

AN APPLE A DAY
KEEPS THE DOCTORS
AWAY



MADNESS

hhs frontier | volume ii issue i



Untitled | Aayush Singh

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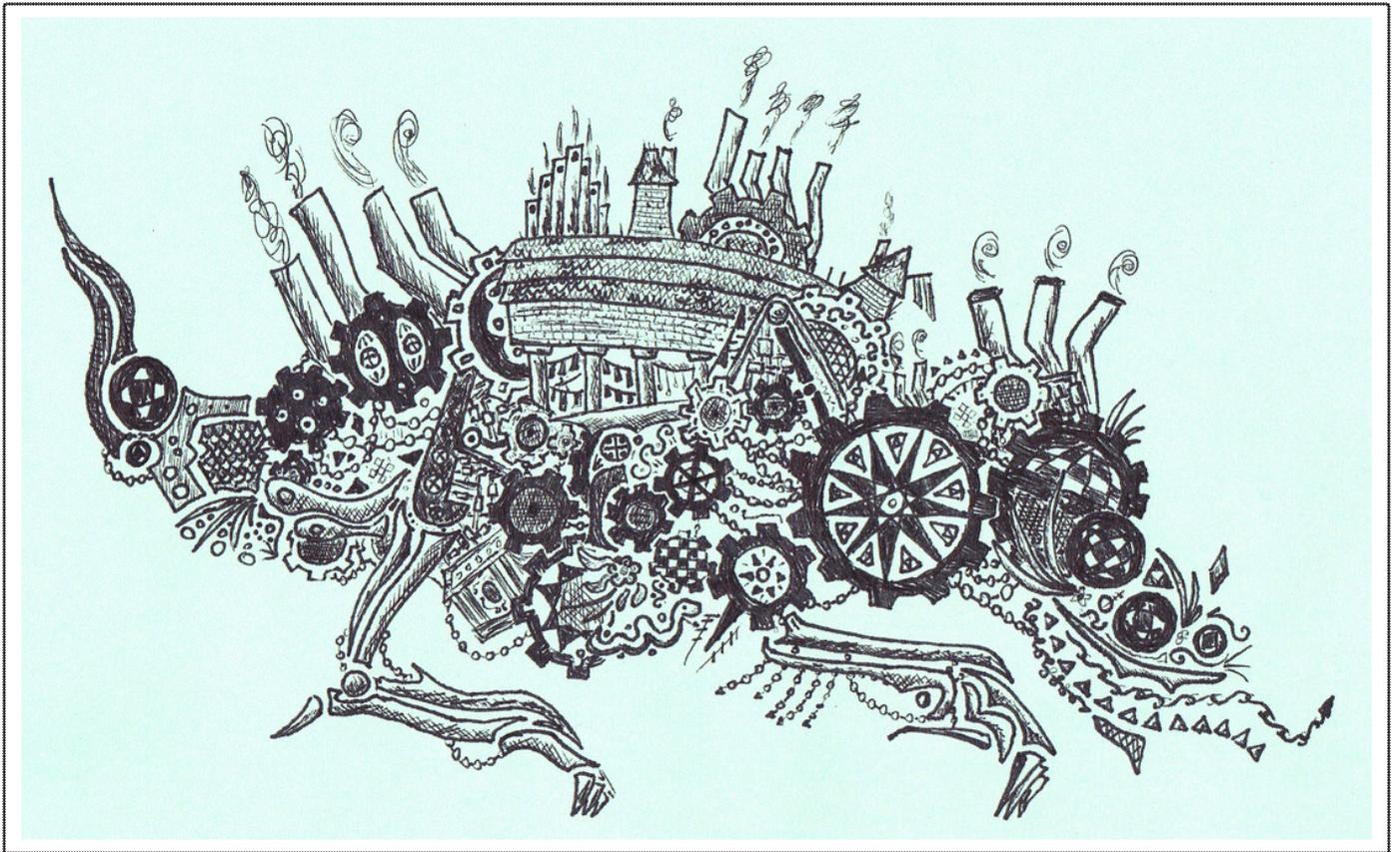
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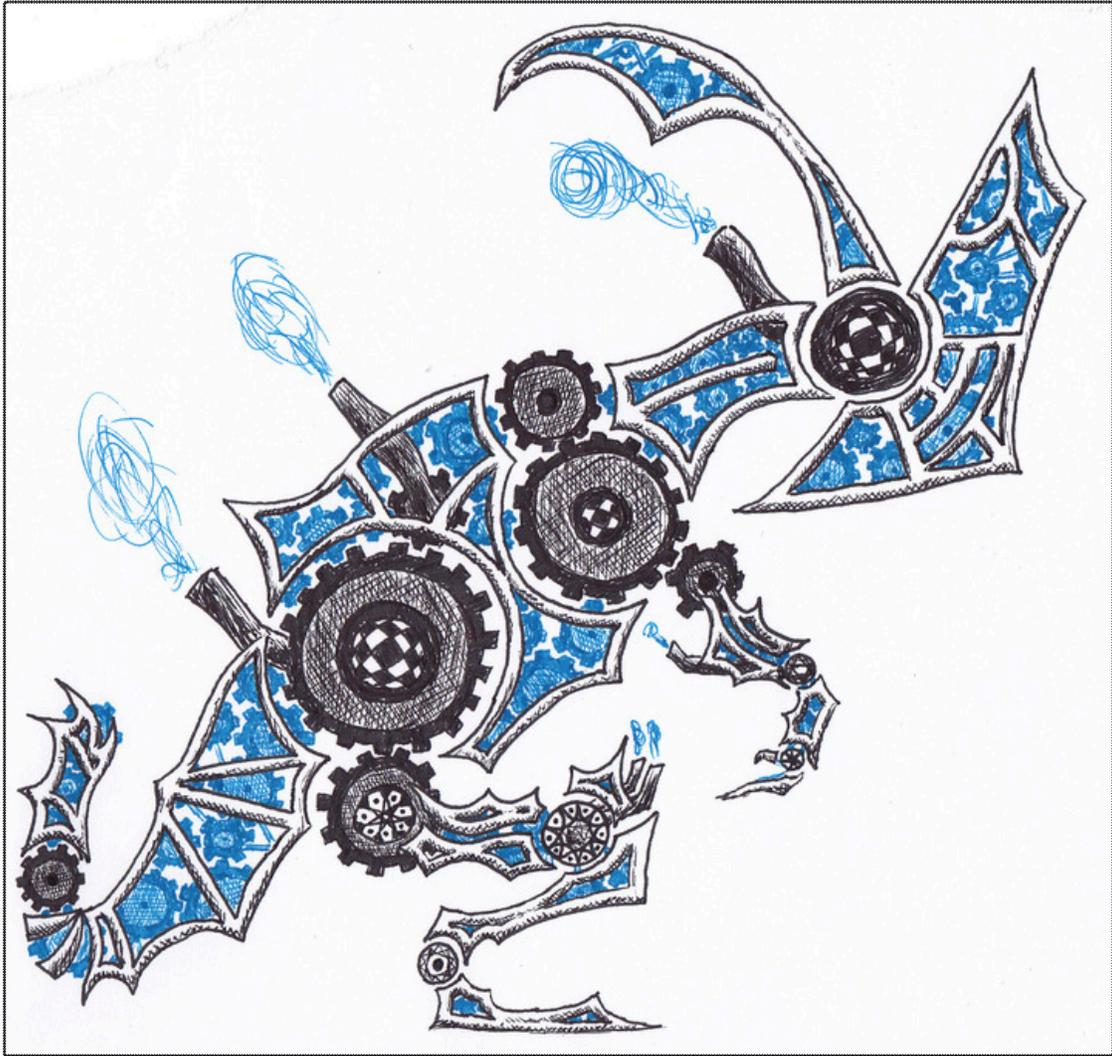
Madness

