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HEART OF DARKNESS

Ava Gripp
Heart of Darkness
Fall 2018

HEART
OF
DARKNESS

JOSEPH CONRAD

AG

For my Brother

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The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

The Director of Companies was our captain and our host. We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seaward. On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. He resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. It was difficult to realize his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom.

Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation, it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns—and even convictions. The Lawyer—the best of old fellows—had, because of his many years and many virtues, the only cushion on deck, and was lying on the only rug. The Ac-

countant had brought out already a box of dominoes, and was toying architecturally with the bones. Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. The director, satisfied the anchor had good hold, made his way aft and sat down amongst us. We exchanged a few words lazily. Afterwards there was silence on board the yacht. For some reason or other we did not begin that game of dominoes. We felt meditative, and fit for nothing but placid staring. The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marsh was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more sombre every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.

And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men. Forthwith a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound. The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth. We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush of a short day that comes and departs for ever, but in the august light of abiding memories. And indeed nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes, “followed the sea” with reverence and affection, than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames. The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea. It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and untitled—the great knights-errant of the sea.

It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time, from the Golden Hind returning with her rotund flanks full of treasure, to be visited by the Queen's Highness and thus pass out of the gigantic tale, to the Erebus and Terror, bound on other conquests—and that never returned. It had known the ships and the men. They had sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith—the adventurers and the settlers; kings' ships and the ships of men on ‘Change; captains, admirals, the dark “interlopers” of the Eastern trade, and the commissioned “generals” of East India fleets. Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth!... The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.

The sun set; the dusk fell on the stream, and lights began to appear along the shore. The Chapman light-house, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat, shone strongly. Lights of ships moved in the fairway—a great stir of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

“And this also,” said Marlow suddenly, “has been one of the dark places of the earth.”

He was the only man of us who still “followed the sea.” The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them—the ship; and so is their country—the sea. One ship is very much like another, and the sea is always the same. In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance; for there is nothing mysterious to a seaman unless it be the sea itself, which is the mistress of his existence and as inscrutable as Destiny. For the rest, after his hours of work, a casual



“One evening as I was lying flat on the deck of my steamboat, I heard voices approaching—and there were the nephew and the uncle strolling along the bank. I laid my head on my arm again, and had nearly lost myself in a doze, when somebody said in my ear, as it were: ‘I am as harmless as a little child, but I don’t like to be dictated to. Am I the manager—or am I not? I was ordered to send him there. It’s incredible.’ ... I became aware that the two were standing on the shore alongside the forepart of the steamboat, just below my head. I did not move; it did not occur to me to move: I was sleepy. ‘It is unpleasant,’ grunted the uncle. ‘He has asked the Administration to be sent there,’ said the other, ‘with the idea of showing what he could do; and I was instructed accordingly. Look at the influence that man must have. Is it not frightful?’ They both agreed it was frightful, then made several bizarre remarks: ‘Make rain and fine weather—one man—the Council—by the nose’—bits of absurd sentences that got the better of my drowsiness, so that I had pretty near the whole of my wits about me when the uncle said, ‘The climate may do away with this difficulty for you. Is he alone there?’ ‘Yes,’ answered the manager; ‘he sent his assistant down the river with a note to me in these terms: “Clear this poor devil out of the country, and don’t bother sending more of that sort. I had rather be alone than have the kind of men you can dispose of with me.” It was more than a year ago. Can you imagine such impudence!’ ‘Anything since then?’ asked the other hoarsely. ‘Ivory,’ jerked the nephew; ‘lots of it—prime sort—lots—most an-

noying, from him.' 'And with that?' questioned the heavy rumble. 'Invoice,' was the reply fired out, so to speak. Then silence. They had been talking about Kurtz.

"I was broad awake by this time, but, lying perfectly at ease, remained still, having no inducement to change my position. 'How did that ivory come all this way?' growled the elder man, who seemed very vexed. The other explained that it had come with a fleet of canoes in charge of an English half-caste clerk Kurtz had with him; that Kurtz had apparently intended to return himself, the station being by that time bare of goods and stores, but after coming three hundred miles, had suddenly decided to go back, which he started to do alone in a small dugout with four paddlers, leaving the half-caste to continue down the river with the ivory. The two fellows there seemed astounded at anybody attempting such a thing. They were at a loss for an adequate motive. As to me, I seemed to see Kurtz for the first time. It was a distinct glimpse: the dugout, four paddling savages, and the lone white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home—perhaps; setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station. I did not know the motive. Perhaps he was just simply a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake. His name, you understand, had not been pronounced once. He was 'that man.' The half-caste, who, as far as I could see, had conducted a difficult trip with great prudence and pluck, was invariably alluded to as 'that scoundrel.' The 'scoundrel' had reported that the 'man' had been very ill—had recovered imperfectly.... The two below me moved away then a few paces, and strolled back and forth at some little distance. I heard: 'Military post—doctor—two hundred miles—quite alone now—unavoidable delays—nine months—no news—strange rumours.' They approached again, just as the manager was saying, 'No one, as far as I know, unless a species of wandering trader—a pestilential fellow, snapping ivory from the natives.' Who was it they were talking about now? I gathered in snatches that this was some man supposed to be in Kurtz's district, and of whom the manager did not approve. 'We will not be free from unfair competition till one of these fellows is hanged

