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The Gallimaufry

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The
Gallimaufry

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Femoral Artery

Kaitlin Hildreth

Sitka, who was named for the black-tailed deer, not the town, remembered the man well. The man had come all the way to Alaska from New York with a big, four-door, diesel truck and a rifle with a scope worth more than Sitka's cabin. He stopped by the local bar for a drink and bragged about the black bear he'd already shot. It had come sniffing around the bait bucket he'd left on the edge of his camp. He hadn't even needed to get out of his folding chair. When he asked about a guide who could find him a trophy moose, the locals pointed him to Sitka. Sitka didn't like the man. He had a long moustache and a beer belly, and he smelled of cigarettes and talked too loudly. But when the man offered him a fistful of twenties, Sitka couldn't refuse.

There was a large bull moose that Sitka knew ranged along the river north of his cabin. He had hoped to hunt the moose himself. The meat would easily have gotten him through the winter and the antlers and hide would have fetched a fine price, but Sitka knew the man's money would stretch much further. So he spent one day tracking the moose alone, easily isolating its location. On the next day, he helped the man spot the moose with binoculars on a wooded slope a mile north of his cabin. He offered to accompany the man on his hunt. The man refused and set off on foot with his rifle. An hour later the shot rang out, but Sitka had been too busy splitting firewood to care.

Twenty-four hours later, the man still had not returned for his truck. Sitka knew bears were not uncommon in the area, and so he set out to find the man with an old rifle slung over one shoulder. He followed the man's tracks for two hours before coming upon the body in a clearing on the same slope where they had first spotted the moose. The snow was stained red in a ten-foot patch with the moose halfway gutted at its center. And next to the moose was the man, sprawled on his back, eyes frozen permanently in panic. His

Femoral Artery continued

knife lay a few feet away, bloody to the hilt. Sitka heard later that the state troopers had matched the blade to a puncture wound near the man's left thigh. A freak accident they called it, a fatal slip of a dulled blade, the last mistake he ever made.

Waking up Rich

Andrew Saunders

Waking up rich is a good feeling to have- a real good one to have
I'm not talking about money, not talking about stocks and markets
Sure, money could be why you might think you're waking up rich
But then again, the best of us don't need more than a little of that

Focus is as focus does; we choose to put our attention elsewhere
When we fall asleep, it's as if we know we're going to wake up rich
We don't know that- not for sure we don't, and worry we won't
If we wanted to consider money to be our only wealth,
There's no way we would ever be able to wake up rich
What then, is the reason that we can wake up rich?

A common perception that we must start to change
Your typical human thinks so much in just one single dimension
Feeling rich has more- far more- than just one single dimension
We could make a list- but then we'd think we'd found the answer
There isn't some kind of formula that just anyone can discover
It grasps the mind like little else can, planting roots in the brain
You never know how an idea so little can affect too many others.
Think back real hard, to the happiest person you've ever known
Maybe those ideas of richness aren't so obscure after all
You might find a common theme, among those who wake up rich
It's all up to you; for this question, an answer key you'll never find
For all we really know, you're the only one waking up rich.
And it's a good feeling to have.

Allie & Chris

Annie Stokely

This, Allie reflected, was not such a good idea.

Turning down the wrong street and having to go back five blocks didn't help. If she'd been able to concentrate enough to watch the street signs, she'd already be at the hospital. The profanity and insults shouted through the phone had numbed her mind hours ago, reducing her attention span to that of a goldfish. Nobody likes telemarketers.

When she clocked out, she'd wanted nothing to do with people anymore. Taking the subway was out of the question, brimming with bodies and luggage and tinny music. And she couldn't take the idle chatter of a taxi driver.

So she walked. The spring evening grew chilly as the sun vanished behind the buildings. Streetlights flickered on, their harsh orange light illuminating every cigarette butt on the gum-pocked sidewalks of Chicago. Chris would kill her for walking this late on her own. I'll lie, she decided. I don't want to deal with another argument.

She turned left and the hospital came into view. Some of the tension in her shoulders left as she sighed, relieved that no weirdoes had tried to mess with her.

The automatic doors slid open as she approached. There was a new secretary at the desk, a woman in her late twenties who smiled too cheerfully. Allie ignored her and waited for the elevator. She didn't want to be here. Every fiber of her being hated this place—but she hadn't seen James since early yesterday morning. She missed him, though he probably couldn't even tell when she came and went.

The elevator arrived. She stepped inside and watched the silver doors slide shut. The machine hummed as it moved up. Allie pressed her head against the cool metal walls, a headache pounding its way to the front of her mind.

On level six, she headed down the hall to James' room. The

Allie & Chris

Continued

floors had been recently polished. She could still smell the cleaning chemicals. The tile reflected the florescent lights overhead, their brightness stabbing into her eyes. She turned and shouldered open James' door.