Ramona Amely

Scarce emotions
Faded tears
Insider's secrets of great frontiers
The fight of survival
The taste of blood
The tempted kills
Madness is what we've learned to call
The people and rules
A society
The scream of freedom that still exists
Madness
The pain of birth
The suffrage for endless needs
The smell of fear is hidden well
Humans as survivors
But who else lives?
We call ourselves kings
But rule as dictators
We live and die; it's no surprise
We disappear; its hide and seek
Hidden secrets leaking through
Dying for peace, or peace for dying?
Madness
This word we've created
There are alternatives
Just don't be fooled
The endless fight for freedom rights
The love people encounter
The brighter side of unknown corners
Our sacrifices and laughter's held in-between
We are our own madness
It's deceiving in many ways
Madness
There is no given meaning
But madness; what could it mean?
A simple answer we have chosen
We.



Drake | Anonymous



Leonardo | Anonymous

Another Game of Croquet

Gabi Soleimanipour

'twas brillig and the
no
no slithy toves will be mentioned here, thank
you
very much. we don't go in
for such stuff and nonsense
anymore, not since little alice
got all grown up and started dreaming about
tax returns
company dinners
luxury handbags instead of
mirrors and songs and chess pieces

'twas brillig and
'twas nothing, and nothing, not since
little alice stopped playing games in
the garden and started playing them
in the bedroom instead.
there will be no more croquet,
no tea parties or turtle soup for you
and me

'twas brillig-
'twas not, and for goodness sakes, that word
isn't even in the books, mister webster
never said anything about
"brillig" or anything else you might care
to name, for that matter.
and don't go singing to me, because
after all, you're hardly
the dormouse - she died, long ago
and left them all alone, that madman
and his hats and that hare
and his tea.
sometimes i wonder
what might have happened to them

'twas-
still you persist.
off with your head, i might say, if it
still gave me any pleasure.
off with your head, but nobody listens
to me anymore, nobody cares for the ramblings

of an old monarch who cannot even play
a decent game
of croquet.

silence from you now;
what, not even a word
of protest?
i can still have you executed,
you know, if you refuse to speak to me.
tell me a story, if you will, or recite me
a rhyme, you might even sing a song or two
if you so wish. you might think this strange but
you do remind me so of that dear
little dormouse, so afraid she was, and so
tired.
im so tired.
tell me a story.

'twas brillig and the slithy toves.
yes, there's a good story
do tell it and then perhaps we might try
for another game
of croquet

Quantum Paradox Theory

Gabi Soleimanipour

There was a large lobster claw sticking out of the wood paneling of the office, about the size of what a Volkswagen would have been if they had been invented yet.

“How long has it been there?” the detective asked, scratching at the thin layer of stubble on his chin in what was probably meant to appear as a professional manner but in reality just made him look as though he had a bad itch.

“Oh, not long,” replied Mr. Gable. “We just got the paneling redone last month. Pity, really.”

“Not the paneling!” snapped the detective, crumpling his hat between his palms and grumbling disparagingly. “I meant the claw.”

“Oh. Well. Just since yesterday. Nora found it when she was coming up to fetch the tea things, and she was awfully upset, you know, seeing as the paneling had only just-”

“I see,” said the detective, cutting Mr. Gable off and making a note on the back of his hand with a gold fountain pen. Mr. Gable noted this with interest and realised that he had not seen his favorite fountain pen in weeks. Surely the pen the detective was currently using to scrawl across his grimy skin could not be the same one. Surely not. After all, it was perfectly reasonable to assume that there was more than one pen in the world with a golden cap and the initials “M.G” engraved into the barrel. Mr. Gable tried to ignore the small pen-shaped movements in the corner of his field of vision and focus on the lobster claw instead.

“Do you, er, know how it might’ve gotten there?” he asked.