for an example,' he said. 'Certainly,' grunted the other; 'get him hanged! Why not? Anything—anything can be done in this country. That's what I say; nobody here, you understand, here, can endanger your position. And why? You stand the climate—you outlast them all. The danger is in Europe; but there before I left I took care to—' They moved off and whispered, then their voices rose again. 'The extraordinary series of delays is not my fault. I did my best.' The fat man sighed. 'Very sad.' 'And the pestiferous absurdity of his talk,' continued the other; 'he bothered me enough when he was here. "Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing." Conceive you—that ass! And he wants to be manager! No, it's—' Here he got choked by excessive indignation, and I lifted my head the least bit. I was surprised to see how near they were—right under me. I could have spat upon their hats. They were looking on the ground, absorbed in thought. The manager was switching his leg with a slender twig: his sagacious relative lifted his head. 'You have been well since you came out this time?' he asked. The other gave a start. 'Who? I? Oh! Like a charm—like a charm. But the rest—oh, my goodness! All sick. They die so quick, too, that I haven't the time to send them out of the country—it's incredible!' 'Hm'm. Just so,' grunted the uncle. 'Ah! my boy, trust to this—I say, trust to this.' I saw him extend his short flipper of an arm for a gesture that took in the forest, the creek, the mud, the river—seemed to beckon with a dishonouring flourish before the sunlit face of the land a treacherous appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness of its heart. It was so startling that I leaped to my feet and looked back at the edge of the forest, as though I had expected an answer of some sort to that black display of confidence. You know the foolish notions that come to one sometimes. The high stillness confronted these two figures with its ominous patience, waiting for the passing away of a fantastic invasion.

"They swore aloud together—out of sheer fright, I believe—then pretending not to know anything of my existence, turned back to the station. The sun was low; and leaning forward side by side, they seemed to be tugging painfully uphill their two ridiculous shadows

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Danielle Carr
Missing Spaces
Spring 2018