"Are you sure you've never played before?" Chris chuckled. "You're a pro."

Allie slipped off her shoes and crossed the cool tile barefoot. Chris sat in that stupid plastic chair with a handful of Bicycle cards in one hand. A deck lay on James' food tray, along with a few face-up cards. His pale, limp hand lay across cards of his own. "Who's winning?" Allie asked.

"He is," Chris said without turning around. "I swear he's cheating."

"He's unconscious."

"Best poker face I've seen in my life."

It hurt a little to smile. She dropped her purse on the floor and lifted herself onto the counter. Her ankles knocked against the cabinets underneath.

Chris switched some cards around in his hand. "How was work?"

"Loud," she admitted, then slipped into the lie. "Sorry I'm late. I wanted to make up for the time I missed last week."

He nodded. "What time didja leave?"

"Eight-fifteen. I took a taxi."

"You know, that's funny," he said, setting his cards down slowly, "because Smithy called me at eight-twenty to see if you got home okay."

Damn. "Well, th-the cabbie was telling me this crazy story, and I needed the diversion, so I had him drive me in circles until he could finish."

"Really?" Sarcasm dripped from his voice. "What was the story?"

Allie & Chris

Continued

“It was about his . . . grandma. And a cat.”

“A cat.”

“A circus cat, actually, and—”

“Cut the crap, Allie.” He stood and looked at her, and she shied away from his angry expression. “You’re an awful liar. What really happened?”

“I walked,” she mumbled.

“You what?”

The stress and frustration she’d tried to shove away resurfaced, made her voice thin and reedy. “Did I stutter? I walked, okay? Work was a giant shithole and I needed to blow off some steam.”

“So you decided wandering through Chicago alone and unarmed at night would help?”

“I wasn’t unarmed,” she protested weakly.

“You left your mace by the fridge. I saw it this morning.”

“Yeah, but . . .” She reached into her pocket and pulled out the knife. It had somehow looked fiercer in the canteen. Now it just looked stupid.

Chris stared at it, appalled. “A plastic knife? You’re going to protect yourself against muggers and rapists with a plastic knife?”

“It’s better than nothing.”

“Oh, is that ketchup I see? Kind of looks like blood! Maybe that’ll scare the bad people away, huh?”

Her face flushed. “I don’t need this right now.” She jumped off the counter and headed for the door.

“Allie.”

“What?!” She whirled, ready to unleash the bitch storm, but her rage died when she looked at him—really looked at him for the first time that evening. He needed a shave. And a nap.

He sighed, deflating. “I’m sorry. I was scared something had happened to you. God knows we don’t need you in this place, too.”

She stared at her feet and nodded. Her head throbbed.

Allie & Chris

Continued

“So, uh, I guess work sucked?”

“Too many pissed off people. And everyone in the office wanted to know how James was doing.” She pinched the bridge of her nose. “I just can’t think about it anymore. I’m sick of thinking about it.”

“Then, you know, this room probably isn’t the best place to be.”

“I can’t go back to the apartment.”

“Why not? All you’ll do here is worry. Worry where there’s a couch, at least.”

“And leave James here all alone? No. What if something happens?”

“The doctors will handle it.”

She shook her head. “I’m his mother. I need to—”

“Allie.” He put a hand under her chin, forced her to meet his gaze. “There is nothing you can do. Not now.”

Tears pricked her eyes. “But I can—”

“Sit here and pull your hair out over something you can’t control? Stay up all night listening to those stupid monitors beep again? If James were awake right now he’d tell you to go home and sleep. You’re running ragged.”

“M’fine,” she muttered.

“You’re exhausted. I know you are.”

“I want to stay here with James.”

He watched her for a moment. “When was the last time you ate?”

“What does that have to do with—”

“When, Allie?”

“Noon.” She pointed to the plastic knife, still on the counter. “Had to get my weapon from somewhere.”

“And did you actually eat anything?”

No. “Of course I did.”

Allie & Chris

Continued

He pressed his lips together, like he'd somehow heard her first answer. Then he gently clutched her shoulders. "Alright, here's what we're gonna do. I'll drive you home." He held up a finger to silence her objection. "While you get your pajamas on, I'll get you peanut butter and Apple Jacks or dark chocolate with vanilla frosting to dip it in or whatever other weird shit you like. Then we'll sit on the couch, and we'll watch the BBC *Pride and Prejudice* for as many DVDs as it takes for you to get sleepy. Then I'll tuck you in to bed, and I'll call Smithy in the morning to tell him you're taking a day off. You can sleep until ten if you want. Hell, I'll even make you pancakes. How's that sound?"

A tear escaped her eye. She swiped at it, annoyed. "You'd sit through five hours of Mr. Darcy for me?"

