, as she drove along the winding back roads, among the towering trees as tall as skyscrapers and smattering of million-dollar mansions that will eventually devolve into the suburban neighborhood of her sister. A familiarly scenic route, and a usually empty one, that Lillian loved driving. This time, however, there were two other cars on the road, one in front of her and one behind. The former had been with her since she turned on the mansions’ street: a flashy, expensive Mercedes SUV that likely belonged to the owner of one of these mansions. Sure enough, the vehicle turned off into an abnormally and unnecessarily long driveway shortly after Lillian’s sleuthing of the Mercedes. The other car, however, was still behind her and had been for a while.

Probably driving into my sister’s neighborhood, she thought, for there was nothing else in this direction. Like she always complained to her sister Miriam, the neighborhood (called Sunshine Woods or Brightleaf Pines or some other kind of fairytale name) seemed to rest at the end of civilization, the last cluster of human life before the world slipped back into its natural

state of trees and land touched only by the critters that live in it. Lillian preferred the city. She enjoyed the bustle and buzz of downtown Raleigh, and the last thing she wanted to do was live in Sunny Creek or whatever it was called, depending on her big sister for help, and yet here she drove.

Lillian glanced at her phone for the third time since leaving her apartment. She'd made sure to let her sister know she was on her way, but there was still no response. That's normal for Miriam, though. She barely used her phone, and when she did it was only for emergencies. Lillian never understood that. After all, they were only three years apart, but sometimes Miriam acted as though she were sixty-seven, not twenty-seven.

After a picturesque journey through the gradually thickening woods, Lillian reached her destination: a neighborhood of roughly fifteen identical houses nestled tightly together in a cluster of Loblolly pines on a single street. She had never noticed it before, the confusing similarities between each house. One could easily mistake one's house for another's if unfamiliar with the neighborhood. Thankfully, she remembered the address and drove through the front entrance of the neighborhood, past a cobblestone sign that read, "Welcome to Ravenswood" in large, swooping, chiseled letters. Okay, she wasn't even close, but at least she remembered the "wood" part. She drove past the first eleven houses to reach her sister's. *119 Wooded Lane*, she recalled as she parked on the side of the road in front of Miriam's house. Stepping out of her car, Lillian noticed the small, black car that had been following her pull up to the very last house in the neighborhood. She'd been right.

Lillian walked to the front door and knocked. Within seconds she was greeted by a shirtless, hairy, fifty-plus man holding a tiny, rat-like dog under his left arm.

"Canneyelpyew?" he muttered, barely opening his mouth to talk.

Perhaps she didn't remember the address as well as she thought. "I'm sorry, what was that?"

A puff of air escaped through the man's lopsided sneer, and he muttered something under his breath about city folk and their supposed lack of intelligence. "I said. Can. I. 'Elp. You?"

Lillian, ignoring this person's serious lack of manners, explained she was looking for a Miriam Bonner, and if he could possibly point her in the direction of said woman's home, she would be ever so grateful.

The man startled, nearly dropping his ratdog who yelped in protest. He leaned forward and whispered, "Yer with 'em, aren't you? I ain't supposed to talk to you."

Confused by the man's conspiratorial attitude, Lillian answered, "Well, I'm her sister. Now, if you could simply point—."

But before she could finish her request, he had slammed the door in her face and clicked the lock.

Clearly the man's confused, she thought, not unkindly, after recovering from the shock of such an odd encounter and walking back down the porch steps, away from 119 Wooded Lane. She checked her phone for a response from Miriam, still nothing, and sent another text despite knowing she'd never hear back. **What's your address again?**

To her surprise, she received a response from her sister within seconds. **Stay.**

Annoyed at her sister's usual monosyllabic, nonsensical style of text, Lillian typed, **Already here. Went to wrong house. Where r u???**

Again, she received an abrupt answer. **Stay, Lily.**

After a moment of puzzlement, Lillian remembered the conversation the two had had the last time she visited. "We should have code names," Miriam had suggested with a mouth full of dinner.