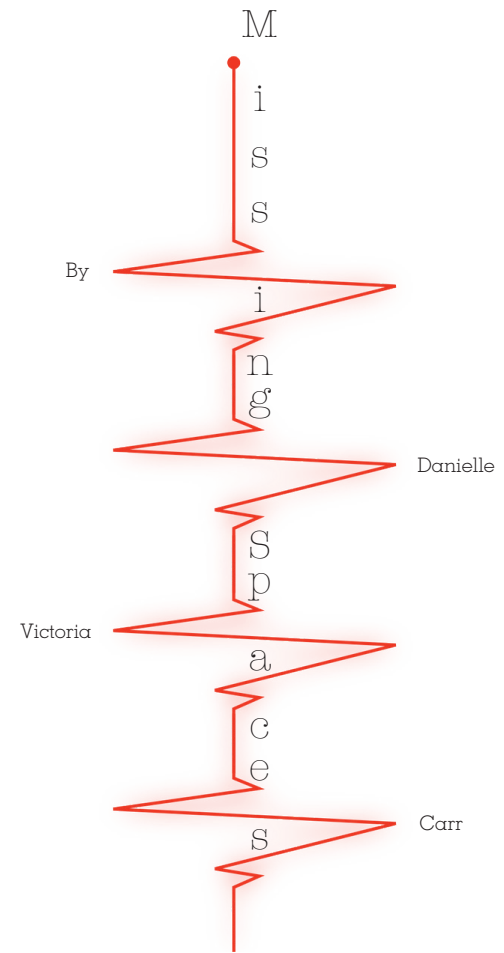
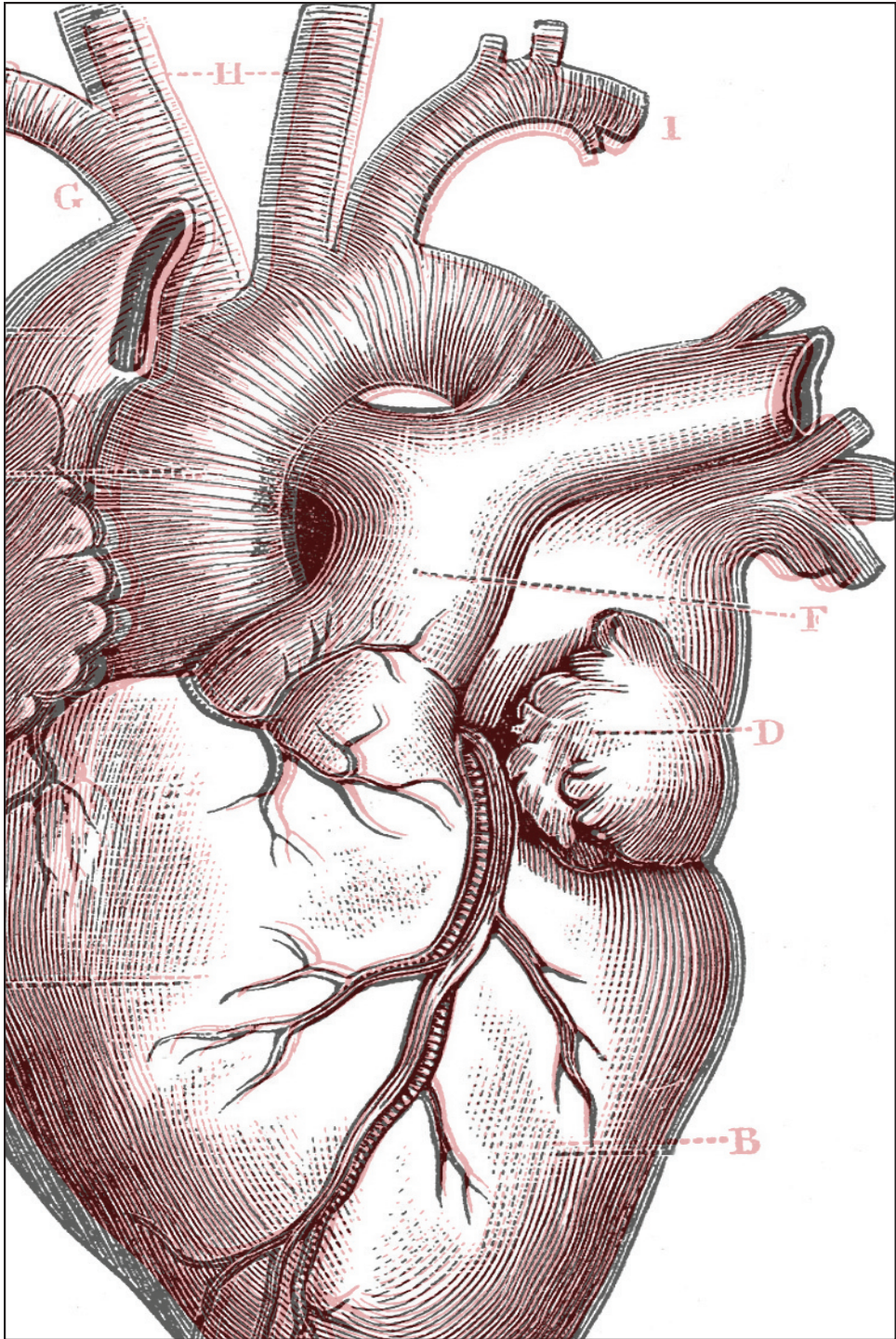