"And *Sense and Sensibility* if it got you to relax, even for one night." He brushed her hair behind her shoulder. "I don't think you've really slept in two weeks."

Her leaden body confirmed it. She fell against him, limp and worn out. He wrapped his arms around her, kissed the top of her head. "C'mon, kid. Let's get you home."

Obsession

Francesca Torquati

It attacks the fiber of yourself. Obsession depression anxiety change your thought patterns, affect your firing synapses, close you from help, burn you from the inside out. It's fear that preys on you in the sickest way. A devout Christian becomes convinced that they have sold their soul. A loving father can't swim with his children he's afraid he'll snap and drown them. A little girl's monstrous imaginary friends want her to eat her baby brother. A woman washes until her dried skin cracks and bleeds because the germs she carries will infect and kill her family. A boy lies in bed in total apathy because the cloud hanging over him makes it too difficult to move. It makes you sick, physically sick. You pound on your head and pull at your hair to make the thoughts stop. You stay up all night, distract yourself with every vice, try in vain to train your thoughts and fail. Your stomach aches, you toss and turn, you run through the alphabet over and over again: "A is for Audio Adrenaline, B is for Beastie Boys, C is for Coldplay" just to distract yourself so that thought—that thought—won't come back again. It comes back. It comes back. It comes back. Your mind is a room. It's getting smaller. Getting smaller. Much smaller. Harder to move. Harder to breathe. It's four in the morning and you're still not asleep because you can't quiet the fear. You are getting more anxious because you have class, you have work, you have friends all waiting for you in the morning and you're so tired, you're so tired. You're so tired. You're so tired. Why is God doing this to you? Why is God doing this? The thoughts break through the music. They break through the peace. They ruin everything, everything, everything. They are twisted, irrational, and your own rationality won't silence them. He says "If you just ignored them for a day it would all go away." He says, "Those drugs are bad for you, trust God to heal you." I can't last a day. I can't ignore them, it's always there, always there, do you hear me? Do you hear me breathe? Do you see my walk? Turn my head from side to side, blink too long? I'm hiding them from you.

Obsession continued

It's always there. It's the soundtrack to my life. There is no way to heal. The constant undercurrent of my thoughts is tapped out by obsession. Compulsion. Obsession, compulsion. Compulsion. Obsession. Pure pure obsession. Pure obsession depression onset anxiety chronic chronic irrational anxiety. Don't. Don't. Don't. Don't. Don't. Don't tell me what I'm doing wrong. Fuck you, you don't know. It preys on me, on my deepest fears, a predator, always there, always waiting, always there, always waiting, and I see no end. I see no end.

Senescent Espionage

Bailey Pons

I am ashamed to say that I have been watching them for a while. Silently. Cautiously. They have not noticed me yet but I hate them. Maybe hate is the wrong word. Hate implies that I know them, that they have wronged me personally and have no intention to apologize for their misbehavior. Maybe I have lost the words to describe what those two mean to me as I study them. I was never very good with words, with phrases, with getting the intended meanings across. Until I remember what the words are I will keep waiting. Watching.

He lives in my apartment building, somewhere between the third and seventh floor. I only know this because I always get off the elevator on the second floor and its common knowledge that only government officials and property lawyers live in the above barrack suites of our complex. I have never ridden the elevator with him alone so I don't know where he lives and where she goes to visit him. I study the grimy, illuminated elevator buttons but I'm always disappointed to see that most of them are lit. The numbers are scratched off anyway so I can hardly read what they say anymore. The management is to blame for the lack of readable elevator buttons, but the tenants seems to be able to read the buttons just fine. A boy down the hall keeps telling me to get my eyes checked but whenever the appointment comes around I find an excuse to stay home. My bifocals have had scratches since 2004, I figure I can manage a few more years with what I have got.

He has a roommate too, some boy whose name sounds like birch. I call him the Treeman because calling him Birch seems too personal. I haven't met him officially either, but I see how sad he seems when he checks his mail on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. One time the Treeman saw an ad for a couple's spa in his mailbox and he threw it hastily in the wire wastebasket next to the lobby's fake ficus tree. He whispered violently, "Nobody needs

Senescent Espionage continued

that trash, not even them.” The way he said them made me smile, it made me feel like I had an ally. I wonder if he resents them as much as I do. Can he even stand to look at them together?

