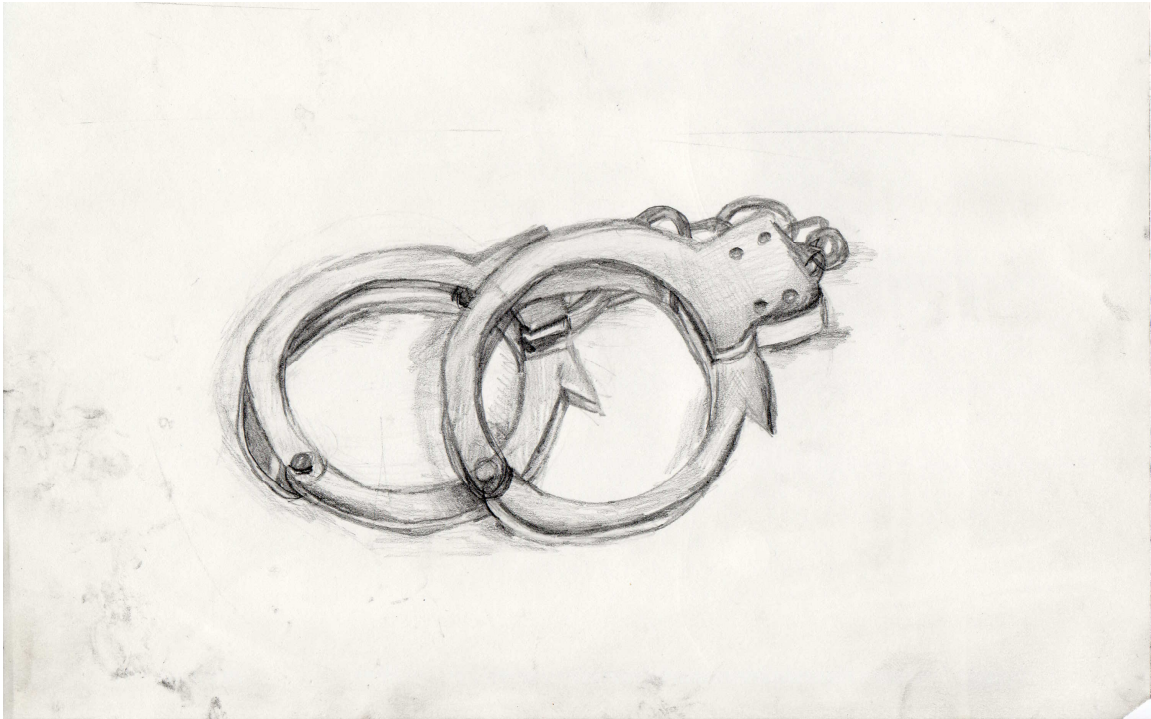


# Tacenda Literary Magazine

## Studies in Crime and Punishment



Drawing by Sara Rubenson

**Spring 2008**

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Washington, DC

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# Tacenda Literary Magazine

## Studies in Crime and Punishment

*Tacenda Literary Magazine*

Published by

**WilloTrees**

[www.willotrees.com](http://www.willotrees.com)

In partnership with

**Bleakhouse Publishing**

[www.bleakhousepublishing.com](http://www.bleakhousepublishing.com)

Tacenda: n., pronounced ta'KEN'da – *things better left unsaid.*

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ISBN 13: 978-0-9797065-3-0

## Note from the Editors

The meaning of *Tacenda* is “things better left unsaid.” It is true that writing can sometimes compromise the truest form of human emotion and thought—that “perfection” of the mind which cannot be reduced to words—yet at some point, writers must bite the bullet and write about an important issue, regardless of the “imperfection” of their words. Well, we certainly wouldn’t say that any of the words in this text are “imperfect”—in fact our contributors’ dedication to writing shows the true merit and most virtuous use of the craft.

How true that in our current society, many of the horrific realities surrounding crime and punishment, captivity and ignorance go “left unsaid,” or merely ignored. There are so many words that *need* to be said, so many issues that need to be embodied in reforms. We are privileged to present you with writers who tackle modern issues that are commonly disregarded—hidden on page ten of the newspaper or not even mentioned at all. The ability of the writers in this edition to capture the dilemmas of fellow human beings, struggling with issues of crime and punishment is awe inspiring. These writers empathize both emotionally and mentally with the plights of people constantly overlooked. They give value to issues that are deemed valueless, in an age that prefers to capture the latest movie star’s hairstyle, rather than examine the atrocities occurring in their local prison.

We should not have to live in a world that needs writers to humanize prisoners—prisoners should not be dehumanized in the first place. Writers should not have to provide voices, and yet, the voices of those behind bars have been so silenced, that even some of the strongest observers of human torture seem to forget (or rather avoid) the pain and suffering that occurs in today’s prisons. But understanding the reality of the world is the first step to changing it. The writers included in this edition of *Tacenda Literary Magazine* believe in writing as a means for social change through the enlightenment of the reader. They know better than most that the point of writing is to give meaning to the world around us. We hope that you enjoy this special edition of *Tacenda Literary Magazine* and are heartened by the fact that writers today work to expose the tragedies of those so neglected.