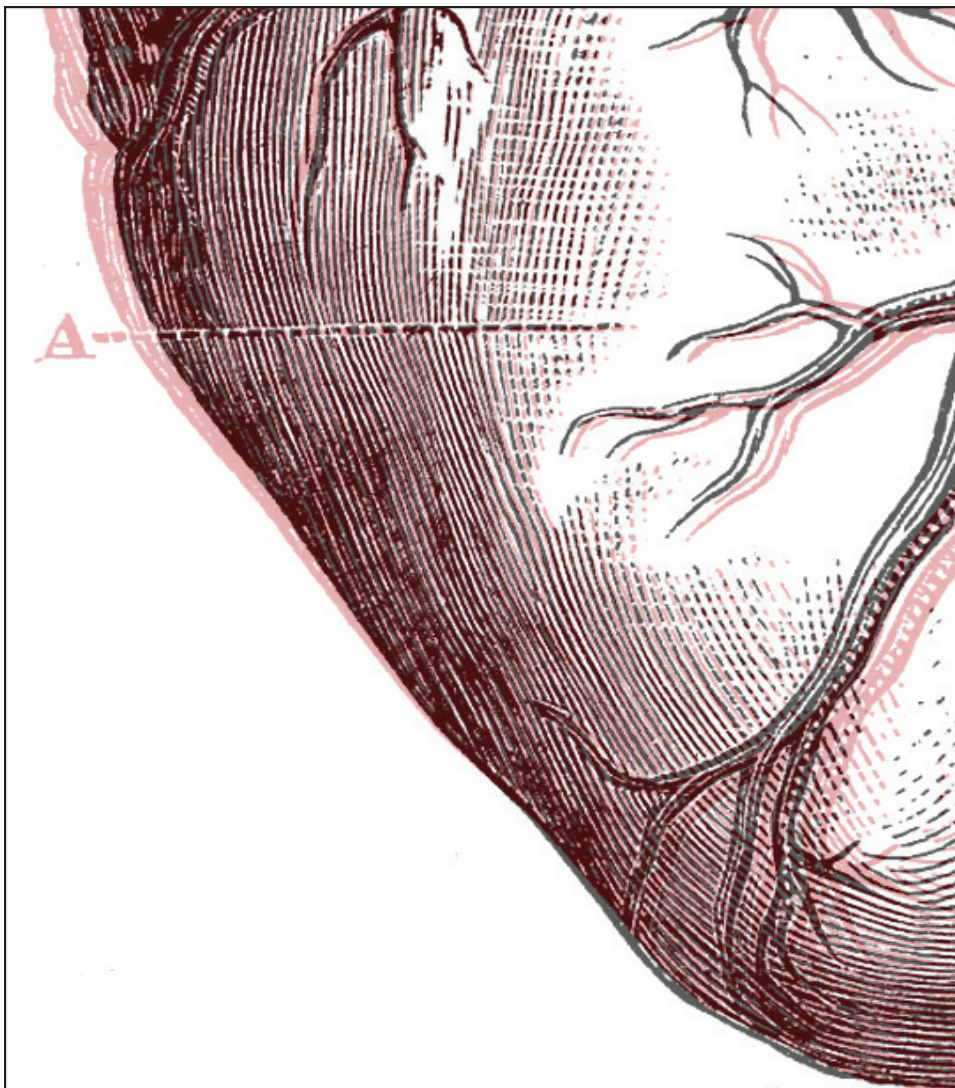
Table of Terminology

Cerebrovascular Accident	Stroke
The sudden death of brain cells due to lack of oxygen, caused by blockage of blood flow or rupture of an artery to the brain.	
Transient Ischemic Attack	Mini Stroke
A neurological event with the signs and symptoms of a stroke, but which go away within a short period of time.	
Patent Foramen Oval	PFO
A hole in the heart that didn't close completely the way it should have at birth	
Atrial Septal Defect	ASD
A hole in the septum, the wall, between the atria, the upper chambers of the heart.	
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	MRI
a diagnostic technique that uses magnetic fields and radio waves to produce a detailed image of the body's soft tissue and bones.	
Septal Occluder Implant	Gore Helix
A device used to close ASDs and PFOs. It is designed to appose the septal wall on each side of the defect and create a platform for tissue in-growth after implantation.	

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They were just holes.

That's all they were supposed to be.

Hidden and small,

They were just small holes.

I don't remember how I met Megan. I remember knowing that she transferred into my class in the middle of fourth grade. That she had just moved to my town from out of state. But I don't remember ever seeing her for a first time. I don't remember how we became friends, or how we came to think of each other as sisters. Only that we do. There must have been a time I did not know her, but we have integrated into each other's lives so completely neither of us remembers what it was like before we met. Maybe because we lived within a three-minute drive of each other. Maybe because we were growing up together. Maybe it's just because we share everything with each other. We've celebrated Thanksgiving together every year since we met. We trade pets like playing cards and borrow family members like cups of sugar. We have matching scars from heart repairs, and plans of matching tattoos with flowers.

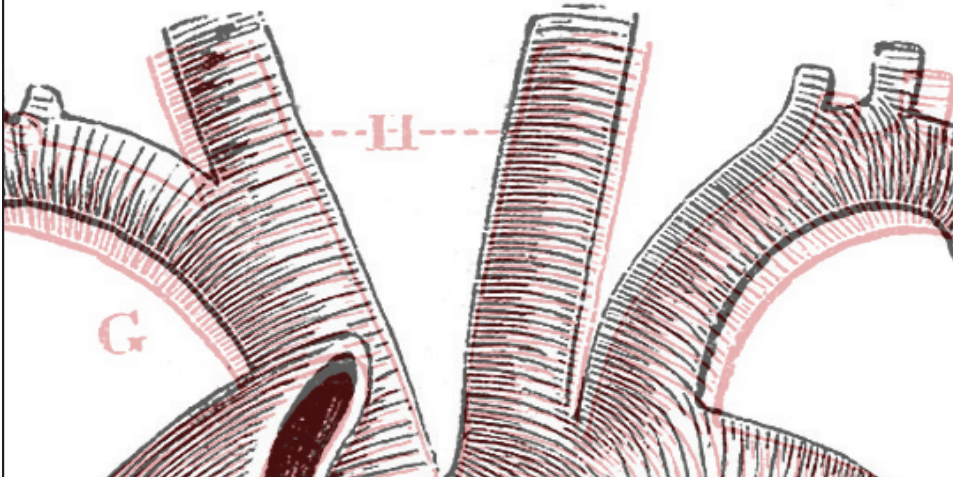
Undetected.

Overlooked.

They bled and bled.



Fig. 37.