He sees them on a microscopic level while I am forced to stare from afar. The close exposure to their interactions has probably desensitized him while everything I am forced to see is blown out of proportion. I take note of the way he brushes the small of her back when he meets her in the lobby on Tuesday nights or the way she holds his arm when they enter the building on Saturday afternoons. I catch a glimpse of them walking to each other’s cars in the morning as they kiss each other goodbye. Sometimes I see her pretty blue SUV parked in front of the building as she waits for him to open the front door of our building to let her inside. I watch from across the street, pretending to casually walk with my purple pea coat wrapped around my aching body. I am sure it must annoy her to always wait for him to come down to the lobby, but she never shows it. Her smile is too bright to reflect whether it bothers her or not. I wish I could hear what they say to each other when they meet but my ears have been failing. There’s no use in going to the doctor for that either. I hear faint buzzing noises all of the time and I pretend that I can hear their conversation from across the street. The only thing I can clearly hear is her laughter: a raucous, booming laugh as she throws her head back and readjusts her hair. The boy cannot be that amusing. A few moments later and they are gone, back into the building on a floor that I do not know.

Theodore and I used to be like that. He would wait for me on the front porch and I would greet him with a shy smile and a basketful of leftover baked goods from my morning’s work at Livingston’s Bakery. One time he led me towards the campus garden at the university he studied at. He snuck sideways glances at my slightly parted lips as we approached the rose bushes and hastily plucked a rose. His knees would greet my feet in an instant and he

Senescent Espionage continued

would gaze up at me with his clear, cerulean eyes.

“A rose for a rose, my lady?” he asked as he reached for my head and kissed the length of my arm. I blushed and feigned to swat the rose to the ground.

“I cannot accept such a gift! It is illegal! You can’t steal from the campus garden, or-”

“Or what? Campus security will arrest me? ‘Excuse me, sir, but you have mutilated the finest garden in the state and the prized possession of the University. We are forced, by the law, to fine you and force you to plant rose bushes until every lad who thinks he loves his lady can carelessly chop a rose from its bush.’”

I shook my head, “No, Teddy! It is bad luck, I even know that. There is a campus legend about this garden. Every flower you pick from it will take a year off your life.”

Theodore laughed and placed the rose in my shaking hands. “Then I insist that you hold onto a year of my life in those pretty little hands. I would need more than this garden of flowers to give you as many years as you deserve.”

He was always smooth. So smooth. Like a creamy hot chocolate with melted marshmallow film floating on top. Ever since that day he would send me a rose every once in a while to remind me how many years he planned to give to me. I still have the petals somewhere, maybe I put them under the bed or on the shelf next to the sewing machine. Once I had a dream that I would do something grand with all the flowers he gave to me. I wanted to give him something more than time, something more valuable than love itself. Instead I kept expecting more roses for my collection so his gift in the end could become better than my imagination. There used to be a day I never would have dreamt they would stop coming.

I loved him so much for his sweetness. Too much. He spoiled me. He never told me how life would be so hard without him. It is cold everywhere and I don’t have a single drop of him to drink.

Senescent Espionage continued

My hands shake and my throat is dry and I hate it. We could be watching these two fools fall in love together but he's gone. Gone. I thought the rose petals were supposed to make him stay.

I have a problem with those two but I cannot figure it out. He isn't special, foreigners have never been my type. He doesn't have an accent so I'm supposed to assume he's legal, but I will always be speculative about his true origins. His hair is dark, almost black with a lighter spot on the nape of his neck. It looks fluffier from a distance. Coarse, thick waves frame the top of his head. His hair has the tendency to stand straight up when she runs her fingers through his hair. I have not decided whether the waves of black are building upon each other or if he is just greasy.

I could see how long his eyelashes are the first time I saw him up close, like black caterpillar feelers. They shade his oak brown eyes. His cheeks are speckled with reddish brown to black facial hair. He usually wears an elegant gray business coat but on cold days he wears a giant Columbia jacket with lime green accents on the pockets. He looks bundled and childish, a first grader going to recess. His almond-tan complexion hardly reflects how cold the weather is outside, but I can always tell what the weather is going to be by what jacket he is wearing.

The boy is tolerable but his girl puts me off. She manages to look presentable even when I know she is staying the night. I wait for her to stumble and embarrass herself in front of the other tenants but she always reappears with an extra change of clothes and a warm, cautious smile on her face. Her copper brown hair is nearly always tucked in a black, floppy hat or messily fashioned into a peculiar but attractive bun on the top of her head. Her dark leather jacket fools the world into thinking she has got her life together because her clothes match: a periwinkle blue shirt, a creamy white dress, a tunic of sparkling gold. The only thing she does not

Senescent Espionage continued

change from night to morning is her pants. She always wears the same pants as the day before. I wonder if she thinks that people do not notice, but I do. I always do.

“I bet all the college kids on that campus wear the same pants every day. They only have so much money for laundry. The girl is being resourceful. And I doubt she only has one pair of pants. How can you see with those scratched up lenses? I swear my son-in-law knows a guy who can fix those up free of charge,” Maroe, my only acquaintance at the Craft Club babbles as I sit quietly with my cross stitch design. She is knitting an olive green scarf that I think is hideous but I hold my tongue. For once I don’t want her to stop talking.