Lillian laughed. "Like James Bond? Okay, Double-Oh-Seven it is."

"No, I mean if one of us is in danger and we have to let the other know without alerting the perpetrator." At the time, Lillian had found her sister's seriousness comical.

Alerting the perpetrator, she'd thought, stifling a laugh. "Been watching a lot of *Dateline* recently?"

Miriam chuckled drily and said, "Just humor me, Lil."

Lillian simply smiled and shook her head, directing her attention back to the plate of overdone steak and vegetables sitting in front of her.

"How about I call you Lily?" Miriam asked, her usual goofy smile haven fallen from her face, leaving behind a placid, almost frigid expression. A mask.

"But that's what my boyfriend calls me. You've never called me Lily."

"Yeah, that's the whole point. If I ever call you Lily, you'll know I'm—"

"In danger, right, got it," said Lillian, still chewing an especially tough chunk of meat. "I guess you expect me to come up with a name for you now."

"No, that's fine."

Lillian swallowed the bite of steak. "Well that's not fair. Why not?"

Her sister's voice, usually so cheerful and boisterous, had dropped to a hoarse whisper like the shirtless man with the ratdog. "Because you won't need to use it."

Stay, Lily.

She'd nearly forgotten about the codename conversation, as it had occurred almost four years ago, but something about her sister's odd demeanor that day had stuck with Lillian. It was as if Miriam knew this would happen. She

knew she'd have to say "Lily" eventually, and she was preparing for that time.

I'm on my way, Lillian typed and returned her phone to her pocket before big sis could command otherwise.

She began knocking on random doors, starting with 121 Wooded Lane, then 123, and finally 125, the house with the black car. She didn't recognize the vehicle, but it was possible her sister could have bought a new one. Or maybe she was having company over, and didn't want Lillian to interrupt. Maybe she meant to type "Lil," but it had autocorrected to "Lily." Or maybe—.

"Hey, Lily." It was Miriam. She looked basically the same, wearing a lavender cable-knit sweater, pale blue jeans, and a beaded bracelet around her left wrist. Her hair was a bit longer, and her face a bit paler, but it was her, seemingly safe and sound. But still calling her Lily.

"Miriam, what's going on? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm great. Why do you ask?" Her voice was strained and her eyes were wide in warning.

Lillian leaned closer to her sister and whispered, "Should I call nine-one-one?"

"No, not at all," said Miriam loudly. "I was only eating lunch. Would you like to join me?"

Miriam opened the front door wider, allowing Lillian to slip past her, but as Lillian walked by her older sister, Miriam whispered in her ear, "It's okay. Just act normal."

Lillian looked around. Everything seemed normal enough. Her sister's home was nice, a one-story building with two bedrooms and one and a half baths. Miriam had decorated it all on her own, relying heavily on large crystals, which rested on nearly every piece of furniture. She claimed they had healing qualities, or something along those lines. Lillian hadn't appreciated them before, but now, as she walked through her sister's living room to the kitchen, she couldn't help but brush her fingertips along the top of what looked like rose quartz, for she had this overwhelming feeling of being watched, or studied, like a lab rat. But she'd ran that maze before, performing under his calculating stares, his pen propped above a notepad, laptop always open. Those eyes never moving far from her face, her body, her mind, and even when they did she couldn't help but feel their presence. She'd learned to keep her guard up, for one never knew when the next test would be. No matter how many times he explained to her, "Lily, I promise, it's for your own good," she couldn't take the labyrinth anymore.

"You're just in time for lunch," said Miriam, scurrying into the kitchen.

"It's not even ten o'clock yet."

“Brunch, then.”

The older sister began pulling out a plastic-wrapped dish containing some unknown substance. Lillian went over to grab the plates out of a cupboard above her sister’s head, watching Miriam closely. She seemed calm, a placid smile hewed to her face, but as she watched her sister pull out yet another dish from her fridge and begin serving food on the two plates Lillian had retrieved, she noticed the slight tremble in Miriam’s hands. After collecting the needed silverware, Lillian approached her sister, who was pulling out both plates from the microwave.