Our thanks are due to the contributors to this issue, Joseph Pelz, Rachel Cupelo, Sonia Tabriz, Katlyn Miller, and Kristen Luppino for allowing us to display their work to the literary community. We would like to thank Sara Rubenson, the artist who finessed a fantastic vision to compliment the extraordinary writing in this edition.

This edition of *Tacenda Literary Magazine* would not have been possible without the mentorship of Dr. Robert Johnson. We thank him greatly for letting his students take the reins on this one, and attempt to emulate the great issues of *Tacenda Literary Magazine* that he has produced in the past.

—Thais H. Miller and Christopher Dum

Spring 2008

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**The Price is Wrong: A Play in One Act with Vignettes**

*Thais Miller*

**Cast of Characters:**

*The Nuclear Family*

MOTHER, age 42, a homemaker

FATHER, age 45, a businessman

SUSIE, age 13, the daughter of MOTHER and FATHER, who loves watching TV more than listening to her parents

BILLY, age 8, the son of MOTHER and FATHER, who likes playing violent video games and with toy guns. He gets bored easily

*A series of seven actors (3 female and 4 male) will rotate playing the following characters:*

Note: One male must be Black and one male must be White. The actors do not have to be the following specific ages, but must wear fake-looking makeup and wigs that make them appear to be the following ages and physical types. The actors must seem like caricatures of the actual people.

*Vignette 1: News report<sup>1</sup>*

NEWSCASTER, age 25

VICTIM: a female in her early 70's

*Vignette 2: Martha Stewart<sup>2</sup>*

MARTHA STEWART, age 65 but looks in her late 40's

LESLIE VAN HOUTON, age 58 but looks in her late 40's

*Vignette 3: Gangbang Girls<sup>3</sup>*

SINGLE MOM, age 30, wears a prison uniform

DAUGHTER, age 15, wears a school uniform

*Vignette 4: Discovery Channel<sup>4</sup>*

NARRATOR 1: a male, serious and unseen voice

GUARD 1: a female guard in her late 30's

CONVICT 1: a short, white male in his mid-20's with a lot of tattoos

CONVICT 2: a tall, black male in his early 20's with fewer tattoos

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<sup>1</sup> Inspired by actual events

<sup>2</sup> Inspired by *Women in Prison*, Robert Johnson's poem "Mister Rogers Prison" in *Justice Follies*, and the TV show *Martha Stewart Living*

<sup>3</sup> Inspired by *Women in Prison* and the TV show *Gilmore Girls*

<sup>4</sup> Inspired by *Lockdown: Inside America's Prisons*

*Vignette 5: Password*<sup>5</sup>

DICK CLARK: The host of Password. He carries a silver microphone, wears a leisure suit and a big smile

CONTESTANT 1: a female in her early 30, has a list of words that she must get CONTESTANT 2 to guess

CONTESTANT 2: a female in her early 40's, guesses words based on synonyms provided by CONTESTANT 1

*Vignette 6: History Channel Special: The History of Fear*<sup>6</sup>

NARRATOR 2: a female, unseen voice

FEMALE

MALE 1: a White male

MALE 2: a Black male

*Vignette 7: Survivor*<sup>7</sup>

PRODUCER: an expensively dressed male in his early 30's with a tight smile and a high-pitched voice

ARPAIO: a White, overweight male in a sheriff's uniform. His black hair has white roots. He wears big glasses

JONES: an adult male contestant wearing only pink Jockey underwear

*Vignette 8: Newlywed Game*<sup>8</sup>

BOB EUBANKS: He has dyed brown hair; he is in his late 60's. He is the host of the Newlywed Game.

RON ANGELONE: Virginia Corrections Chief, he wears a suit

MARY: a female contestant in her late 20's

JUSTICE SYSTEM: A woman in a suit

DAMIEN WAYNE ECHOLS: Teen convicted of the West Memphis triple homicide with no physical evidence. He has dark black hair

*Vignette 9: Dateline: To Catch A Predator*<sup>9</sup>

CHRIS HANSEN: Host of the show, he wears a suit

ARNOLD FRIEDMAN: A late-middle aged man convicted of child molestation without physical evidence. He was first targeted because he had child pornography in his home where he gave children computer lessons

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<sup>5</sup> Based on the TV show *Password*

<sup>6</sup> Inspired by *The History Channel* and Kai T. Erikson's *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*

<sup>7</sup> Inspired by *Gates of Injustice* and the TV show *Survivor*

<sup>8</sup> Inspired by the TV show *The Newly Wed Game* as well as by *True Notebooks*, *Gates of Injustice*, and *Paradise Lost 2: Revelations*

<sup>9</sup> Inspired by the TV show on *Dateline NBC* and *Capturing the Friedmans*

*Vignette 10: Def Poetry: Everybody Hates Convicts*<sup>10</sup>

RANCISCO: an outspoken Latino juvenile from LA County Prison, convicted of murder

KAREN: a poet and juvenile convict

*Vignette 11: The Price is Wrong*<sup>11</sup>

BOB BARKER: Host of *The Price is Right*. He is in his early 80's. He is white and has white hair. He holds cue-cards telling him the name and price of each object