“You see, Maroe, I do not care about her laundry situation. I just don’t want her in my building. She doesn’t even pay rent. She doesn’t belong there and yet I have no control or say in the situation,” I say, fiddling with my needle and coral colored thread. “Our building needs a comments box or something.”

“Oh Joan, there’s no point in fighting back the status quo these days. It’s too tiresome. Hopefully you will understand that there will always be things that are beyond your control,” Maroe says, staring at me suspiciously. As if she knows anything about control.

I place my cross stitch firmly on my lap and look at her thick tortoise shell spectacles. “She parks in our spaces. She steals areas that people, like myself, pay good money to park in. She flaunts her ability to have someone let her in the building. Soon she will probably have a key,” I say. I haven’t thought about it before. She would have access anytime without warning. I grimace at the thought.

Maroe looks at me with a peculiar expression, her thin, fading eyebrows raised. They are a different color than her mousy

Senescent Espionage continued

brown-red hair. Her eyebrows are the color of her scalp.

“The girl is in love. You can’t blame her for falling can you?”

“I want to burst her idea of love. There’s no way it can last.”

Maroe laughs at that. “Joan, you really don’t know what you’re getting into. If you have such a big problem with your nephew’s choice in girls, you should invite him over to your floor sometime for coffee and those lovely mulberry scones that you make. The ones with the sweet frosting on them.”

“Vanilla nut frosting,” I mutter, correcting her.

“Yes, those are delightful. Maybe you can invite the girl too and you’ll find out she’s not that bad.” She says this with a satisfied smile as she finishes her ugly olive scarf.

“Hmm.”

I ignore Maroe for the rest of the Club and wait silently with my cross stitch on my lap. My design is half finished with frayed string rose petals and stems stitched too tightly on the cloth. As my bus arrives, Maroe looks up for her second project, a burgundy colored pot holder.

“Tell your nephew I say hi and that I would love to meet his girlfriend the next time I’m over for tea.”

I nod away from her and walk to the door. I cannot tell her that the boy is not of any relation to me. My concern would seem suspicious to the average observer.

I wonder what they do in his apartment. The building is old and the air from the ventilator is usually stale like a brief humid breeze off the shore of a polluted lake. The light fixtures, if they are anything like my room’s, are dull, yellow balls of light that hang from the ceiling, allowing nothing in the vicinity to be completely illuminated. The kitchens are small, the ovens are ancient. The oven in my apartment is the same style I used to bake when I was still working when Theodore was alive. The carpet is relatively

Senescent Espionage continued

new. I wonder if she notices the newness of the carpet compared to the rest of the building. I wonder about so many things. How well does he clean the apartment? Does he vacuum? Sweep? Scrub the kitchen counters? What about the Treeman? He lives in the apartment too. What if he cleans up after their mess so he doesn't have to stare at the remains of their interactions? I imagine Treeman picking up take out boxes lined with residual Chinese food dinners and congealed wonton soup, throwing them spitefully in a trash bag. What if he assumes that everything he sees in pairs are linked together by them in some way? Two half empty glasses next to the couch where they watched a movie the night before lay untouched because the happy couple forgot they were thirsty. Or perhaps two different backpacks sitting next to each other on the floor as their respective pieces of homework remain neglected, too busy with each other for work to be done.

Downtown. We were married in a downtown lobby on the 4th of June. He spent a fortune on a ring because he wanted to make sure that our love lasted forever. It was a platinum band with filigree roses on the band. Dainty leaves lined the ring's profile, a solitary diamond that was slightly off kilter wobbled violently in its high pronged setting. Teddy was always saying that he was going to take it to his friend Leroy Pitchnox to get it fixed but how he needed the band before anything else. The roses sold him.

"It was the only way I could get you that platinum band. The diamond can always be replaced if it gets lost, but that band can never leave your finger cause it's huggin' it so tight." He would then squeeze my hand and I would squeal with delight, learning my head gently on his shoulder. He would hold my ring hand with both of his and he would kiss my fingers gently, one by one. I fretted over losing the diamond, even with his reassurance as a distraction. Can you imagine wearing a wedding ring without a di-

Senescent Espionage continued

amongst? The prongs would protrude from the band, like tall towers against my fingers. It would pierce my skin and snag my clothes. I suggested that I should keep it in the safe after the ceremony, to ensure that the loose stone wouldn't go missing.

"Don't worry, you won't lose it," he would say. "Sweetheart, I promise. You're too observant, you'd be able to see it if it came out of its cage in a heartbeat. You always see diamonds where diamonds aren't supposed to be. That's what I love about you, Joanie, you see diamonds where they don't belong."

The diamond popped out of the setting three weeks after he died. He was right, I noticed that the stone was missing the second it fell out. I could see it on the floor, shining against the navy felt carpet of the furniture mart three blocks away from our home. I stared at it until an employee asked me if I needed help with finding anything. I turned to her and told her I wasn't looking for much and scuttled away from her quickly. I left the diamond in the store that day and never replaced the stone. I wanted to feel the cold platinum prongs against my skin.

