

The Patient

I made an appointment with my Lawyer a couple of weeks ago. I was sitting in the waiting room. There were other people in the waiting room, but none in such loathing as I. I feared I had the worst sickness of all. There were people with colds and the like, influenza, and an embarrassing STD. But my illness was not what the Lawyers call physical. It is a very terrible disease that infects the mind. They call it the Melancholy, and it is as dreadful as cancer.

“Mr. Mathos?” I heard the Secretary say.

I walked over and tried to smile. She was a pretty lady.

“Are you Mr. R. Mathos?” She asked with a smile.

“Yes.”

“The Lawyer is ready to see you now, so just follow me.”

And she led me down a series of hallways. The massive structure of the building was both threatening and magnificent. It was the same with the Secretary. She was so young and beautiful that she had eased my fear. But the thought of having to speak to her outside these formalities was terrifying. I felt ugly next to her. I smelled bland next to her perfume. I was a writer at that! A writer was not the type of person a decent, good girl like her would get involved with.

“So, what do you do for work, R.?”

“I’m a writer, so what do... what do you do?” I asked stupidly. “So, you’re a writer.” She ignored me.

“What do you write about?” “Everything and nothing.” I tried to sound clever.

“So, what’s something you would write about?” She insisted.

“I write short stories, and... well, I use different theories as themes... it’s rather long to explain.” I could see she did not understand.

“What would be a theme?” She was like a persistent mosquito in my ear.

“Well, for instance, I might write about ethical subjectivism.”

“And what’s that?” She was adamant that I explain myself... and I had made this speech before... many times before.

“Ethical subjectivism is the argument in Moral Philosophy that our ethical principles depend completely on our individual choices, that we all have our code of ethics that we alone follow... because what’s right for one person is wrong for another, and vice versa. It says that nothing we do is right or wrong from a personal standpoint.” I sighed in relief after rambling out my rehearsed lines.

“I see. So, you could just kill people and it would be okay since you wouldn’t have a conscience?” She had such a charismatic stare about her.

“Yeah... I suppose so.”

I was overly impressed that she even listened to my paraphrased textbook definition. But it was as if she already knew something about the subject... as if she was already prepared with her rhetorical question. "Well, here you go. The Lawyer will be with you in a minute." "Okay," I said.

The Lawyer came in just minutes later.

"Hello, Mr. R. Mathos." The Lawyer smiled.

"Just R. will do." I insisted.

"R. -that's quite Kafkaesque." The Lawyer commented.

"Yeah..." I said.

"So, tell me R., what seems to be the problem?" He asked as he took out a notepad from behind his desk.

"Well, it feels like I have a dead child inside me. It's hard to explain, but..." "Uh huh..." He interrupted and scribbled down something in his notes.

Silence fell upon the room as I began to lightly tremble.

"And have you lost your appetite?" He asked.

"Yeah..." My voice quivered like a fish stranded on the shore.

"And do you feel tired all the time, or sleep but don't feel rested, or wake up early, or have problems going to sleep or any sexual difficulties?"

"Yeah... all of the above," I said. "And I have really bad dreams."

"Well, hell, I am going to go ahead and diagnose you with Melancholy. I am going to have you escorted to our Interrogation Center. It's a State Institution called the Center for the Coffins of Children or C3. There will be a Judge there. He is a specialist who performs Black Bile extractions. I know you probably feel a little scared, but everything will be fine. This procedure they will be using is a third generation, a new technique. It is quick and painless. But only State Institutions can treat this very contagious disease." He paused to finish his notes. "Okay? You take care now." I was transported by E.O.D. or Emergency Order of Detention, to the "triple C" in a cold vehicle driven by the Guard who would aid the Judge with the Black Bile extraction.

I was taken before the Judge. He said hello and introduced himself.

"Well, Mr. Mathos, the procedure is pretty simple. We will do a series of routine tests to confirm for ourselves that you do indeed need this transfusion. Don't worry, we won't be using electric shock therapy on you." He laughed sarcastically. "The transfusion is just one simple operation, and you will recover in no time. And you do understand you are now quarantined due to the risk of this disease spreading?" "Yeah..." I said.

But everything seemed surreal to me now. Just yesterday I was at home writing and smoking, eating pieces of chocolate, and drinking coffee. But now I was in this Institution. It is one of those situations where, suddenly, you wake up and realize that you're in a nightmare.

I have been in the Institution for three days now. All my tests confirmed that I had Melancholy and would have to have the Black Bile extraction at once. I went to have an inquiry with the Judge once more before my operation.

“Well, it’s simple R. There will be a Witness for the State, due to the ethical sensitivity of the procedure. The Guard will go with you to the operating room. I will explain any further questions you may have before I operate. Okay? You take care now.” “Yeah...” I mumbled.

I was taken back to my room while preparations for the operation were made. Waiting seemed forever as I stared out the window, lost in the confusion of thought. “Ready?” The Guard said with a comforting smile.

“Yeah... I guess. I feel kind of nauseous, though.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll be just fine.”

I thought of the Secretary and her pretty smile. How I wished she were there by my side instead of this Guard, who had the smell of the Institution about him. He led me through a series of rooms and then into what appeared to be a hallway, but there were no doors along its walls or at its end, just an operating table with some horrid transfusion device... I assumed. The light was bright and magnified by the clean white walls of the Institution. I began to walk down the hall...

“Well Law, are you ready? You are the Witness, you know?” I said.