VOLUNTEER: a member of the audience picked at random

SHOW GIRL: a young blonde actress wearing a low cut shining dress. She has an irritatingly large smile with perfect (if large) white teeth

LEANDRO ANDRADE: a male convict

DUC: a 16-year old in juvenile prison

**Setting:**

Spring 2007: The set is divided into two. One side of the stage is an upper-middle class kitchen in Los Angeles, California with a central table and five chairs. The other side of the stage has a large square frame around it, large enough for several people to fit inside the frame at once but be able to move comfortably inside and out. This is the TV. There should also be projections of the onstage TV screen on monitors facing the audience, to make it seem more TV-like. There should also be a sign in the audience that lights up when the audience is supposed to applaud.

*Note: This is a work of fiction inspired in some instances by actual persons, situations, and events.*

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<sup>10</sup> Inspired by the TV show *Def Poetry* and *True Notebooks*

<sup>11</sup> Inspired by *Gates of Injustice*, *Juvies* and the TV show, *The Price is Right*

**THE PRICE IS WRONG**

*(Open with Paul McCartney's "Another Day" playing in the background. See MOTHER in the kitchen placing silverware, plates, and napkins on the kitchen table. Music slowly fades out as MOTHER looks at her watch, picks up the remote control lying on the kitchen table, and points the remote towards the TV. The music slowly fades out. As MOTHER continues to set the table, NEWSCASTER appears on TV.)*

NEWSCASTER: *(mid-sentence)* ... in the afternoon and it seems that the police have yet to find the armed robber responsible for the last few days of muggings. One victim identified the mugger as a Caucasian male in his early 30's *(NEWSCASTER holds up a drawing of the suspect)* who was "Hispanic looking." He was reported as acting alone. His tactic was to attack his victims as they left a small supermarket on Roscomare Road. *(MOTHER gasps and stops setting the table).*

NEWSCASTER: The man also used his car as a barricade stopping primarily elderly women *(VICTIM enters screen)* from exiting the supermarket parking lot. One victim said...

VICTIM: my window was an inch down, I like driving with a little air, and he just stuck the gun up to the crack and said, "Money..." I thought he was going to kill me *(VICTIM exits).*

NEWSCASTER: If you have any more information or eye-witness a robbery, please contact your local police... *(MOTHER changes the channel and starts to prepare the meal. MARTHA STEWART and LESLIE VAN HOUTEN appear on TV. They are sitting in MARTHA's home, quilting).*

MARTHA: Now Leslie, what have you got to show me here?

LESLIE: Well, these are some of the quilts that I've made while at the Correctional Institute for Women in Corona, California. *(SUSIE ENTERS, dialogue on different sides of stage is slightly overlapping. Dialogue between MOTHER and SUSIE should be slightly quieter).*

SUSIE: Hi Mom!

MOTHER: *(distracted by TV)* Hi Susie, how was your day?

MARTHA: Look at that elegant stitching!

SUSIE: Fine. *(Noticing MOTHER distracted)* What are you watching?

LESLIE: Why thank you, Martha.

MARTHA: Now, while incarcerated in prison, you've dedicated your time to a group that makes quilts for the homeless.

MOTHER: Oh, it's just this woman who's on Martha Stewart today, that...

MARTHA: And look at these gorgeous colors! They would brighten any room, or cell for that matter. You're really quite talented.

MOTHER: Leslie Van Houten. I saw her on TV when I was just a little kid, she was so scary. She helped murder some people not far from here when I was a little kid. Now she's in prison, well... now she's on TV *(Susie sits down at the table to watch)*. She's still scary.

SUSIE: Why? She doesn't look scary.

MOTHER: Neither does Martha—but they were both incarcerated. Just goes to show that you can't trust anybody nowadays. Anybody could be a criminal.

LESLIE: Thank you. It's a wonderful cause and it really helps us—the inmates, I mean—out as well.

SUSIE: She's just quilting.

MOTHER: You don't know what she did.

LESLIE: It gives us something to do. Martha, as you must know from your own experience, sometimes in prison the sheer boredom can drive a person crazy. This makes us feel like we matter. It's really a waste for society—and for us—to be locked up for such a long period of time with nothing to do.

SUSIE: (*bored*) Mom, can we watch Gangbang Girls now?

MOTHER: Sure, honey. (*SUSIE uses remote to change the channel; SINGLE MOM and DAUGHTER appear on TV.*)

DAUGHTER: I've been thinking about our lives, Mom—about the fact that you had me when you were 15. About the fact that you stabbed my father when I was five because he was abusive and you weren't going to take it anymore. Look what the result was... you were sentenced to life and I was sent into foster care.

SINGLE MOM: But I still get to see you!

DAUGHTER: Yea, Mom. I guess I'm luckier than most kids who have imprisoned parents. I get to stay with you for three days every three months in this little shack in the prison. But there's barbed wire everywhere! This isn't like living.

SINGLE MOM: ...but I still get to see you, baby. That's all I care about. We can take this opportunity to make up for all the time we've missed out spending with one another.

