

MISSES SISYPHUS

By Gregory Cioffi

WHY WE LIKE IT:

This New York New School neo-constructionist tautological excerpt is a fiction of equivalences where the relentless repetition drives the narrative energy to the point of 'constructed monotony' and creates, in the process, a reductive aesthetic.

Ham. Swiss. Spread the mayonnaise. Ham. Swiss. Spread the mayonnaise. Ham. Swiss. Spread the mayonnaise. Ham. Swiss. Spread the mayonnaise.

Fiction as fiction as fiction because, because, because. The main character's burden is her unchanging daily routine and she operates in her world like a Stepford wife without the stinger.

Misses Sisyphus looked up at the bland white ceiling. She wondered what tomorrow would bring, knowing full well what it would.

Synthetic and polymer by day, she is dimensional at night, when deep stirrings, make her question the banality of her existence. Cioffi's minimalist style, spartan prose and mechanical 'voice' are the perfect fit for this exceptional modernist work of art. The Eds.

Senior Editor Charles writes: *What you see running down my face is egg (...hopefully). When we first published this story we excluded Chapter 2. No, no, no! This is an important structural element in the design of this fiction and shame on me (with all my literary pretensions!) for not catching it. Greg was good enough to point this out and we are happy to reintroduce the story as it was conceived. Don't stop reading at the end of Chapter One. Continue until the words disappear. The text is identical to Chapter One and that is the point. The intentional fade out crosses the border into 'concrete' fiction. From here on style predominates over content and the 'story' is reduced to an artifact of expression, with no meaning or value of its own other than its*

position as a formal narrative apparatus. Now, has anybody got a tissue? I feel like a cigarette... CP

**The following is an excerpt from the story of Misses Sisyphus. If you desire to read it in its entirety, you can find it archived in the Useless Efforts and Unending Frustration Collection. Any prestigious university should have one.*

Chapter 1

Misses Sisyphus awoke at 6am sharp. She took one deep breath and scurried out of bed, while her husband still slept, and entered the bathroom. She showered while the house was silent so that no one would see her before she applied her makeup. She did, after all, have an image to uphold.

Misses Sisyphus firstly put on some foundation and powder – one shade darker than her natural skin tone with a very slight tint of pink. Powder blush was next. She applied her matching eyeliner and eye shadow; she did attempt to be trendy. Cake mascara was next and in conclusion was the lipstick. She knew this was the most crucial aspect to the entire ensemble. She dabbed a coral tint in a matte finish on her perked lips; she thought this gave her one leg up on the other women so that her husband had eyes for her only.

Misses Sisyphus opened her boudoir to pick out an outfit. She put on a short-sleeve sweater, a pencil skirt, and black high heels. She topped it off with a bow in her hair.

Misses Sisyphus made her way to the kitchen and started the coffee; it usually took a good fifteen minutes to percolate. She opened the refrigerator and started taking out bread and cold cuts for the four lunches she was about to prepare.

Ham. Swiss. Spread the mayonnaise. Ham. Swiss. Spread the mayonnaise. Ham. Swiss. Spread the mayonnaise. Ham. Swiss. Spread the mayonnaise.

Misses Sisyphus fetched a glass of water and made her way back upstairs.

She gently rubbed her husband's back as she placed the water next to him. This was how he enjoyed waking up. He thanked her, took a sip of water, and headed towards the bathroom to take a shower. On his way, he noticed the outfit Misses Sisyphus had laid out for him the night before. His silence on the matter meant he approved of the suit and tie she had picked out.

Misses Sisyphus headed down the hallway to wake their two sons. The rambunctious children darted out of bed and frenziedly ran in circles before she guided them into the bathroom to brush their teeth and get dressed. She laid out their clothes the night before as well.

Misses Sisyphus walked back downstairs and into the kitchen. It was time to prepare breakfast.

As Mister Sisyphus and the two boys entered the kitchen, Misses Sisyphus was placing a stack on pancakes on the table. Next was a mound of scrambled eggs, followed by plates of bacon and sausage. She had already squeezed fresh oranges for juice, she had learned to do that first – it just made the entire process flow better. She poured two coffees and joined everyone at the table as her children poured unseemly amounts of syrup on their pancakes and her husband blissfully hid behind the morning paper she had somehow fetched in the interim and placed on the table for him to enjoy.

At breakfast's conclusion, Misses Sisyphus kissed her husband goodbye as he went out into the workforce. Misses Sisyphus sent the two boys upstairs to make their beds as she cleaned up breakfast.

At some point during this duty she would undoubtedly have to yell, "It's time to go!" to which the boys came running down.

The three walked three miles together to school. Once they reached their destination, Misses Sisyphus walked the three miles back, alone.

The time for cleaning and household chores had arrived; this was the cornerstone of diligent homemaking. On the agenda: the kitchen, bathrooms, living room, floors, and laundry.

Misses Sisyphus took out her castile soap, ammonia, borax, vinegar, and baking soda.

She wiped down the cupboards, cleaned the refrigerator, dumped the coffee maker and washed it by hand.

She dusted all the furnishings in the living room, tidied up the little clutter that existed, and made sure all the framed pictures were perfectly straight and correctly aligned with one another.

She cleaned the toilet with a brush, meticulously wiped down all the surfaces, polished the mirror, emptied the trash, shook out the carpet, swept, and mopped.