Twin scars,

Malfunctioned minds,

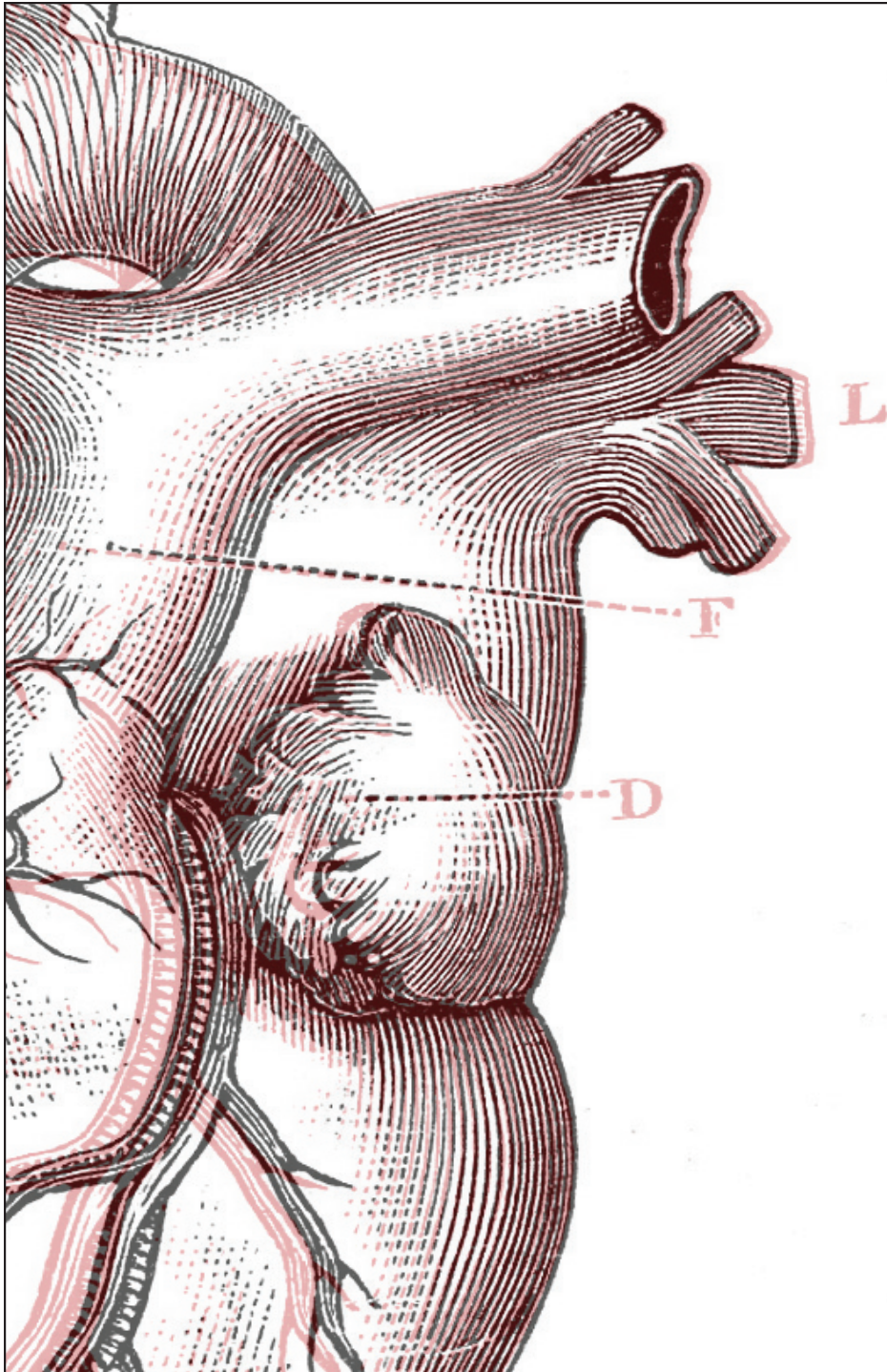
Malfunctioned hearts.

I learned Megan had a hole in between the chambers of her heart the same day she went to track practice and couldn't tell coach how to spell her own name. They took her to hospital, but she was fine a few hours later. The doctor told her everything was probably fine. An acute migraine, most likely. Her family has no history of migraines. They wanted to let her go, convinced that she was okay, but she refused to leave. I think we both knew better. She had a stroke, yet not quite. A mini-stroke. It mimics a real stroke for all intents and purposes, except that the effects are temporary. It disrupts the brain momentarily, in much the same way that a stroke would, but then the clot releases. The symptoms fade away. The brain remains healthy, and whole. The doctors didn't know what could have caused it. Not dead, they said. But incredibly rare in someone so young, they said. I remember looking at her and asking, "How much you want to bet?"

Less of a metaphor

And more of an untimely

unfortunate coincidence.



Slowly. Tread slowly.

Do not

Step too quickly, Breath too heavily.

The monster lives here,

In the in-between.