DAUGHTER: Months?

SINGLE MOM: Yes, months. Months of separation I know that, I know what it feels like! (*BILLY enters.*)

BILLY: (*dropping backpack on the ground*) Hi, Mom! Hi Susie!

MOTHER: How was your day, dear? What did you do?

SINGLE MOM: I miss being there; I miss being able to watch you grow up and experience life with you.

BILLY: Fine. Stuff. What are you watching?

DAUGHTER: But I *am* grown up, I had to grow up without you, without a mother.

SUSIE: Gangbang Girls. I think the mother-daughter relationship is just about to fall apart.

BILLY: Yuck! Can I change it? (*He grabs the remote.*) Please!

SUSIE: Mom!

DAUGHTER: It takes hours to get here, just to see you in person. You're not allowed to call me a lot. Since when have you been my mother?

SINGLE MOM: I'll always be your mother, honey.

DAUGHTER: But I don't want you as... you are here. You've never been there for me! (*A beat, then whispering*) I am ashamed to call you my mother. I'd rather have no

mother than a mother behind bars. Mothers are supposed to be there for you. I hate the fact that I have to explain to my friends that my mom is in prison... people assume that I'm going to go to prison one day, too.

BILLY: Please!

MOTHER: *Alright*, let Billy change it.

BILLY: Yes! (*He uses the remote to change the channel; CONVICT 1 appears on TV*).

NARRATOR 1: (*mid-sentence, with deep baritone voice*)...only on Discovery

CONVICT 1: (*to audience*) I was pretty scared when I first got here; it's like a zoo— animals locked up in cages. It only makes them worse. (*CONVICT 2 enters*).

NARRATOR 1: Here we have the dominant male of this group as he tries to assert authority (*see CONVICT 2 approach CONVICT 1*). Watch as he turns this corner, hoping to segregate his victim from the pack. Will he pounce right away? Or let the initial shock wear in?

MOTHER: (*Not paying attention to the screen as she cooks*) Ok, at least it's something educational.

CONVICT 2: (*To CONVICT 1*) I gave you protection now pay up! (*MOTHER looks up at TV, startled*). Services or money? Now which will it be? If you don't pay, I will kick the shit out of you—right here, right now.

NARRATOR 1: Keep in mind however, that the less dominant male can still assert authority (*CONVICT 2 exits, GUARD 1 enters*) with a less likely victim... a female guard.

CONVICT 1: (*approaching GUARD 1*) I heard things about you from the other inmates. I can tell you what they say, as a favor (*CONVICT 1 exists*).

GUARD 1: (*to audience*) Yeah, I've been noticing that he's been paying extra attention to me lately. And I know his history; he manipulates women in order to get them to do what he wants, even commit murder.

NARRATOR 1: Weighing only 110 pounds, standing only 5 foot 2, will she stand a chance?

GUARD 1: (*to audience*) I'm pretty scared. But this is my job; I'm not losing my job. I just have to act like I'm in control.

MOTHER: (*To SUSIE*) A woman in a male prison? Who wouldn't be scared? I'm scared just watching it.

SUSIE: (*not paying attention, engrossed*): mm...hmm

GUARD 1: Should the inmate decide to get physical, I am equipped to use a potent pepper spray to protect myself. (*She takes out her gas canister, which looks a bit like a hand grenade.*)

BILLY: Oh cool! She's going to use it!

MOTHER: (*grabbing the remote and changing the channel*) Hey, let's watch something a little less graphic. (*Cast of Password appears on TV, the contestants sit in chairs side by side, DICK stands to side, and applause sign in audience goes on*).

MOTHER: Ooh! I haven't seen this show in years!

BILLY: (*bored, to MOTHER*) That's because it's a Game Show Network rerun, Mom.

DICK: Ok folks. (*Talking to CONESTANT 2*) Your partner will try to describe a word chosen by our judges. You have to guess two more words in order to get the grand

prize. Are you ready to play? Start! (*Whispering to audience*) The word is “criminal.”

CONTESTANT 1: Ok. Like a villain, a hustler, demonic...

CONTESTANT 2: Satan!

CONTESTANT 1: No, no. Like human evil, a convict

CONTESTANT 2: A prisoner! An inmate!

CONTESTANT 1: Closer! Keep going!

CONTESTANT 2: A gang banger! A rapist! A murderer! Is it while he’s committing his crime or after?

CONTESTANT 1: Both! Hated always, ugh! Um... an outcast from society

CONTESTANT 2: A criminal!

CONTESTANT 1: Yes!

DICK: Great! Keep going! (*Whispering to audience*) The word is “prison.”

CONTESTANT 1: Um... hell! Worse than hell!

CONTESTANT 2: What? What’s worse than hell?

CONTESTANT 1: Think... convicts, guards, rapes, beating,

CONTESTANT 2: Jail.

BILLY: Oh come on! This one is easy! There’s got to be something better on than this.

CONTESTANT 1: Close! Think of a synonym!

SUSIE: Can we watch The History Channel? That’s not very violent, and it’s educational.

MOTHER: Alright.