“May I ask what’s being served?” she asked, eyeing the suspiciously non-descript substances.

Miriam snorted and replied, “It’s my famous green with a side of orange.” She grabbed a spoon off the counter to hand to Lillian, but as the youngest reached for the utensil, Miriam winced and it fell from her hand, clattering to the floor.

“Ah, sorry about that,” Miriam said, picking up the spoon, setting it in the sink, and grabbing another from the drawer. “Here.”

“You alright?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just my wrist. Probably from all the cooking,” she explained, rubbing her left wrist and pushing the bracelet up further on her arm.

Lillian nodded. “So, which one’s mine?” she asked, gesturing to the two plates.

Miriam winced again, pulling on the bracelet. “Which one do you want?”

“What’s the orange taste like? Or, maybe a better question is: what is it?”

Her sister smiled. “It’s a surprise.”

Lillian laughed. “Guess I’ll have the orange.” She grabbed the respective plate and walked it over to the table. “Thanks, by the way.”

She sat down and glanced at her big sister, “Care to join?”

Miriam didn’t respond, nor raise her gaze from the green dish sitting in front of her. Instead, she rubbed her wrist and muttered, “I thought your favorite color was green.”

“Nope. Used to be, but I’ve sort of taken a liking to orange. It reminds me of the sunrise. Or sunset, however you want to look at it.”

Miriam was glaring at her dish, repeatedly yanking the bracelet on her bad wrist.

Lillian scooped some of the orange onto her spoon. It smelled like melted cheese and spice. “Hey, it’s fine. I know we haven’t seen each other in a while, but that’s my fault. I was just so busy—”

“Lil.”

“Don’t beat yourself up. I still like green, it’s just—”

“Don’t eat it.”

“—I guess I prefer orange now. You know how I am. One day I like this and the next—“

Miriam bit down on her bracelet, causing it to snap and spill its beads on the floor. Stepping over the mess, Miriam walked swiftly toward her and snatched the full spoon from her hand. It was then that Lillian noticed the state of her sister’s wrist. It was raw and bloody, like that of a prisoner who has spent far too long in handcuffs.

“What the hell, Miriam?”

The older sister didn’t respond. Instead, she grabbed the bowl and threw it in the sink, where it shattered into a mixture of orange slime and glass. She then marched over to the nearest crystal, picked it up, and held it in front of her face, shouting, “Is that what you wanted?”

Lillian stood up, knocking her chair over. “Miriam, calm down.” She took a couple of steps toward her sister, hands outstretched in front of her as if taming an animal. “It’s not that big a deal. Just talk to me.”

“I’ve already tried, Lily.” Miriam slammed the crystal on the ground, but it remained intact. The floor, on the other hand, dented under the force.

Suddenly, the walls of Miriam’s house began to shake, harder and harder, until paintings fell to the floor and crystals tumbled off tables. Thinking this was the first earthquake she’d ever experienced, Lillian crawled under the dining table and called to her sister, asking her to follow suit. But Miriam only stood there, staring ahead, tears streaming down her face, as half of the house’s walls lowered into gaps in the floor, and a dozen lab-coat-adorned individuals began flooding into the home, led by a familiar face.

Mark, thought Lillian as the leader’s face came striding inside, a group of note-takers rallied behind him.

“Test two-one-four complete,” he spoke, supposedly to his followers who began scribbling furiously on their notebooks. “Results: Subject Four attempted to warn Subject Three of the impending outcome of the test. Their relationship remains intact, unlike the last time, and Three is still utterly confused by the entire ordeal. Four, on the other hand, remembered enough to know her sister was in danger and attempted to warn Three against me and the test, as planned. End notes.” He turned to Miriam. “What does she remember?”