I was too exhausted. Too tired of the tingling in my side keeping me up at night. Too tired of being afraid to sleep because I was scared I would wake up with another crack of my brain disintegrating. Too exhausted of every moment of anxiety brought upon by the slightest twinge along the left side of my body. The surgery wasn't strictly necessary medically, but mentally it was a necessity. Megan proved it was simple. Low risk. Easy. Our puzzle pieces were almost identical. A small birth defect that a quarter of the world's population suffers from. A mirror image of each other, our hearts were hole punched. At least, it was supposed to be. When it was my turn for pre-surgery tests, they discovered that my heart wasn't as whole as we thought it was. Megan had one hole a little less than a centimeter wide. I had three.

It will steal the air from your lungs,

From your blood.

Slowly. Tread slowly.

Don't let your heart

Beat too quickly.



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Glossary of Missing Spaces

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In Isolation

Abbey Evans
In Isolation
Fall 2018



In Isolation

We Both Grow
Stronger

by ABIGAIL EVANS



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Essay One

August 2015
First Infection: Right Knee

I contort my body, twisting my knee to find the best angle, the best lighting. The first series of pictures shows this: a pimple inflated to ten times the normal circumference, flushed skin surrounding the pustule (warm to the touch), a pen-drawn outline of the inflammation in the shape of an amoeba. The pustule is comprised mostly of white blood cells but there is something black lurking inside as well. It looks like a drop of ink, smudged around the edges. I tell myself that it is blood, but there is no way that I can know for certain.

The doctor takes a culture of it in the office. She pokes a hole in the puss-filled sac with a long scalpel and most of the fluid drains easily, like yolk spilling out of an over easy egg. To drain the remainder, the doctor places her latex hands inside the amoeba line and presses firmly, squeezing with short pauses in between. I grip the edge of the examination bed. She takes a sample of the fluid with a long swab which she places in a cylindrical tube. What is

left on my knee is a deflated sac of skin so thin that it is transparent under the cut of fluorescent lights. She tells me to come back if the inflammation goes outside the pen-line. I can't wash it off. She tells me the wound will refill with fluid. It does.

I move into my college dorm that week. I wear clothes that cover the gauze wrapping and the paper tape that holds it in place. I stop shaving my legs. I nicked my knee shaving the night before the pimple first appeared, small, like a bump from an ingrown hair. My legs are prickly when I take pictures of my knee in my dorm room.

I show the pictures to my roommate, after the wound itself looks better. I am scrolling through my camera roll in our dorm room when they crop up, sandwiched between pictures of smiling faces and fireworks. I can't remember whether I decide to show her or whether she just saw. We scrunch up our noses at the hair and pus and angry skin. We laugh together and it's okay because it is a picture and not me. With pictures I can prove my pain without having to show it and keep contagion at a distance.

When anything out of the ordinary appears on my skin I inspect it carefully, suspiciously. I know from the start when it is MRSA. It is an instinctual feeling, but also something else. They always look different. Even when they first appear as a small pimple, there is a redness that gives it away. The center is always surrounded by a ring of red that forms a perfect circle and as the infection grows the redness does too, expanding outward like growth rings on a tree stump. The longer the infection stews, the more rings. I pretend that these spots are spider bites or ingrown hairs. I never make the call too early because I am afraid of jinxing it. It is hard to know whether MRSA has caused my superstition to flare up, or whether I was already this way before my illness struck. How much of this is in my mind?

Skin illnesses have a particular potency. We spend our whole lives recognizing ourselves by our skin. In pictures, in the mirror, in the shower. My perception of myself is immovable from my physicality, from my skin. My MRSA has become a part of this perception. I read about other skin conditions in an attempt to sort through these thoughts. I discover Morgellons disease. People with Morgellons say they have something under their skin, usually thread-like fibers but sometimes crystals or fuzz or bugs. Patients will scratch and tear their skin, digging for what they feel beneath the surface. I think of my skin and how sensitive it is, how alert. The slightest brush of a stray hair against my arm will make me crazy if I can't locate it and pluck it off my shirt. I google Morgellons and click on the "images" tab. I see skin dotted with open lesions and scabs, usually localized in one area like an arm, leg, or hand. Some pictures show sores on the scalp or the face. I picture myself sitting alone in my room scratching at whatever lies beneath. Where would I feel bugs scattering?