CONTESTANT 2: Big house, um... the hole, prison!

CONTESTANT 1: You got it! (*Applause sign goes on, CONTESTANT 1 and CONTESTANT 2 jump up and down in joy. As audience applauds MOTHER hands SUSIE the remote and she changes the channel. The cast of Triangle disappears as the cast of The History of Fear appears on the TV.*)

NARRATOR 2: (*mid-sentence*)...to The History of Fear. Over time each civilization creates different standards of behavior and draws new lines between deviants (*FEMALE appears*) and law-abiding citizens (*MALE 1 appears*). Societies commonly define themselves by what they permit members to do (*MALE 2 appears*). By separating out individuals from a community who do not adhere to certain assumed societal norms (*MALE 1 gives MALE 2 a high-five and both laugh at FEMALE. FEMALE and MALE 1 and 2 exit in opposite directions*), the community better asserts power and control over its members. Think of Anne Hutchinson (*FEMALE enters with a white wig*), a devout Puritan but also an assertive woman...

MOTHER: (*To SUSIE*) She was ahead of her time.

SUSIE: (*distracted by the TV*) mm...hmm...

NARRATOR 2: ...who attacked powerful Puritan ministers (*MALE 1 enters*). Hutchinson was labeled a deviant because of her divergent opinions and her power to sway public opinion away from the religious authority. When she spoke, Puritans listened. To reassert control, the religious authority called her

blasphemous and sent her into exile (*FEMALE exits*). By separating her from the community, the Puritan authority made a point to stand against anyone who didn't adhere to church doctrine (*MALE 1 brushes his shoulder off in a gesture of pride*). Labeling deviants and then exiling them was a dramatic and frightening way to set societal boundaries and maintain control. People were afraid to get out of line.

BILLY: Ooh! Now it's getting good!

SUSIE: Shh!

NARRATOR 2: From Salem to McCarthy, witch hunts of one sort of another—targeting “real” witches or some demonized group, like communists or child molesters—have been used to label deviants and exile or execute them. Ethnic, religious, and racial profiling, both nationally and internationally, has been used to target specific groups of people (*MALE 2 walks across stage, MALE 1 stares and then grabs*) and label them as deviants in order to better assert societal control. (*Enter FATHER*)

FATHER (*to MOTHER*): Hi honey! (*Kisses her*) How was your day?

MOTHER (*distracted by TV*): Oh fine, just fine.

BILLY & SUSIE: Hi Daddy!

FATHER: What are you watching?

NARRATOR 2: Propaganda has been used over time (*as MALE 1 and 2 still struggle, FEMALE enters—walking like a ring girl at a boxing match—carrying Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda and anti-Native American caricatures from Manifest Destiny/1800 Westward Expansion*) to influence public opinion through the use of fear (*FEMALE exits*). Scapegoats are often used for societal problems, demonized in order to be persecuted so that societal authorities can claim in solidarity that societal ills were defeated. As technology has improved, propaganda has become more and more insidious and effective, not just locally but across the world.

MALE 1 (*pausing from fight*): A Black male was accused of...

MALE 2 (*interrupting*): Two White males were convicted of attempting to bomb an office building after tons of ammunition and explosives...

MALE 1 (*interrupting*): murdering two children when in fact their White mother was responsible for the murders. Police searched for days for the mysterious “Black” suspect that the mother claimed to have seen kidnap her children, rounding up different innocent men fitting the description, until the children's bodies...

MALE 2 (*interrupting*): were found by police in their basement. Police came to observe their questionable behavior and mysterious activity after receiving a tip from a neighbor...

MALE 1 (*interrupting*): If you see any suspicious people...

FATHER: There's got to be something better on than this. (*To MOTHER*) I can't believe you're letting the kids watch this stuff.

MOTHER: I watch it. It's on the news all the time. Besides, it's educational (*FATHER reaches for the remote as MOTHER starts to put the food on the table and the family prepares to eat.*)

NARRATOR 2: TV coverage of frightening events has increased although actual crime rates have decreased greatly. The question is: why would society want to promote

fear? (*FATHER changes the channel, History of Fear cast disappears as the cast of Survivor appears.*)

PRODUCER (mid sentence): week's episode of *Survivor*—Prison Edition! We're here in Maricopa County, Arizona with Sheriff Joe Arpaio—the toughest sheriff in America! Our contestants have been living under actual prison standards. Sheriff, will you describe the conditions here?

ARPAIO: Sure. I couldn't be prouder. We have the contestants live the exact same way that the regular convicts do. No exceptions. (*Enter JONES*) As you can see we have all of our convicts wear pink underwear, as a form of humiliation and punishment for their wrongful deeds. There's Jones now (to JONES), how you doing, sweetheart? (*JONES backs away, up stage*).

PRODUCER: (*Clearing his throat to get attention, to ARPAIO*) Now, describe their living conditions.

ARPAIO: Well, instead of cells, the convicts have tents out here in the desert.

PRODUCER: And jeez (*to audience, fiddling with the neck of his shirt*), it sure is steamy!