“No,” the detective said flatly.

“Are you sure?”

“Quite positive.”

“Oh.” Mr. Gable’s heart sank along with his shoulders. “I thought you might.”

“No,” repeated the detective. “But my associate will.” He snapped his fingers and a ferret scuttled in through the open door and onto the desk. Mr. Gable looked at it incredulously.

“Is that ferret wearing a bow tie?”

“It’s a marmoset, actually,” corrected the detective, putting the pen away in his breast pocket - yes, Mr. Gable thought, it did look an awful lot like his fountain pen - “And yes, he is.”

“I see.”

The ferret - marmoset, Mr. Gable corrected himself - crawled across the desk and upset the jar of ink onto the blotting paper while Mr. Gable wrung his hands in anxiety. When the furry creature reached the claw it sniffed it, hissed, and began to gnaw ferociously on the shell. The detective sighed.

“I tried to train him, but it doesn’t seem to be working. He did this the last time too.”

“Oh, you bring your pets with you on cases regularly?” asked Mr. Gable with just the slightest hint of disdain. He was now quite certain that the detective had been using his pen and was trying to figure out a way of bringing the subject up without seeming indelicate, if one could seem indelicate when inquiring after the presumed theft of one’s own possessions.

“No. What, you think you’re the only person with an infestation of giant crustaceans in the wall of your office?”

Mr. Gable was slightly taken aback. “Er. No. But I thought you said you didn’t know how it had gotten there.”

“I don’t. I just know that you’re not the only one with this problem.”

“Oh.”

“Everyone just loves to think they’re special,” the detective sighed. “Loves to think that their case is the first of its kind, a real original worthy of being turned into one of those cheap Conan-Doyle rip-offs. But they never are and so it all goes to waste.”

“That’s a good bit there,” commented Mr. Gable. “You should put that in your memoirs.”

“Won’t be having any bloody memoirs,” said the detective snidely. “I’ll be dead long before I’ll get around to writing bloody memoirs like some pompous prat, but maybe you’d like to write them for me?”

“No,” sniffed Mr. Gable, ignoring the insult. “That will be quite all right.” He paused. “Now about this claw-”

“Oh yes, you’ll just have to do what I had the girl at the other place do.”

“And what’s that?”

“Bust up the paneling, and hope your wife likes shellfish.”

“Oh,” said Mr. Gable.

“You sound disappointed.”

“Well, I was rather hoping you would have a more . . . a more spectacular solution.” The detective rolled his eyes and began writing on the back of his hand again. Mr. Gable craned his neck, trying to make

it seem as though he was trying to look at what the detective was writing rather than at the pen. It was quite a nice pen, he thought, all done up with gold and it even had the detective's initials on it and everything - and they had to be the detective's initials, hadn't they, because surely there was more than one man in the world with the initials "M. G". and Mr. Gable couldn't imagine why anyone would want to use a pen that had the wrong initials on it.

"If detectives were meant to be spectacular," said the detective, putting the pen away again, "They would all give up their jobs and join a circus act. This is a practical solution. If you want spectacular, then there's a professor over at Oxford who deals in quantum paradox theory and he'll be happy to help you out."

"What's that?" asked Mr. Gable.

"Hell if I know. Pretty sure the summary of the paper mentioned lobsters, though," said the detective, walking around to the other side of the desk and wrestling the marmoset's jaws free of the lobster claw.

"What do lobsters have to do with quantum paradox theory?"

"Do I look like a bloody Oxford professor to you?"

"No. You might look like a detective," began Mr. Gable, beginning to feel quite irritated indeed, "if you didn't look so much like a man who steals other men's pens and uses them to write notes on the back of his hand!"

Slowly, calmly, the detective pulled the pen - my pen, Mr. Gable thought scandalously - out of his pocket and made a note of that on his hand. "Are there any other comments you would like to make for the record?" he said. The marmoset had begun to gnaw on his ear, but he didn't seem to notice.

"That's not a bloody record, it's your hand!" screeched Mr. Gable. "Are you even a real detective? Nobody ever picked up at Scotland Yard when I called and so I assumed they hadn't got my message, but here you are with that ferret-"

"Marmoset," the detective corrected.

"-whatever it is, and you haven't told me anything at all!"

The detective smiled. "I never said I was a detective, either."

"But you . . . I don't . . . what about my pen?"

"The professors at Oxford will be sure to send you compensation for any and all damages caused during the course of this experiment," the not-actually-a-detective assured Mr. Gable.

"It's not a damage, it's my bloody pen! Which you took!" was all he could say in reply. The not-detective took the pen out of his pocket a final time and looked at it curiously. After several seconds, he shrugged.

"If you say so," he said, and set the fountain pen down on the desk while Mr. Gable looked on smugly. "Good day, Mr. Gable," he said, and left the room with a swish of his trenchcoat. The marmoset perched on his shoulder hissed at Mr. Gable as the door swung shut.

"Bloody scientists," muttered Mr. Gable, picking up the pen and pulling open a drawer on the side of his desk. "Bloody detectives, bloody-" He stopped, his hand poised in mid-air. There, in his desk drawer, was his pen, the same as always.

"Oh," he said.

Behind the paneling, the lobsters scratched at the wood. Their claws made the sound of paradoxes.

The Butterfly

Donnie Denome

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To Kass, there is something enchanting to the curve of the Butterfly's cheekbones. They meet for the first time in the bathroom outside the school psychologist's office, where Kass is retching into the toilet after being beat up by the Thuggish Triad that roams the halls. He cradles his arm with his other. It might be broken.

The Butterfly is there when he turns around. He watches as the figure walks towards him, extending one exquisitely sculpted hand to him. Kass takes the hand, watching as its owner places the other one on his injured arm. The touch is comforting.