Morgellons patients face an additional obstacle that I do not. No one believes that they have foreign fibers coming out of their skin, including doctors and dermatologists. "They didn't know what this matter was, or where it came from, or why it was there, but they knew—and this was what mattered, the important word—that it was real," Leslie Jamison writes. The disease is real, but the controversy revolves around how much and which parts. Doctors, who are placed with the power of treating the disease, claim that Morgellons is purely psychological. Patients, who must live every day with their disease, stress that it is real, that there are foreign objects beneath the surface of their skin. They collect these objects and bring them in to dermatologists, who have coined this as the "the matchbox sign." Proof is important for them, because they are called liars in the face

ÆSOP'S FABLES

EMBELLISHED WITH
EMBLEMATICAL DEVICES

Kaylyn Wingerter
Æsop's Fables
Fall 2017

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ÆSOP'S FABLES

EMBELLISHED WITH
EMBLEMATICAL DEVICES



BY C. WITTINGHAM

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THE WOLF, THE LAMB, AND THE GOAT

A Wolf meeting a Lamb, one day, in company with a Goat — “Child,” says he, “you are mistaken; this is none of your mother; she is yonder;” pointing to a flock of sheep at a distance. — “It may be so,” says the Lamb; “the person that happened to conceive me, and afterwards bore me a few months in her belly, because she could not help it, and then dropped me, she did not care where, and left me to the wide world, is, I suppose, what you call my mother; but I look upon this charitable Goat as such, that took compassion on me in my poor, helpless, destitute condition, and gave me suck; sparing it out of the mouths of her own kids, rather than I should want it.” — “But sure,” says he, “you have a greater regard for her that gave you life, than for any body else.” — “She gave me life! I deny that. She that could not so much as tell whether I should be black or white, had a great hand in giving me life, to be sure! But, supposing it were so, I am mightily obliged to her, truly, for contriving to let me be of

the male-kind, so that I go every day in danger of the butcher. What reason then have I to have a greater regard for one to whom I am so little indebted for any part of my being, than for those from whom I have received all the benevolence and kindness which have hitherto supported me in life?”

APPLICATION.

It is they whose goodness makes them our parents, that properly claim filial respect from us, and not those who are such only out of necessity. The duties between parents and their children are relative and reciprocal. By all laws, natural as well as civil, it is expected that the parents should cherish and provide for the child, till it is able to shift for itself; and that the child, with a mutual tenderness, should depend upon the parent for its sustenance, and yield it a reasonable obedience. Yet, through the depravity of human nature, we very often see these laws violated, and the relations before-mentioned treating one another with as much virulence as enemies of different countries are capable of. Through the natural impatience and protervity of youth, we observe the first occasion for any animosity most frequently arising from their side; but, however, there are not wanting examples of undutiful parents: and, when a father, by using a son ill, and denying him such an education and such an allowance as his circumstances can well afford, gives him occasion to withdraw his respect from him, to urge his begetting of him as the sole obligation to duty, is talking like a silly unthinking dotard. Mutual benevolence must be kept up between relations, as well as friends; for, without this cement, whatever you please to call the building, it is only a castle in the air, a thing to be talked of, without the least reality.



THE COUNTRY MOUSE AND THE CITY MOUSE

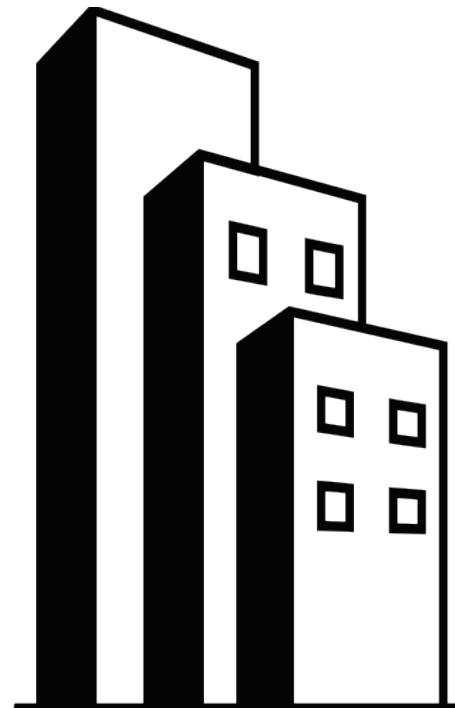
An honest, plain, sensible Country Mouse, is said to have entertained at his hole one day a fine Mouse of the Town. Having formerly been playfellows together, they were old acquaintance, which served as an apology for the visit. However, as master of the house, he thought himself obliged to do the honours of it, in all respects, and to make as great a stranger of his guest as he possibly could. In order to this, he set before him a reserve of delicate grey peas and bacon, a dish of fine oatmeal, some parings of new cheese, and, to crown all with a dessert, a remnant of a charming mellow apple. In good manners, he forbore to eat any himself, lest the stranger should not have enough; but, that he might seem to bear the other company, sat and nibbled a piece of a wheaten straw very busily. At last says the spark of the town, "Old crony, give me leave to be a little free with you; how can you bear to live in this nasty, dirty, melancholy hole here, with nothing but woods and meadows, and mountains, and rivulets, about you? Do not you prefer the conversation of the world to