“Yes... But how about we smoke first?”

“Alright. I’m in no hurry, and the Patient can wait.”

We sat and smoked a pipe for a while and relaxed. My job is simple, but it is not at all boring. I love my work here at the Institution. I attended the Guard Academy as soon as I had completed my formal schooling instead of going to the University. I had no use for academic bullshit. I would have probably become a Soldier if I had not received my certificate. But now I have it made. No one bothers me because I am the best when it comes to an assistant for this new operation.

“Everything ready?” Law asked.

“Yeah, I suppose... well, let’s do this,” I said.

We went to the Patient’s room. He was sitting, staring out the window, like all Patients do before their operation. The fear of the unknown is quite a horrifying burden on their minds.

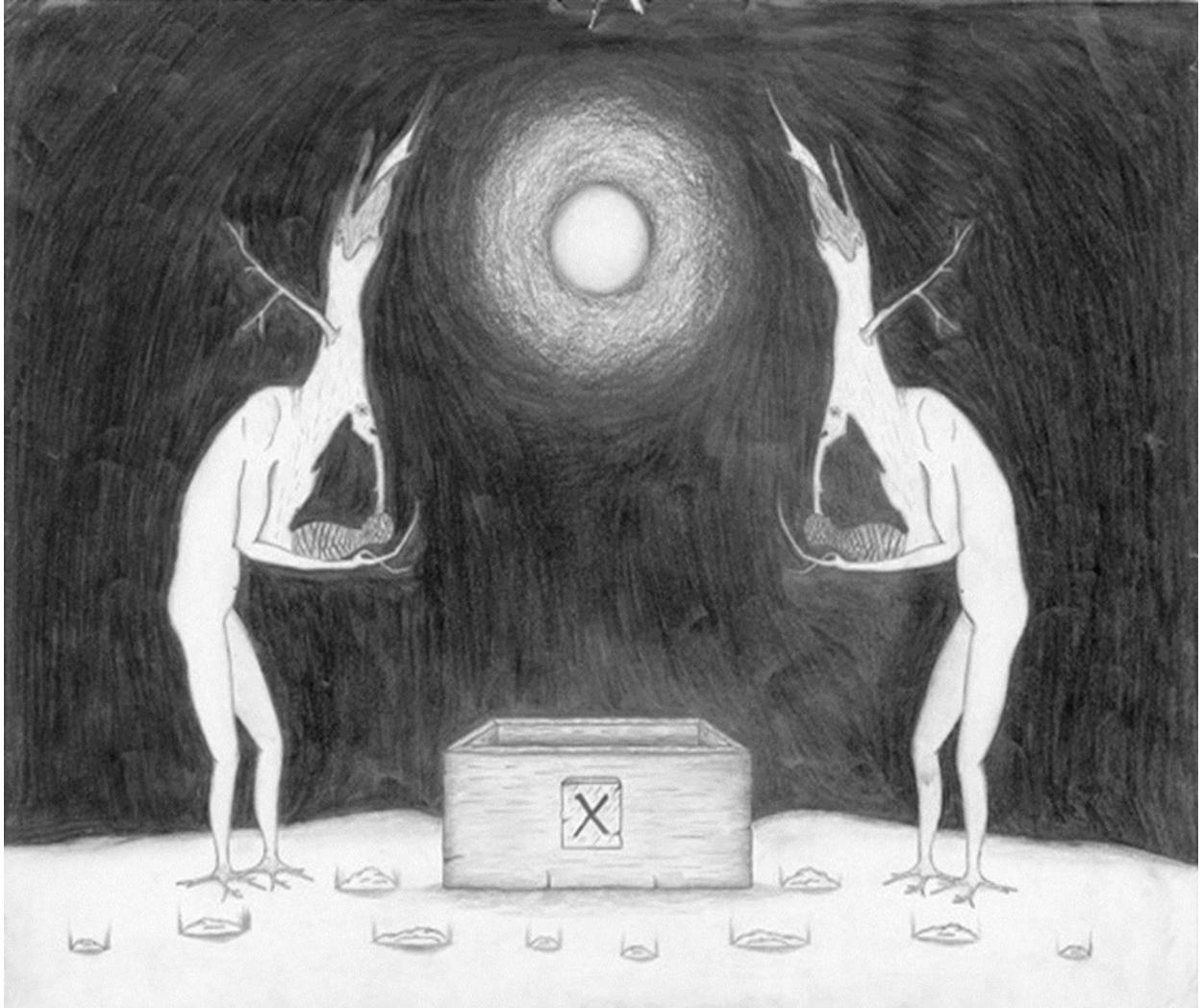
“Ready?” I said with a soothing smile.

“Yeah... I guess. I feel kind of nauseous, though.” The Patient said.

“Don’t worry, you’ll be just fine,” I reassured him.

I led him through the holding rooms to the operating room. He seemed to look as if he were longing for something, as all Patients do. I looked over as we walked into the hallway of the operating room to my Witness and friend Law. He nodded his head in approval. I put the barrel right at the base of the Patient’s skull and pulled the trigger. It was a good shot. The bullet went in at an angle so that it did not exit. It merely rattled around in his skull. I put two more bullets through the Patient’s back into his

heart... strictly routine. We sat and watched the postmortem muscle reflexes and Law commented on how there was an art to the blood splatters on the wall. It was beautiful, the wounds bled out like a dark, red stream flowing over white stone.



Coffins of Children