He holds back a scream of anguish, a scream of fury throughout the whole episode. The Butterfly, though definitely human, is beyond perception. Whenever they touch his skin illuminates with the energy of a thousand fireflies, each lightening bug flashing its tiny lantern across his eyes. The figure smells of the barest hint of rosemary despite the shit-stink of the bathroom and whenever they touch the gentle thunder of Pachelbel's Canon rips through his ears.

Kass's arm is still on fire – it will eventually be splinted and its owner ordered out of a gym class he isn't enrolled in – but he makes his way to the bathroom door along with the Butterfly. This is where they part ways.

He is desperately, helplessly, hopelessly, nakedly in love and does not try to hide it. He stumbles into the office covered in vomit, a black eye coming on, his shirtsleeve torn, clutching his arm to his chest with his bag lolling open. The school psychologist, Dr. Spanner-in-the-Works, as half the student population calls her, sits at her desk and stares at him.

She sends him home very quickly. The Thuggish Triad are never punished even though everyone knows it was them that did this to him.

His sister, Diane, is seven. She complains about having to go to their Aunt Melanie's house while their parents take him to the emergency room. His younger brother, Neal, is too young to be putting up much of a fuss.

At the emergency room, they examine his arm. It takes about five minutes to determine that it is broken but not too badly and deserves a splint. Then, in order to decide what painkillers to prescribe him, they

must take his medical history.

The room sounds of Ride of the Valkyries. Hospital rooms always do. The walls ooze lentil soup, the smell almost overwhelming.

At that particular moment, he doesn't much care what painkillers interact badly with risperidone since his arm is killing him, he can't sit still, and the Butterfly is back. He moves towards the figure, holding his good arm out. His fingers brush the skin, the ivory-silk skin, and he loses himself in the figure's eyes. They're green and gold, like something out of a ornate tapestry. The lips are pale, pale pink, the pink of a washed out photograph. Then the skin turns translucent and he can see the mechanics of his clockwork Butterfly, his wonderful majestic Butterfly. The gears spin to bring color to the defined face and the plain ivory sheen turns into a wavering film of colors, sparkling, dancing.

"...schizophrenia, diagnosis at age fourteen," drones the doctor.

"Yes, that's correct..."

The Butterfly takes his hands and motions for him to follow. Down the halls in an instant, out a door that says DO NOT OPEN in large red letters, onto a balcony. They sit, their legs dangling over the edge, like workmen on a steel beam a million feet above the ground. The air is rice crisps dissolving on his tongue, fuzzy slippers all over his body.

When they find him, the Butterfly is gone. No one can understand how he got out that door, that triple locked door leading onto a balcony that shouldn't be there. How the hell did this boy get out onto this balcony? How the hell did he get through the entirety of psychiatric without anyone noticing?

Spanner-in-the-Works orders him into her office first thing Monday morning and interrogates him about what happened at the hospital. He misses music theory and government.

He stares at her. "How did you escape?" she finally asks.

The Butterfly is sitting next to him, stroking him splint gently. They squeeze hands, skin soft against skin. He trembles slightly under Spanner-in-the-Works's deadly stare. She's still waiting for an answer. The office stinks of antiseptic cream, giving him a headache. "How did you get out of the hospital?" The Butterfly is there again, brushing his hand gently. The touch is reassuring. It makes him feel invincible. My God, his savior whispers, just answer her question.

You know how it happened.

Kass looks at the woman in front of him, her forehead crinkled with worry. Not worry for him, no, but worry that she'll lose her job if she can't crack this puzzle. She does not care what he feels as long as she gets answers. None of them do. "I followed the Butterfly," he hears himself say from a million miles away. "It wasn't me, I swear."

She tells him that the Butterfly does not exist, admonishes him for not taking the pills he is sure he took that morning and the night before and the morning and night before that. Her voice grows until she is shouting so loud they can hear her in the science classes halfway across campus. Kass shrinks back against the bookshelf, praying for it to end but it doesn't.

He is out the door, sprinting down the hallway past the guidance offices, past the attendance secretary who is chewing out a truant for the third time that month, out of the administration building, across the quad. There is a doorway that opens onto a hallway and another doorway that he opens to reveal Dr. Lanson, head of the mathematics department, sitting at his desk and correcting papers. "The whiteboard is right there," he says. "There's a packet with the new problems at your desk." Kass hasn't taken one of Lanson's classes since the freshman year but the old man still keeps a desk for him. He was the only one for whom things didn't change when Kass was diagnosed. "I have a class next period but you're welcome to work through break. There's butcher paper if you want to stay longer and have a pass."

Yes, the Butterfly says, yes. You can miss Japanese. You can miss Contemporary Literature. You could miss your classes at Lumina Civitatis this afternoon. All that matters is your mathematics proofs.

While he doesn't want to miss Japanese – あなたは私の蝶蝶です° – he could stand to miss Lit. No one makes Bromden jokes in here. He picks up a packet and starts copying it onto the whiteboard while the Butterfly climbs up on the wooden stool next to the overhead projector. The math takes all of his focus and leaves none for his other problems.

Math is Appalachian Spring. The marker is sweet and sour candies and the room is perfume-and-cigarette-smoke, the smell of an old room.

Der Schmetterling

Together they sprint across the country, their shoes a beat-up old car he uses a semester of automotive technology's teachings to fix up outside of Chino.

He drives with such a passion two people ask if he's just gotten out.

"Yes," he always answers, "into life."

He could have applied and been accepted to any college he wanted but he didn't. He withered away through his senior year and afterward started his journey into the great unknown. Now, some years later, he is on the road, a vagabond through the ups and downs of life.

The Butterfly corners him in a skanky motel one night. It is the kind infamous for hookers and drugs and ax murders but it is all he can afford. He stares at the wavering form and something wells up inside him. It sickens him, his desire for this illusion. He resists it, resists this mirage of so many colors and desires, and instead goes out to find someone at a bar. He has never been good with people. His skills have only lessened as his condition has worsened. When he stumbles back into the room with someone trailing him, the Butterfly is there, calling out to him. "You – hic! – aren't helping," he whispers.