ARPAIO: Yeah. It gets pretty hot. Look at Jones sweating over there! (*To JONES*) Time to eat! (*MOTHER, FATHER, SUSIE, and BILLY start eating*).

PRODUCER: (*Excited, to audience*) This is the first feeding time of the day, there will be one other feeding and that's it for the entire day. (*To ARPAIO*) You also charge them for meals, is that correct?

ARPAIO: Yes sir.

PRODUCER: What food does he get today?

ARPAIO: Same as every day. Green bologna. Our average meal “cost is 45 cents a day for an inmate. Our dogs cost more to feed than the inmates.”<sup>12</sup> (*To JONES*) You hear that, Jones! You eat worse than a dog! (*ARPAIO laughs*). (*A beat and then to PRODUCER*) I'm the alpha dog, in case you hadn't noticed.

PRODUCER: Yes, I see. (*To JONES*) How does it feel living the life of a real inmate here in Maricopa County? (*JONES shrugs*). C'mon now, Jones. You must be angry, upset, tired—what do you feel like?

JONES (*muttering*): ...worse than a dog.

PRODUCER: Hey! Life's no piece of cake! At least we don't send you to the prisons where guards threaten to use rape as a bargaining tool *and* as a punishment.<sup>13</sup>

FATHER: Ugh, (*with food in his mouth*) not more crap. What's with TV these days? I'm so sick of this!

PRODUCER: What a great idea for next season's show: *Survivor*—Prison Rape Edition! A little fear keeps those guys in line. Oh, but I forgot, (*to JONES, mockingly*) you have to be tough, fearless, to survive these places, right? (*FATHER changes channel. Survivor cast exits and Newlywed Game cast enters.*)

BOB (mid sentence): back to the Newlywed Game—Featuring the Justice System! (*Audience applause sign goes on, audience applauds, he speaks to couples*) Well, you couples really aren't newlywed, but who wants to go into history. Let's see how much you know about your relationship to the justice system!

---

<sup>12</sup> Elsner pg. 5

<sup>13</sup> Elsner pg. 70

FATHER: (*To MOTHER, lines overlap with TV*) How was your day today?  
MOTHER: Ugh, there have been these horrible muggings lately. On our street! God, can you believe it? It's so close. This little old lady victim was on the news today.  
BOB: Now Mary, I asked you to write down if you thought that while in a super max prison you would receive proper medical treatment, especially for your depression. Do you think you will receive proper treatment in a super max?  
FATHER: I know (*shivers*), I heard about them.  
MARY: Of course, Bob. I'm still a human being after all, even if I am in government custody.  
MOTHER: Oh, but the way they were committed. It was just dreadful.  
FATHER: Lets not talk about it during dinner, ok?  
BOB: Ok. Now Ron, as a Virginia Corrections chief you represent the justice system, what's your answer?  
RON: Well, Bob that depends how you define "proper." "Proper" medical treatment could mean different things to different people. It doesn't mean that it's just or fair medical treatment. It changes depending on the person's expectations.  
BOB: Don't fool around Ron! Ok, let's try this one more time, if Mary was given antidepressants outside of prison and she entered the prison system, would she still receive treatment?  
MARY: I hope so.  
RON: Well, Bob. You see, she would have to be examined by a prison psychiatrist.  
BOB: And then?  
RON: Well, that would take some time and then we may come to very different conclusions about the mental health of this inmate.  
BOB: She's depressed Ron; let's say she has a history of suicide.  
RON: It doesn't mean she requires medication, Bob. We would have to wait to see what the doctor thinks and if he disagrees with her treatment, then no, we wouldn't provide the medication.  
BOB: So then she tries to commit suicide.  
RON: There are unforeseen circumstances...  
BOB: She succeeds.  
RON: (*A beat*) "Let's face it; they're here to die in prison."<sup>14</sup> That's the bottom line.  
MOTHER: Speaking of death, this old woman was nearly killed! She was attacked while she was still in her car! She just had the window down a crack and this guy—this nut case—came up to her with a gun! It was just terrifying—and they haven't even caught him yet! He could still be out there! He could still be on our street.  
FATHER: (*Slightly frustrated with MOTHER*) Later. We'll talk about it later.  
BOB: (*pauses*) Ok. Now Damien, do you trust that the justice system would always use physical evidence to convict the right person?  
DAMIEN: Yes, I would have hoped...  
JUSTICE SYSTEM: Nope.  
MOTHER: Look kids (*ignoring FATHER*), you just got to be careful—I mean, with that madman out on the street.

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<sup>14</sup> Elsner pg. 145

FATHER (to MOTHER, more frustrated): Not now.

BOB: Keep in mind this person *may* have been involved in a horrific crime—the community feared that he *might* have been a Satanist. Do you think they would sentence someone to the death penalty without any physical evidence?

DAMIEN: No! That's not fair!

J.S.: Yes.

BOB: Do you think they would scapegoat a murder on a mysterious teenager (*puts his hand on DAMIEN's shoulder*) with dark hair who listens to heavy metal?

DAMIEN: No, why would—

J.S. (*interrupting him*): Yes.

BOB: Did you think *you* would lose appeal after appeal because you were sent to the same judge...