She shook out all the other area rugs in the house, swept and damp mopped the remaining floors before turning her attention to the laundry.

Misses Sisyphus utilized her new washer and dryer by doing one load everyday. This made her routine so much easier compared to past years where she washed and dried all the clothes by hand. She truly was a lucky gal. All this only took three hours.

Before she knew it, Mister Sisyphus walked through the door; he was on his lunch break. They kissed hello and she grabbed the two remaining sandwiches that she had already prepared out from the refrigerator. She poured two glasses of water and sat opposite her husband at the table. Sometimes they chatted about the mundane and the monotonous, sometimes they ate in silence.

Mister Sisyphus left soon thereafter, kissing his wife goodbye once more.

Misses Sisyphus usually spent this portion of the day picking up anything from the stores that she needed.

She strolled to the bakery and then the butcher.

She strolled back home.

Misses Sisyphus grabbed a pair of jeans that her eldest had ripped open and sewed it back together. After the mending was complete, Misses Sisyphus had time only to bake a pie before picking up the children.

She did so with love and care; her pies never cracked.

When the pie was complete, she placed it on the counter to cool and went out once more to take the three-mile walk to school.

The walk back was always a little more pleasant as she had the company of those she loved and cherished.

Once they arrived home, Misses Sisyphus began dinner preparations. Timing was the key to everything, she had learned this years ago.

Misses Sisyphus prepared a gin martini. As she dropped a green olive into the drink, Mister Sisyphus walked through the door. With a smile, she handed him his beverage. She asked how his day was. He muttered something negative.

Fifteen minutes later, to the tee, dinner was served. The family of four sat and devoured the home cooking of Misses Sisyphus, often remarking on how delicious it was.

Next came the freshly baked pie. It too was devoured, this one garnering even more praise than dinner.

Misses Sisyphus cleaned up the kitchen one last time.

Misses Sisyphus bathed the two boys in their tub. She filled their hair with soap and swashed it around.

As the children brushed their teeth, Misses Sisyphus laid out their clothes for the next day.

As Mister Sisyphus listened to a radio show, Misses Sisyphus laid out his clothes too.

Misses Sisyphus tucked her two sons into bed. She made up an adventurous story as she always did so that they would fall fast asleep.

Mister and Misses Sisyphus lay in bed side by side. He leaned over, kissed her goodnight, and entered a deep slumber.

Misses Sisyphus looked up at the bland white ceiling. She wondered what tomorrow would bring, knowing full well what it would. She felt comfort in knowing how much she loved her family and although it was never uttered aloud, she believed they appreciated her and her hard work. What she did, she knew, was considered both normal and a duty; it was nothing special; it was an expectation, not an exception. Hell, it was the life of every woman. She wondered if, one day, someone might look back upon such a life and think of her, and the many others like her, as heroes in their own regard, like in the comics her children so often talked about. She considered herself strong and persevering - was that not the modern superhero? Was this her hubris speaking? She laughed at such a silly notion, not loud enough to wake her husband up of course. She pondered whether or not she would one day be able to express these thoughts aloud instead of in her head every night. She yearned for such a privilege.

Misses Sisyphus fixed her pillow and rolled over. As she dozed off, her last thought was: perhaps tomorrow would be different.

Chapter 2

Misses Sisyphus awoke at 6am sharp. She took one deep breath and scurried out of bed, while her husband still slept, and entered the bathroom. She showered while the house was silent so that no one would see her before she applied her makeup. She did, after all, have an image to uphold.

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AUTHOR’S NOTE: *So I started pondering about the role of the American housewife in the mid-20th century, as I’m sure we all do. Mark my facetiousness. I did some research, listened and read the stories of such women and became amazed at their heroism, and I don’t use that word lightly. The sheer resilience and endurance of these women were truly awe-inspiring. However, I also couldn’t help but notice the monotonous nature of their lives. The ever-repeating tediousness that so often went verbally unappreciated. I thought immediately of Albert Camus’ *The Myth of**

Sisyphus. For those who don't know it – basically -Sisyphus was forced by Zeus to roll a huge boulder up a steep hill. As the boulder was about to reach the top, it rolled all the way back down and Sisyphus had to descend and start all over again for all of time. The connection between the king of Ephyra and the 20th century housewife seemed tight-knit. Life can be laborious and seemingly futile. None knew this better than Sisyphus or the women who have lived such repetitive lifestyles. So I suppose, above all else, this story pays tribute to those who thanklessly get up every morning and do what they feel they need to do without rest, without end, and without stopping.

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Gregory Cioffi (SAG-AFTRA, AEA) is a professional actor and a published writer. His works have been published in The Feral Press, Mystery Weekly Magazine, Queen Mob's Tea House, Little Old Lady (LOL) Comedy, Blood Moon Rising Magazine, Fleas on the Dog, The Five-Two, Aphelion, Paumanok: Interwoven, and Allegory Ridge. Six of these stories have been archived in Yale University's Beinecke Collection (Rare Books and Manuscript Library). Greg's film (his foray into directing), The Museum of Lost Things, recently won awards at The Long Island International Film Expo, Global Shorts, and The Madrid International Film Festival. You might have noticed him on the stage or screen in The Irishman, The Godfather of Harlem, or in Tony n Tina's Wedding where, for the last 5 years, he has been married hundreds of times nationally and internationally. Greg teaches a creative writing course and a basic acting course at Nassau Community College. <http://www.gandeproductions.com/>*