"Helping?" his partner responds, holding Kass close enough that he can see the track-marks and scabs. It is no matter. "Helping what?"

"Never mind," he says, leaning in for another kiss. "Those how you numb the pain of it all?"

"Yeah." The kisses are soft and the voice is rough, hardened by years of bellowing drunkenly and cigarettes incessantly chain-smoked in dark corners.

"How do you?"

He doesn't but he is compelled to lie, to say anything besides the god-awful truth that he deals neither with reality nor his fantasy land. While trying to think of something to say, he tastes the sugar-peppermint of the cigarette smoke, hears the punky beat of the room as it tosses and turns. "I like mathematics," he finally says.

And toss and turn they do, hardly caring what the people in the neighboring rooms think.

Much, much later when he is once again alone he hears the strains of Do You Remember Rock 'n' Roll Radio? coming, appropriately enough, from a radio across the way. He turns over, extending a hand towards the sound and –

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"I wish someone would turn that music down," the Butterfly's voice floats to him in a haloperidol haze. He can't move and his left arm aches down to the bones.

There is something thick and itchy on it. He raises his right arm and sees only vague shapes.

Drip.

Drip.

Drip-drip.

Drrrrrip!

Drip-Dr. Sanchez, please call staff reception-drip.

The pipes, the leaky pipes, are the heart of this hospital. He can't remember what he did to end up here. He can't remember anything besides the screaming pain of his arm impacting something hard. The Butterfly is there, stroking his forehead. It is comforting, more comforting than anything will be for a while. People hurry in and out of the room, asking questions.

Do you know your name?

Do you know where you are?

Can you tell me why you're here?

Is there someone I can contact?

You broke your hand trying to get out of a dead-end alleyway. Do you remember that?

They keep him on the sedatives for sixty hours. Sixty hours is just enough to give a grace period of the last twelve. Seventy-two hours before they either have to release him or come before a judge to explain the circumstances. Even without RSI and haloperidol in his system, he still can't remember anything. "Shock Shop," the Butterfly whispers.

"Be quiet," but their conversations attract the attention of the staff, who either don't care or take them way too seriously. "They can't do nothin' unless I consent."

"Double negatives," the Butterfly teases, "don't use them."

He vomits all over himself before having to go before the judge. The public defender appointed to him is a kid in his first year out of school and scared to death of a man who doesn't have the presence of mind to hurt him. They say exactly two words to each other: "Good luck," Kass whispers to him as the Butterfly disappears from the courtroom in clothes much more appropriate to the situation than Kass's vomit-covered tee-shirt and ripped blue jeans.

The judge, while halfway sympathetic to his plight, deems him not competent and sends him back to the room for another bout of torture as they play with his mind while he sleeps and the Butterfly plays coy with him in his waking hours.

It is late at night and most of the lights are off

in the hospital, leaving only shadows that torment paranoids like himself. He strokes the flickering face in front of him, the anchor in his tumultuous sea. It is illuminated by the candle the ivory hands hold. The tiny flame sparks and spits at him, a hissing dragon suddenly.

The Butterfly doesn't flinch as his hands caress the soft cheekbones. "Mm," he mutters, knowing there is absolutely nothing they can do here without alerting everyone. "Mm."

"You like that?"

"So much so," and the Butterfly is rubbing his cheek back, smiling wildly at him.

רפרפ

He wakes up in the morning with Diane clutching his broken hand. "I knew it," she sobs, "you'd end up like this one day. Why did you have to go and punch that wall?" as if that's what got him in here.

"Why'd you have to punch the goddamned wall, Kass?"

"Sis," he stares up at her, wanting so hard to tell her to get out, never talk to him again, tell their family never to contact him, the unloved defective son, again, "I don't remember the wall."

"Christ, Kass. You gotta remember the wall. You were screaming at it, that's what they said. Screaming and pounding like you were gonna die behind it."

"I don't, Di. Stop it, stop telling me," he slurred. "You should go – they don't want you to see me."

"I'm not. I've got a apartment here – I left New York when I heard you were getting worse – Kass, I am going to make sure you get better."

He wants to tell her that she should stop wasting her life, that she should move on, ignore him, but he can't bring himself to. "Thanks, sis."

"I'm trying to get them to allow me your guardianship – " oh, crap " – but it's a process."

She leans down to kiss him on the forehead. For the first time in ages he smells something real – not the olfactory hallucinations or the sensory confusion of synesthesia that plague him, but the very real smell of her rosemary perfume. It is the same kind of perfume their mother wore. Some second cousin or other makes it and sends it to all the women in the family. When he turned fourteen, she asked if he wanted a bottle to give as a gift when the time was right. He said yes but never gave it away.

Rosemary ... rosemary ... rosemary. This is the scent he falls asleep with.

La Mariposa

The Butterfly looks out the open window, flicking cigarette ash out down to the sidewalk twenty feet below. "San Francisco. Home of the best and the crazy. Here's to you," and they toast with the cans of all-natural fruit juice sugar-free soda that Diane buys by the carton and abandons with him. "Mm. Goes down well, doesn't it?"

It tastes like rotten pomegranates and is bright, electric blue. He pours it into the planter box outside the other window. "Do you like rosemary?" he asks the Butterfly.

"No."

"Oh. Okay."

He looks at the figure next to him, the figure that smells of rosemary despite hating it, the figure who is the summation of all he ever wanted. "What are we going to do?"

"What do you want to do?" the Butterfly responds, holding his hand, his still tender hand, gently.

"I – don't know."

"I can't help you if you don't know," and the figure has vanished.