DAMIEN (*interrupting him*): No! Why? Why!

J.S.: Hey. At least he has the *right* to appeal. Look at him... ooh, he looks so menacing. (*He shifts in his seat*) I'm scared just being next to this guy.

BOB: Ok. Let's settle down now. (*A beat, then to MARY*) Where is the *weirdest* place you have ever made whoopee?

MARY (*blushing*): Oh, well...

DAMIEN (*interrupting, yelling*): In the ass!

FATHER: Oh God! (*To MOTHER*) We've got to start censoring these channels.

MOTHER (*Distracted by TV*): It wouldn't work. This kind of stuff is on every channel now.

DAMIEN: Damn it! I was raped in prison! (*Breaking down, to J.S.*) You took my life away, all because of suspicion. I filled a report against the rape because I was already on death row. Because what did I have to lose? (*FATHER changes the channel. The Newlywed Game cast exits and the Dateline cast enters.*)

CHRIS: On this week's episode, we have a strange case. Arnold Friedman is part of ring of predators that buys and sells child pornography. Today, we catch Friedman in the act on *Dateline NBC*. (*ARNOLD enters.*)

ARNOLD: Hi, are you the guy about the magazine.

CHRIS: No. I am an investigative reporter from *Dateline NBC*. You are illegally selling and buying child pornography. What have you got to say for yourself?

ARNOLD (*shocked*): I-I, I don't know what to say. My, poor family—this is going to humiliate them.

CHRIS: You also teach an under-age computer class, don't you?

ARNOLD: Yes. What has that got to do with anything?

CHRIS: Have you ever molested one of your students?

ARNOLD: No, of course not.

CHRIS: Well, what if we just go and *ask* them?

ARNOLD: What do you mean "ask them?"

CHRIS: Well, we would approach them and tell them, "We know what he's done to you..."

ARNOLD: That's not asking them.

CHRIS: Well that's how we, as adults, have to deal with this situation. You've already robbed them of any innocence they could have had, you slimy...

FATHER: Jeez. What a creep.

ARNOLD: But I haven't done anything. I haven't even been convicted yet. Do you even have any physical evidence? This is all just rumor and suspicion.

BILLY: What does molest mean? Daddy, how can a man molest a kid?

FATHER: Uh, uh... that's an adult word, uh...

ARNOLD (*slowly reaching outside of the TV screen towards BILLY, who watches the screen intently*): Just because I like boys...

FATHER: Oh, god. I do not want to have to answer this. (*ARNOLD's arm reaches out into the kitchen, almost touching BILLY*)

ARNOLD: ...doesn't mean that I did anything...

MOTHER (*Eyes widened screams*): Not my son! (*MOTHER reaches to protect BILLY. FATHER changes the channel, Dateline cast disappears, and Everybody Hates Convicts cast enter*).

FATHER: (*To MOTHER*) what's gotten into you today?

MOTHER: I-I don't know. It must be that stupid madman out on the street.

FATHER: Just don't think about him. That's what I'm trying to do. Think about the kids instead.

MOTHER: (*whispers*) But that's what I *am* thinking about. (*To BILLY and SUSIE*) Kids, I don't want you walking around outside of school anymore. I am going to pick you up promptly after school every day from now on. No more walking around with your friends.

FATHER (*to MOTHER*): C'mon. We used to walk home from school. All they do is go to the Ben & Jerry's down the block.

MOTHER: (*To FATHER*) No! No! This is a different time. I am not going to let them get picked up by a stranger and get (*whispers*) molested.

FATHER (*to MOTHER*): Just relax, watch TV. Take your mind off of it.

MOTHER: (*flustered and anxious*) Wait, just-just... (*To DAUGHTER and BILLY*) don't forget what I told you. Don't talk to anyone in the parking lot...

FATHER (*to MOTHER*): Relax.

KAREN: Lifelong ambitions dwindle when  
Society's Hate reaches  
Inside of me and fizzes, and  
I cannot get the steam out.  
I am Boiling.  
I am Loud without a mouth  
Papers running  
Cameras flashing  
Courtroom Story, but no one  
Hears my story

FRANCISCO: (*to audience*). Listen. I heard of a father who abandoned his son with his son's grandparents and hadn't seen his son in years. His son was tried and his father showed up. His father told the *Los Angeles Times* that his son was "pretty

mean. I know kids that are raised by their grandparents and they come out just fine. Some kids are just bad kids. The prisons are full of them. It's not necessarily anyone's fault but their own."<sup>15</sup>

KAREN: My own life was taken away from me, when he left me,  
Taking my childhood with him...

FATHER (*to BILLY and SUSIE*): So what did you kids do today?

BILLY: Nothing. Well, actually, you know that science project you helped me with? I got an A.

FRANCISCO: (*to audience*). Look. No one ever sees the homes that we juvenile offenders come from. They would make you understand, we're not juveniles at all. We were  
FRANCISCO & KAREN: children robbed of our childhood.

MOTHER: I can't stand these TV shows anymore. Like anyone can empathize with...

SUSIE: He's just a kid. They are both just like Billy and me.