I'm expecting the day to come where watching them isn't so compelling for me, but it hasn't happened yet. I plan my days around their own. Waiting, observing. Is this all I have left? To watch the happiness of another couple that I don't even like? That I don't even know? I still haven't told Maroe that the girl I complain about isn't my nephew's girlfriend. I don't even have a nephew. Instead, I play out potential scenarios in my head. I would be on the lobby floor, waiting for the elevator to arrive. The second elevator would be under repairs so only the right one would be working. I always liked the right one better, anyways, the floor numbers on the buttons aren't as scratched up on that elevator. Then I would walk in calmly and press the second button on the right next to a green dot sticker that I already placed next to the button months ago. I would hold the door open until I heard the clanking of keys next to

Senescent Espionage continued

the lobby's door and her booming laughter. I would wait.

They would race each other to the elevator and her arm would nestle gently into his. He would just stare at her with those dark brown eyes. Would I be able to see that look without thinking of Theodore?

"What floor would you like, dears?" I would ask, moistening my lips to ensure my words flowed smoothly. He would say the number and I would give a great sigh of relief. I would press the button and smile, satisfied with this subtle triumph.

"Is this your floor?" the girl would ask, her voice sounding genuine. His finger would be hovering over the open button, waiting for my answer in return.

"Yes...yes." The moment was too short. This can't be it.

I have changed my mind. Now I imagine that she reluctantly holds the elevator open for me. She would ask what floor I needed while wiping tears from her eyes and I would say the second floor and smile politely as she punched the button until it glowed. I would stare and not say a word, relishing in her pain. He doesn't want her anymore and she has nothing to show for it. She won't even feel the empty prongs of a wedding band digging into her flesh, snagging at her clothes, ripping away at the old memories she had with the boy.

This day never came, I never shared a moment with the two. After a while he and the Treeman moved out of the apartment and went somewhere new. She helped him move, of course, in that shiny blue car with her hair on top of her head. It's not hatred that I feel. It's not envy either. It's a new emotion I can't explain. I mentioned how I'm not very good with words, right? It's a hybrid of sorts, a mashing between self-loathing and deconstruction. I watch them to remind myself what I had lost.

"Teddy, have you ever thought of where we'll be? At the end of it all?"

Senescent Espionage continued

“I don’t need to think about it because I already know.”

“You can’t know.”

“Oh but I do, sweetheart.” He kisses my hand and rubs his thumb across the rose on my finger. “That’s the beauty of love. You see it everywhere so you are constantly reminded that it can never die. There’s no need to worry about anything else.”

Dust

Nick Robinson

Raw like fresh meat
Gore still attached and dripping. Ripping.
Dust has torn their vocal chords to carrion.
Has it stopped?
Heads rise like prairie dogs to the window,
Little eyes pink with tears,
Hoods crushed over calico slashed with decaying prints.
Bedouin in a foreign desert.
It has not.
Faces retreat again behind lumber and dirt
That does little to stop the invasion of its cracks.
The wood does not swell,
Pell-mell the wind beats to make the wolf proud.
But no, this is not true,
It is a gale, long and steady as the rifle
That killed the mule when the crops failed
And the heavens opened to rain down earth,
But its guts were full of splinters,
The butchering knife exploding belly into wood storm
And mule meat useless in their throats.
The president promised food from behind his dam
“A chicken in every pot”
But their pot was full
Of dust.

The Following

Aliana Keplinger

I followed in my mother's footsteps when I was old enough to choose;
I became a liar by trade (and business was good).
I do some of my best work standing up against the wall.
Our favorite position was "hostage."
I lie with my liar and play games of deceit;
I often found myself lying on my back, legs carelessly flung about
callous men
Who hid my nudity beneath blankets of skin woven from
self-loathing.
Threaded together with yarns of unhappy marriages and needles
Of pity, vulnerabilities exposed like crooked seams.
They walked through the door without worries or names, a parade
of familiarly
Masked faces.
They slid foil-wrapped excuses from their wallets, ones they carried
for years
In anticipation of the perfect moment and fumbled them from their
lips
With the ineptitude of first-timers.
Their women accept fragrant bouquets of apology artfully arrang-
ing them in wreaths of forget-me-nots and reasons not to worry.
Petals scatter on the floor-
He loves me, he loves me not.
The wives lie next to their husbands, sipping reassurances from
molasses mouths.
Together, we rot our teeth on uncertainty and buck our hips, re-
mind ourselves
To breathe,
As the tenuous taffy bonds of our con-artist hearts are slowly pulled
apart.