Kass sits in the room alone, waiting something to happen. He's dressed, with nowhere to go, nothing to go there in, no one to talk to, nothing to dull his delusions, and the dread and hatred of his life pressing down on him. There is nothing in the room except the windows, which do not open more than a crack; his chair; and a package of sodas.

He doesn't know when Diane will be coming over next. He has a few friends in this city now, having been here for a few months, but none of them will visit.

He nods off and, when the church bell strikes half-past-ten, he wakes to the soft touch of the Butterfly's fingers. "Hey."

"How are you? Drunk? You look it."

Well, he wants to say, it's not my fault I've been alone. "I'm just fine," he snarls. "Just fine, you."

"What are we going to do?"

There's another room, the bedroom, and they stumble into it and talk and talk and talk and stumble out of it laughing and giggling like two teenagers alive on a sleepless summer night. He says something about doesn't know what it is, hoping the Butterfly will, maybe, maybe....

"I love you," the Butterfly whispers.

"I love you, too."

And then the figure laughs – they don't mean it, no, not at all – and as he is caught in that wicked, harsh stare, Kass can only hope that he might be all right someday.

But now? Now he's just a mess.

Le Papillon

They take a walk in Golden Gate Park, holding hands. They pass graffiti'd walls, the Academy of Sciences, the de Young, the tea gardens. At some point, they circle back around to a vivid black-and-white of two teenagers in the middle of a passionate kiss. "That's something," Kass whispers.

"He's invisible," the Butterfly says. "She's like you. Special."

"Mm. Special isn't always a bad thing." He sits down against the wall, remembering that one terrible day in the school bathroom, the kindness of Dr. Lanson, the years of imitations passing as he tried to come close to the Butterfly....

"Are you alright?"

"Yeah. I guess... no. I'm not. I would be."

"If not for what?"

"I'm a mess," and they embrace right there in the park that smells of eucalyptus and the sweet flowers in the conservatory. Kass feels the Butterfly's warmth and sighs, "Oh, I am such a mess," into the man's shirt.

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Stroke of Midnight

Anna Ashbury

Tristan Scarlet fixed the red cloak that made up her costume. She and her fellow detective, Alexander Wolfe, had been forced to attend the All Hallows' ball at the home of rich banker, Adam Prince. She and Alex had decided to go as Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf. Not the most original thing, but they didn't really care. Their real purpose was to question Adam concerning the recent murder of his wife, Cindy Eleanor Prince, formerly known as Cindy Eleanor Brown. It had happened three weeks ago, and at first, it had been dismissed as an accident, but upon further evident, it was obvious that Cindy Eleanor had not died of natural causes. They waited exactly twelve minutes before making their way down a long, winding path to the infamous Prince mansion, where the ball was being held.

"I don't see the whole point of wearing a costume if we're here on business," Tris muttered, adjusting her cloak for the fifteenth time. "It just gets in the way."

"Where's your enthusiasm, Tristan? Don't you like Halloween?" Alex whispered, raising an eyebrow as he looked down at her.

"It's just plain ridiculous to wear a costume dedicated just for one day of the year," Tris grumbled, glaring up at him. "It makes me feel like I'm five or something."

"Try not to glower too much," Alex whispered, much to her irritation.

As they entered the Prince mansion, they were semi-impressed with the decorations. The mansion had been decorated to look exactly like a haunted house. Eerie music floated around them, seeming to come from nowhere. Partygoers were dressed in strange and exotic costumes, but none of them were easily recognizable. Most carried a glass or two of champagne in their hands, and some even seemed to be stumbling about giggling.

"Good grief, they're serving alcohol," Tris mumbled to herself in horror, dodging a particularly tipsy mermaid.

"No need to sound so horrified," Alex said, smirking at her. "Now, let's go see if we can find Mr. Prince."

The twosome craned their necks, trying to look for the host of the party. They had to dodge several

partygoers, most of them being couples who thought that the dance floor was a good place to kiss in plain sight. Tris had looked particularly scandalized, and Alex seemed to be enjoying her reaction. Finally, they managed to locate Adam in the company of a brunette. He did not notice them until Alex cleared his throat loudly.

"Detectives Scarlet and Wolfe, what brings you two to my humble home?" Adam asked them politely in his deep voice.

"We'd like to talk with you, privately," Tris said, glaring at the brunette.

"Why, of course, of course," Adam said genially before turning to the brunette. "Juliette, love, I'm sorry to say that I have some business to attend to, so why don't you mingle with the other guests?"

Tris and Alex exchanged a look when Adam called Juliette 'love'. Wasn't he supposed to be mourning his wife's death? Adam did not look like a man grieving and pining for his lost wife. He looked positively happy, not at all weepy-eyed. He turned away after Juliette sauntered off, motioning for Tris and Alex to follow him. They ascended the staircase, and Adam led them away, the music and sounds of the party fading away. They arrived at the library, and Adam opened the door, gesturing for them to enter, and he closed the door after they walked in. He turned to them and clasped his hands together, a toothy smile pasted on his face.

"So, what is it you want to talk to me about, detectives?" he asked, the smile not quite reaching his eyes.

"We were wondering what you could tell us about your wife's murder," Tris said, and she saw his smile slip ever so slightly before it returned in full force.

"As you probably remember, Cindy Eleanor was originally thought of to trip and fall to her death, but further examination showed that she was beaten with a large object," Alex said, his arms crossed. "She died before she had even started falling down the stairs."

"Detectives Scarlet and Wolfe, I would like it if you did not remind me of how my darling wife died," Adam said, but the grief in his voice did not sound particularly convincing to Tris' sharp ears.

"You did not sound particularly unhappy when you were talking to Juliette Caplet," Tris pointed out, having recognized the young daughter of the Caplet family and fiancée of Royce Monteg.

"I believe you called her 'love', if I'm correct," Alex said, his face serious.