the chirping of birds, and the splendour of a court to the rude aspect of an uncultivated desert! Come, take my word for it, you will find it a change for the better. Never stand considering, but away this moment. Remember, we are not immortal, and therefore have no time to lose. Make sure of to-day, and spend it as agreeably as you can; you know not what may happen to-morrow." In short, these and such like arguments prevailed, and his Country Acquaintance was resolved to go to town that night. So they both set out upon their journey together, proposing to sneak in after the close of the evening. They did so; and, about midnight, made their entry into a certain great house, where there had been an extraordinary entertainment the day before, and several tit-bits, which some of the servants had purloined, were hid under the seat of a window. The Country Guest was immediately placed in the midst of a rich Persian carpet: and now it was the Courtier's turn to entertain; who, indeed, acquitted himself in that capacity with the utmost readiness and address, changing the courses as elegantly, and tasting every thing first as judiciously, as any clerk of a kitchen, the other sat and enjoyed himself like a delighted epicure, tickled to the last degree with this new turn of his affairs; when, on a sudden, a noise of somebody opening the door made them start from their seats, and scuttle in confusion about the dining-room. Our Country Friend, in particular, was ready to die with fear at the barking of a huge mastiff or two, which opened their throats just about the same time, and made the whole house echo. At last, recovering himself — "Well," says he, "if this be your town life, much good may do you with it: give me my poor quiet hole again, with my homely, but comfortable, grey peas."

Gravity

GRAVITY

R. L. CAMMENG



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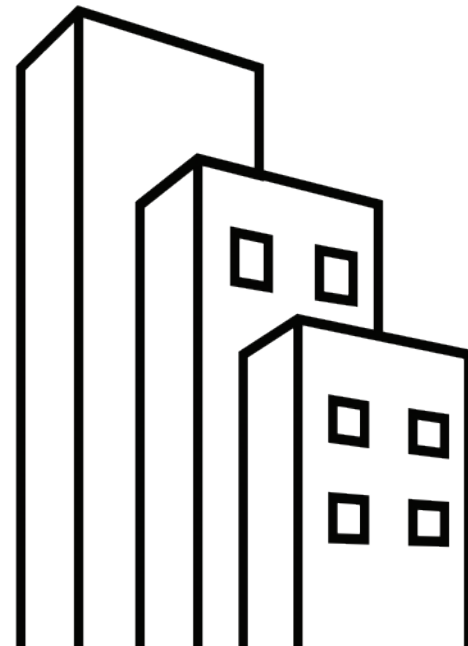
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For **Greg**,
for
everything.

PART 1

Little Notes



I.

No one cared enough to question the coffee. Not the money she spent on it, nor the twenty minutes she drove in traffic to acquire it, nor the half hour waiting in line while the surly barista brewed it. Corporate sent a new coffeemaker last week as a thank-you for the past quarter's sales increase, and since then her coworkers had been content to make their own coffee rather than wait.

The drink carriers steamed on her desk, home to two flower-petal patterns of eight useless cups of coffee. Steam clouded the Formica desk top beneath—cheap, ugly, outdated. It matched the interior theme of the office: taupe walls, speckled carpet to hide the dirt, a musty smell whose source she couldn't identify.

Going out of her way was her own fault, she supposed. She'd brought in coffee for years—a comfortable habit she'd grown into, like filling in the gaps of a long-run radio jingle after hearing only the beginning—so how was she to remember she wasn't needed?

She glared at her desk and decided this was on corporate. They didn't stop in to see how the salesmen were faring, didn't realize that what they really needed was fluorescent light bulbs and ergonomic chairs, not some contraption that required a PhD to understand. She already had the caffeine-needs under control. Maybe if they'd focused on the little people every once in a while they would know their coffeemaker was unnecessary.

She frowned, shook her head, nodded. Yes—her muscles were sore, but this idea she could shoulder.

Something new she'd learned in the past few months was to categorically assign blame: the landlord for the squealing radiator that had kept her up all night, Garrett for not waiting for her to choose an outfit for him to wear and instead going to school dressed like he crawled out of a Goodwill, his school for not sending buses near their home and leaving them stuck in traffic every morning. All of these things were categorized, separate from problems that were not assigned space and were therefore her own fault. She didn't have to worry so much about things that were not her fault.

She prodded the lids of the coffee cups and searched for a way to categorize the conversation she'd had with her son that morning—something about his constant

“moods,” which were probably due to his age (ten), which was inevitably due to the fact that aging was not yet a controlled activity that could be stopped and started at will.

“Why don't you read a book until we get there?” she had suggested as he'd sat in the backseat and glared.

“I don't have one.”

“And why not?”

“Books are stupid. School is stupid.”

A minivan had cut her off, and she bit back a curse. “Don't say stupid.”

She could attribute his hatred for school to the public institution he attended, which was not a private academy, and was not someplace he would enjoy class and maybe learn some respect. The biweekly phone calls and emails she received detailing his “behavior problems” and failing grades could also be blamed on public school, and not on anything else. Of course, if she could have sent him to a private school she would have, but rising rent prices stopped her. She hoped Garrett would grow out of his moods.

She blinked at the office walls, that mind-numbing taupe. Growing up was the only solution she could afford.

At the school entrance, mothers had dropped off their children while dressed for yoga. She'd pulled her