“You’re a psychology professor. You study her as part of some research you’re doing, but she doesn’t know what it is,” Miriam answered, arms crossed and staring directly at him. Her eyes darted to Lillian, then back to Mark. “She thinks you’re engaged. As if she’d ever sink to your level.”

Mark paused, watching Miriam intently, then spoke over his shoulder. “Subject 4 showing signs of defiance.” More scribbling. “Increase the serum

dosage for next time to erase any memories of my role in the test. I'm afraid it may have skewed our results."

The scientists finished taking their notes, then one, a woman, walked over to Miriam, who continued to glare at Mark. "It's alright," said the scientist, attempting to lead Miriam through one of the gaps in the walls. "Next time. She'll get it next time."

Miriam waited before following her outside. She turned to her little sister, eyes pleading. "You have to remember, Lil. Next time. Just remember, and they'll let us go. You'll be cured."

"What's happening, Miriam? Cured from what?" asked Lillian, crawling out from under her table. "Why is he here?"

Mark answered for her. "Lily, you are a recipient of experimental treatment for those suffering from trauma-induced memory loss. You and your sister are also part of my study regarding relationships between siblings who have undergone a tragedy and what they are willing to do for each other's wellbeing. Now, I am going to ask you a series of questions and I would like you to answer them as truthfully as—"

"What tragedy?" asked Lillian. "I've never 'undergone a tragedy.' Miriam, tell him—"

"It's okay, Lil." The oldest sister turned to Mark. "Your tests aren't working, Dr. Gable. I don't want to put her through this anymore. She doesn't remember what happened, and she doesn't need to. And frankly, your study is barbaric and dangerous. We're done. I no longer consent to your treatments."

Mark (Dr. Gable?) only chuckled, along with his colleagues. "Miriam, that's what you said last time. Why do you think I had you wear that special bracelet?"

Miriam's face paled as Dr. Gable had two scientists lead her outside. "Treat her with the serum. We'll try again after the interview."

"Leave her alone, Mark. I won't let you touch her," Lillian exclaimed as she watched her sister being led to one of the several vehicles that now resided in Miriam's front yard.

"I know. You never do," he replied, beckoning over two more colleagues. "Hold her arms."

Before Lillian could take a step toward her sister, she felt her arms pinned behind her back. Dr. Gable's goons had caught her, their grips strong, yet painless, as if they were afraid of damaging her, not out of kindness, but the anxiety that a hand-shaped bruise blooming on her wrist might skew their results. Lillian was nothing but a test subject in their eyes, something to be studied, a means to something more. She could see it in how they looked at her, but she was used to it. She was an expert at being studied.

“Alright, Lily. Let’s get started,” Mark said. He pulled a sleek, black pen from his pocket, propping it above that damn clipboard. “Did you notice the car this time?”

“What car?” She knew she should be scared, but something about this seemed familiar, like it’d happened before. The only thing she felt was confusion, and an overwhelming desire to hide from *him*.

Dr. Gable studied her, his pen bouncing against the thick stack of paper clamped to the board. “The black one. We weren’t exactly discreet this time.”

“A black car? Yeah, I saw one of those. I’ve seen several black cars during my lifetime. Can we be done now? I want to go home.” Lillian struggled vainly against her captors. “And I want my sister.”

Dr. Gable’s eyes shut as he brushed the palm of his hand over his face, index finger and thumb pinching the bridge of his nose, stopping there only briefly. He referred back to his notes, scratched something down, then turned to leave.

“Interview two-one-four complete,” he said as he walked past his colleagues toward the yard filled with cars. “Patient’s status: same as always.”

“That’s it? Okay, what the hell is going? Let go of me.” Lillian once again attempted to escape, but her struggling was useless. The grips on her arms simply tightened, making it impossible to move.

Dr. Gable, without so much as breaking his stride, called over his shoulder. “Let’s try it again, everyone. This time, leave out the sister. We won’t be needing her again.”

A sting of a needle in her arm. The cold hardwood floor pressed against her cheek. That was all she remembered. At least until everything started over again, and she was reborn for the twenty-fifth time that year.

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