“What I say or do is none of your business,” Adam nearly snarled, his jaw tightening.

“You don’t seem particularly upset about Cindy Eleanor’s death,” Tris said quietly, leaning forward ever so slightly and fixing Adam with her blue-eyed stare. “In fact, one could say you look happy.”

As they had talked, Adam had moved farther and farther away from them. He was now standing next to a window, absentmindedly toying with something in his hands. Tris narrowed her eyes as she realized he was holding a tarnished silver candelabrum in his hands. She was instantly suspicious when she saw some dark brownish red stains on the candelabrum. A quick glance in Alex’s direction confirmed what she had seen.

“Mr. Prince, what are those stains on the candelabrum you’re holding?” Tris asked slowly, making slow, deliberate steps in his direction.

“This is a very old candelabrum, it’s been in my family for a long time,” Adam answered, seeming to avoid her question. “I’ll have you know that it’s a family heirloom.”

“Mr. Prince, please answer Detective Scarlet’s question,” Alex said sternly, also stepping toward Adam.

“Mr. Prince, why are there stains on the candelabrum?” Tris asked, enunciating each word now in case he hadn’t understood her the first time.

“I heard you the first time,” Adam snapped, clutching the candelabrum more tightly in his hands, a strange look in his eyes. “No need to treat me as if I were a misbehaving child.”

“Then there is nothing wrong with you answering her question,” Alex said in a quiet voice, his amber eyes narrowed.

Adam had a wild look in his eyes now, and he was gripping the candelabrum so tightly that his knuckles were white. Tris and Alex were closing in on him, and his eyes darted around, avoiding their gaze.

“You’re making this harder for you and for us,” Tris said, holding her hands out in a pacifying manner. “All you have to do is tell us why and everything will be alright.”

“No! That is where you are wrong, Miss Scarlet!” Adam suddenly shrieked, swinging the candelabrum at her wildly. Had it not been for Alex’s quick reflexes, Tris would have had her face bashed in. “Killing her a midnight was a stroke of genius! It made her death all the more symbolic!”

Alex had a tight grip on her waist, pulling her

away from the crazed man. Adam’s eyes were unfocused, and he was crazily swinging the candelabrum around. He seemed to shrieking something at them and after she recovered from her initial shock, she narrowed her eyes and pulled away from Alex. She listened to Adam’s strange ranting and started piecing the puzzle together.

“Cindy Eleanor was the bane of my existence, the reason that I was no longer allowed to mingle and flirt with other women!” Adam shrieked, keeping them at bay with the candelabrum. “She tied me down when I could have remained single and happy!”

“That doesn’t justify you murdering her!” Tris yelled while ducking as the candelabrum swung by, a little too close for comfort.

“Her death freed me, but I can’t get the voices out of my head! They keep whispering to me at night, and Cindy Eleanor won’t stop bothering me,” Adam’s voice by now had dropped to a mere whisper, but Tris and Alex had to be extremely cautious. “Make it stop, make it stop!”

As Tris and Alex inched closer and closer to the crazed man, he snapped suddenly. He threw the candelabrum widely at Tris, and it grazed her shoulder as it imbedded itself in the wall behind her. She ignored it and advanced on him, intent only on distracting him while Alex snuck behind Adam. Adam started to kick and punch wildly at her, and then, with an audible grunt, Alex tackled Adam to the floor.

“Let me go! Let me go! She deserved to die! I did what was right!” Adam howled as Alex pinned him to the floor. “Let me go!”

A good twenty minutes later, the guests left the mansion, having been politely asked to leave the premises. A very battered Tris and Alex stood outside the grand mansion, watching as the police made arrangements for Adam to be placed in a mental asylum. Tris and Alex sighed as they examined the scrapes that they had gotten while trying to subdue Adam. They almost didn’t notice Commission Heartley arrive.

“Detectives Scarlet and Wolfe, a job well done,” she said, nodding at them approvingly before walking away.

“I got a suggestion for you, Tristan,” Alex mumbled after their boss had walked away.

“What?” she muttered, examining her bruises and scrapes and grumbling quietly.

“Next Halloween, I think we should just stick to trick-or-treating,” Alex said, earning a smile from Tris.

“But it’s not as fun as catching crazy psychos,” she joked.

“Are you nuts? He nearly took off my nose!” Alex protested as his eyes widened and his jaw dropped in disbelief.

Unbeknownst to them, the blood-stained candelabrum had never been found and obtained. It had mysteriously disappeared after Adam had been dragged away kicking and screaming. Tris realized this only after hearing twelve tolls of a grandfather clock in the Prince mansion. She glanced back at the now-empty mansion, suppressing a shiver.

Untitled

Kellyann Ye

He was my first friend, and my only one, to this day.

I was raised in a madhouse, born of a madman and a madwoman. He was brought in when he was ten, for trying to kill his teacher. I was a nine-year-old girl then, wary but kind, the only child in the place aside from him, and fell into his shadow like I belonged.

He introduced himself as John, when he met me a week later (after I’d spilled orange juice over his white shirt), scanned his ID into the metal disk in my door that I had long wondered the use of, and showed me how it flashed on the screen on the other side:

FIRST NAME JOHN MIDDLE NAME UNKNOWN LAST NAME UNKNOWN AGE TEN YEARS: WINIFRED ADAMS AGE ELEVEN YEARS ADMIT YES NO

YES, I picked, and pressed the green button.

A few weeks later we were allowed to go outside into the courtyard, and he showed me the names of the plants we passed, “Queen Anne’s Lace, that’s that white one there. Looks like bunches of flowers on a stem, see?” I followed his descriptions with rapture, hanging on to his every word, storing the information away when he said his favorite plant was a fern.

He showed me one, when we sat down on the concrete next to the display of the fern, and I pressed my fingers to the glass and wondered how fuzzy its leaves were.