Realism in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and “The Things They Carried”

Morgan Condello

In Henry James’s “The Art of Fiction” he states, “I may therefore venture to say that the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel.”¹ Realism has been one of the larger themes in American literature since 1900. According to an article by Indira J. Mawelle, she writes, “However, what ‘realism’ portrays is a rational and accurate representation of American life in different and various contexts.”² Realism literature shows the everyday normal life of everyday people. Harper Lee and Tim O’Brien utilize realism in their stories *To Kill a Mockingbird* and “The Things They Carried.” Lee and O’Brien use literary realism to depict death and emotions that people go through in real life in these two texts.

According to the article, “Fine Fancy Gentlemen’ and ‘Yappy Folk’: Contending Voices In *To Kill A Mockingbird*”, by Theodore R. Hovet and Grace-Ann Hovet, “Lee also utilizes what Robert Shulman calls the middle-class, conversational voice that characterizes classical American realism.”³ Lee’s use of realism is what helps make the novel as popular as it is because average, middle class people can relate to what the characters go through and connect to the novel. Realism is seen in the novel through Jem’s emotions after Tom Robinson’s trial and through the death of Tom.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Tom Robinson’s court trial greatly affects Jem. Before the trial, Jem believes wholeheartedly in the court system. Jem believes that the courts bring about justice. However, after Tom was found guilty, Jem’s belief in the court system is shattered. After the verdict, Scout recalls, “His [Jem’s] face was streaked with angry tears as we made our way through the cheerful crowd. ‘It ain’t right,’ he muttered.”⁴ Jem knows that Tom is innocent and that he should be free. Jem’s emotions after the trial are

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very realistic and common. When a person witnesses an injustice, their beliefs and what they thought was right get turned upside down. Everyone can connect with what Jem is going through because people lose their beliefs due to injustices in a similar manner. For example on September 11, 2001 America witnessed one of the most unjust moments in recent history. Before 9/11 every American believed their country to be safe and free from terrorist attacks. America still does not feel completely safe like we did before and we never will feel safe again because what we believed to be true is now gone. Jem's reaction to injustice is realistic of reactions that humans go through. Since Jem's emotions are so realistic, readers can connect with Jem more and become more invested in the story and the characters.

When a person loses their belief in something, they do everything they can in order to get that feeling back. Realism is seen again when Jem tries to scrape together some of his former beliefs. Jem tries to make sense of what happened in Tom's trial by talking with Atticus. Through these talks about the trial, Jem comes to the conclusion that since Tom is innocent, "Then it all goes back to the jury, then. We oughta do away with juries."⁵ Jem believes the jury did an injustice by saying Tom was guilty even though he was not and he tries to wrap his head around the injustice. Jem is looking for the one thing in the court system that creates injustice and tries to explain why it should be done away with. He tries to find a reasonable reason why the court did the wrong thing to get his beliefs back. Realism is seen in this moment because humans do the same thing when faced with injustice. We try to find out what went wrong and try to change it so that it never happens again. Using the 9/11 example again, after the attacks America went to war so they could hold back more terrorist attacks and airport security tightened up immensely. Humans can connect with the emotions that Jem goes through because we also try to explain why injustices happen.

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Jem can talk all he wants about how he would change the court system and make everything better but there is no way to save Tom. Tom is shot when he tries to escape prison. Atticus then goes to Helen, Tom's wife, to tell her what happened, "...Atticus went to her [Helen], took off his hat, and offered her his finger. She grabbed it and he eased her down the steps. Then he gave her to Calpurnia." ⁶ Helen and everyone on Tom's side are devastated to learn of Tom's death. Here Lee uses realism again when Tom dies. In the real world happy endings do not occur every time. Tragedy, sadness, and loss are common things humans see in the real world. Even though the death of Tom is sad the reader is more invested in the story because of the realism of his death. When Tom's death occurs, the novel turns somber and the reader becomes saddened. These emotions help the reader connect more with Tom's strife and with the emotions of Helen, Atticus, and Jem. Lee is not the only author to use realism in the 1900s. Death is as real as it gets as Tim O'Brien also uses the realness of death in his short story "The Things They Carried."

"The Things They Carried" is a war story set during the Vietnam War. To make a war story great it needs to be realistic or readers will not be able to really understand what a soldier went through in war. Realism is very important in war stories and O'Brien makes use of it in this story. According to an article by Lorrie N. Smith "... O'Brien captures the moral and ontological uncertainty experienced by men at war, along with enough visceral realism to 'make the stomach believe.'" ⁷ O'Brien captures the emotions that soldiers went through and he captures the realism of death in war. O'Brien's use of realism helps the reader not only become invested in the characters but also to get a realistic insight to the life of soldiers during war.