“I hate this place already,” he revealed then, pointing out where it stored its seeds. I could understand, having grown up in the madhouse with its

whitewashed walls and slick white tiling and bland food and lack of entertainment, “But,” he continued, half-smiling, “it’s slightly better when you’re around. What’s your name?”

“Winifred,” I said, “Like I’ve said. But you can call me Winnie.”

“What are you in for?” he asked, because that was what you did, in a madhouse. You asked around and pretended you were sane by following the same social rules the normals used.

“Being born,” I said, and shrugged like he did, left-shoulder-right-shoulder-down. “You?”

He didn’t answer. I guessed he’d hurt somebody he cared a lot about right before he was brought in, other than his teacher, and didn’t ask again.

“It’s only here sometimes,” was all he said of his madness, once, safe in the blanket of darkness on the roof of the madhouse, looking out at the stars, “And I mostly don’t do anything terrible. I’m too young to do much damage. I can always be stopped.”

“That’s good,” I said, staring down at his wrist, where his ID chip was. First Name John Edward, I knew it read, Last Name Unknown. Age: 11 years. And it was good, to be stoppable. If you could be stopped, the doctors would try to stop it, and they didn’t take you away to die. And if the doctors stopped it, or you stopped it, you could leave after two years.

He’d done alright before, I supposed, because he only shrugged and said, “I blended in better than most,” when I asked. And indeed, when I looked at him, brushing the fine blond hair out of his eyes with a pale hand, he was normal. But a closer look showed the slight sheen to his blue eyes and the way his fingers clenched and unclenched, always in a pattern of three.

It was an oxymoron, his entire being, the way he blended in better than anybody else when he was sane, but when he was gone (I never, ever used the word insane), he was the worst of everybody.

Only once did he ever let himself lose control when I was there, once when I’d just come in from an afternoon quest to the public library, bounding into his room with my arms full of my tablet, now filled again with titles.

“Who are you?” he’d asked, hands balled into fists, settling low on his heels in a way that reminded me of a cat, the way they’d lean back on their haunches in the colored pictures in the tablets, right before they pounced. “What did you do to my friend?”

“I—” I stopped, heart hammering in surprise. “How do you mean?”

“Is she alright? What did you do to her?” He stepped forward, closer. I stepped back, breath catching in my lungs. “Tell me!”

Bleep, said his wristband, flashing yellow, and I knew I should get an orderly, a doctor, a security guard, somebody, but he’d been fine for so long, nearly all of the eight months he’d been here, and if he was reported, he wouldn’t be able to leave for another two years.

I didn’t want him to go, of course, but he was too good for a place like this, too brilliant to be chained by his mind.

I couldn’t say anything, just fluttering my fingers, trying to push away the blockage in my throat so I could ask him what was wrong, was this his madness, did this happen often, how could I help. But my fingers fluttered uselessly, and I gasped for air, choking on the words not coming out of my mouth.

“What did you do to her?” he shouted, “Where’re you hiding her? If you’ve hurt her I’ll kill you!”

Bleep, bleep, bleep, said his wristband, flashing orange now, and the door burst open, the tall doctor who took care of my mama and the bald security guard with the cutest little baby boy twins burst in the door, and grabbed John by his skinny arms, and dragged him out, kicking and screaming. “I won’t let you hurt Winnie,” I heard his shout just before they turned the corner; “I won’t let you!”

His madness, I understood then, was that he lost his perception of the people around him, and thought they were not themselves in his delirium.

Then came the midnight episodes, when I’d hear him across the curtain-divided room, crying out for his mother, his best friend Luke, and me, wanting to know what they had done with us, threatening, through his tears, to kill them if they’d hurt us. The dreams would always end come morning, and he’d be paler, but sane still.

And then there was the night when the crying didn’t end, and at last I crept out of bed, tiptoeing my way across the slick white-tile floor to his metal-framed bed to pat his shoulder.

“John,” I whispered, “John. Wake up. Come back.”

“Is she alright?” he asked, turning toward me but not seeing me, blinking rapidly to the pulse of his wristband, red-dark-red-dark-red.

“Yes,” I said, putting my face next to his ear so he could hear my voice over the urgent beep-beep-

beep-beep-beep of the wristband, part of me hoping the doctors wouldn’t hear, so he could stay longer, part of me hoping they would, so they could help him.

“She’s okay,” I said, already hearing the rustle of the doctors’ coats behind me, knowing that once a patient had gone red, they’re dead, like my mama, and you won’t ever see them again. “She’s okay!” I repeated, as they picked him up, limp as a rag doll, “You saved her!”

I asked the doctors where he was the next morning, and they wouldn’t tell me. He couldn’t be dead, I told them, because he was John, not my mama, or my papa, who had been crazy for decades. He was young. Young people weren’t allowed to die so early.

They didn’t answer either, and a month after his death, when I’d calculated that he couldn’t be released, that there weren’t any madhouses close enough for him to be transported to, I stole a fern seed from the underside of the leaf, planted it, and kept it on the windowsill of what had been our room for nearly two years.

I think he would have liked that.

Murderous Dream

Katia H.K.

A shrill, high pitched scream tore through the quiet night air.

“What is it? What’s going on?!?” asked the man beside the screaming woman, as a few neighbors turned their lights on.

As the quiet returned and he saw that she was okay, the man relaxed a little.

“Why did you scream?” he asked her.

A dog barked in the distance. Her forehead was gleaming with sweat, her cheeks with tears.

“A dream,” she said softly, “I had a dream.”

“What happened in it?” his voice a bit concerned. Her hand was resting over her heart.

“A hooded figure... stood over me with a dagger. “She looked at her hand, “and stabbed me in the heart.”

Slowly she removed her hand, to reveal a deep gash such that a dagger would leave, the liquid leaking out unmistakable in the moonlight.



Asylum Corner | Clem Chou

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