One of the first deaths in "The Things They Carried" is the death of Ted Lavender. O'Brien writes, "...right then Ted Lavender was shot in the head on his way back from peeing. He lay with his

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mouth open. The teeth were broken. There was a swollen black bruise under his left eye. The cheekbone was gone.”⁸ Jimmy Cross remembers Ted’s death afterwards in an unemotional tone. Cross remembers how they rolled Ted’s body in his poncho and took him to the helicopter. For soldiers death happens all around them in war. And while death is sad, soldiers (especially in Vietnam) need to move on quickly if they want to survive. Another example of an unemotional death is the death of Norman Bowker. O’Brien writes, “At the time of his [Norman Bowker’s] death he had been carrying a pouch of rice, a rifle, and three magazines of ammunition.”⁹ Again Cross is remembering soldier’s deaths in a very unemotional way. Cross only remembers the detail of the death, like how they died and what they were carrying. However never does Cross remember any sadness he felt for them. Realism is evident in these scenes because of the way Cross reacts to death.

It has already been stated that soldiers need to move on from the deaths of other soldiers to survive. Soldiers cannot afford to dwell on death; it puts them and their comrades at risk. Cross tells the reader how soldiers thought about death during the war,

When someone died, it wasn’t quite dying, because in a curious way it seemed scripted, and because they had their lines mostly memorized, irony mixed with tragedy, and because they called it by other names, as if to encyst and destroy the reality of death itself. They kicked corpses. They cut off thumbs. They talked grunt lingo.¹⁰

Soldiers reacted by kicking the corpses and using hard language because they desired to “destroy the reality of death.” Death needs to seem like an impossible thing to soldiers, something that will not get them. This is a realistic portrayal of how soldiers would think. When a person is in danger 24/7 with the possibility

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of death, that person needs to “destroy the reality of death” to get through the day, to do their duty. O’Brien’s use of death and realism allows readers to fear for the characters and to find a newfound respect for what soldiers go through.

Fear of death is not the only realistic emotion soldiers go through. O’Brien writes, “They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die. Grief, terror, love, longing these were intangibles, but the intangibles had their own mass and specific gravity, they had tangible weight.”¹¹ When soldiers go to war they risk their lives daily. Risking one’s life causes stress and negative emotion. O’Brien also says that the soldiers carry dignity, superstition, and their reputations. Soldiers go through a mix of emotion during war and O’Brien shows these emotions realistically.

In her article, Mawelle lists some of the main qualities of literary realism, including “... focus on middle class life, attention on the immediate, the use of characters and situations which closely represent reality, natural and close-to life diction and the author being objective, with less authorial intervention.”¹² This list of realism qualities can be seen in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and “The Things They Carried.” Lee creates situations that represent reality. This is seen in Tom’s trial when he is found guilty because he is a black man in a racist town. Also Lee never intervenes in the story; she lets Scout tell the story the whole way through. O’Brien’s characters are also from the middle class. O’Brien does not intervene in the story and he uses situations that happen in war that are realistic for example the death of Ted Lavender. Lavender did not die in battle but while he was on break. The way Lavender died shows that no soldier had time to rest in the Vietnam War; no soldier was safe.

Realism is a consistent theme in American literature during the 1900s. Mawelle writes, “Life has its joys and sorrows, ups and downs. However, realism in the United States of America, or American Realism, concentrated particularly on the darker side of life, its harshness and misery, rather than its sunny side.”¹³ Lee

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and O'Brien do not write about the "sunny side" of life. They write about the harshness of life, the realities of life. They both write about real American life. Readers are able to connect more with the story when they can relate. In Henry James's "The Art of Fiction" he also brings up readers relating to stories. James writes "The characters, the situation, which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one most..."¹⁴

Realism in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and “The Things They Carried” references

¹ James, “The Art of Fiction”, web.

² Mawelle, “Realist Works as Landmarks in American History” (2008), page 113.

³ Hovet and Hovet, “Fine Fancy Gentlemen’ and ‘Yappy Folk’: Contending Voices In *To Kill A Mockingbird*” (2001), page 68.

⁴ Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1988), page 242.

⁵ Ibid, page 251. (same source as previous footnote)

⁶ Ibid, page 275.

⁷ Smith, “‘The Things Men Do’: The Gendered Subtext in Tim O’Brien’s *Esquire Stories*” (1994), page 16.

⁸ O’Brien, “The Things They Carried”, web.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Mawelle, “Realist Works as Landmarks in American History” (2008), page 113.

¹³ Ibid, page 110.

¹⁴ James, “The Art of Fiction”, web.

Turkey

Layla Younis

Passports unstamped we said our goodbyes.

What Am I

Layla Younis

What am I?
I hang from a tree
Unraveled by the wind.
My screams of laughter
Cause the birds to pitch high.
My stem is rooted in a life bigger than I.
From my angel
I can lie
To make my listeners
Frightened.
But I'm only one thing.
The thing you see in the shadow of night.

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