MOTHER: No they are not! (*To SUSIE and BILLY*) You are not like them. Don't you ever compare yourself to them! You are different.

SUSIE: Yeah, (*chuckles to herself*) we have money.

FATHER: (*To SUSIE*) what did you say?

SUSIE: (*To FATHER*) and, we (*pointing to BILLY*) grew up with two parents who take care of us and never abused us.

FATHER: (*To SUSIE*) that's better.

KAREN: Madness drives my inner being,  
Anger prevents all reason,

MOTHER: You hear that! They have anger!

SUSIE: So do all of us.

MOTHER: But they can't control their anger! They have no reason! They can't think.

BILLY: (*To MOTHER*) they're not animals, Mom. Of course they can think.

KAREN: Muted and hidden to escape from feeling  
I pray to God that I can stay alive  
Because in prison there are only (*shows two fingers*) two things you can do  
To fight or be fought  
One might get you longer time (*hiding one finger*) and the other  
Might get you jumped (*slowly hiding the other finger*)  
Day after day and people call you a

FRANCISCO: (*To KAREN*) Buster!

KAREN: But I pray about when I might be free.  
With more than just two options (*shows two fingers*), but with an additional

KAREN & FRANCISCO: Option to be me

FRANCISCO: "They don't know anything about us... all they know is what the newspapers say. They don't know the whole story."<sup>16</sup>

SUSIE: (*To TV*) No, we don't.

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<sup>15</sup> Salzman pg. 325

<sup>16</sup> Salzman pg. 64

BILLY: Who cares? (*SUSIE jabs BILLY in the arm. FATHER changes channel. Cast of EVERYBODY HATES CONVICTS disappears and THE PRICE IS WRONG cast appears*).

BOB: Who wants to play the Price is Wrong?! (*Audience applauds as applause sign lights up. MOTHER starts to clear the table. BOB addresses the audience*) Now let's see some hands. Who wants to volunteer? (*BOB picks a VOLUNTEER out of the audience to be a contestant*). Now what's your name?

VOLUNTEER: (*answers*) Julie.

BOB: Now this is how the show works: we have three different objects and you are going to guess their price. If you guess the correct price... well, there really aren't any costs (*Laughs to self*)... then you win the objects. That's right! You get to keep them, because we sure as hell don't want them. Heck, we don't even want to look at them! (*Awkward Pause*) Ok! Here we go! (*SHOW GIRL [S.G.] appears with LEANDRO. Audience applause sign goes on.*) First we have Leandro Andrade, a two-strike violator, who stole "nine children's videos worth around \$150 from Kmart. They included *Cinderella, Snow White, and Free Willie*."<sup>17</sup> In years, how long do you think he will be sentenced for? How much did his crime cost?

VOLUNTEER (*guessing*): 2 years.

BOB: Wrong! Unfortunately, Leandro "got 50 years without parole."<sup>18</sup> I guess Willie "went free but Andrade did not"<sup>19</sup> (*Laughs as LEANDRO and S.G. exit*). Ah, that three strikes rule get's me every time! Well, that's sunny California for you. (*An awkward beat*) Ok, on with the show. (*S.G. enters with DUC. Audience applause sign goes on.*) Next up we have Duc, a 16-year old, with no prior criminal history, who was driving a car from which someone shot a gun. Duc was not a gang member and no one was hurt by the shot. In years, how long do you think he will be sentenced for? What was the price of being a driver?

VOLUNTEER (*guessing*): 5 years.

BOB: Wrong! Duc was actually sentenced to 35 years to life in an adult prison. I guess that's what it costs to associate with dangerous people. I've heard about those gangs. (*Shivering and laughing, to audience*) They're scary.

S.G.: (*Maintaining her smile*) But he wasn't in a gang.

BOB: But didn't he *know* people in a gang? As I said, (*shivering and laughing*) gangs are scary.

MOTHER (*to SUSIE and BILLY*): You heard that. Don't you ever hang out with anyone who is suspicious or dangerous or even equate yourself to such people.

FATHER: (*to MOTHER*) What, now you're taking parenting lessons from the TV?

MOTHER: (*ignoring FATHER, to SUSIE and BILLY*) You got it? It's only going to lead to trouble.

BILLY: But how can you tell which people are dangerous?

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<sup>17</sup> Elsner pg. 20-21

<sup>18</sup> Elsner pg. 20

<sup>19</sup> Elsner pg. 21

MOTHER: You can tell just by looking at them. (*DUC and S.G. exit*). Like that attacker on the street. They said he was “Hispanic-looking,” so don’t go near anyone with that description.

FATHER (*whispering to MOTHER, overlapping with BOB*): For goodness sake, sixty percent of LA is Latino. What are you trying to teach them? You’ve just got to stop this—this racist nonsense and fear. You are upsetting me and you are upsetting the kids. I told you we can talk about this after dinner. Just quit it!

BOB: (*To volunteer*) Well, you’ve had two chances already. Let’s see if you can guess the price of the third object. (*Applause sign goes on. To audience*) you look confused. This is not the price of *people* up here. These people are just things. They are criminals. Stop looking upset. It’s just a game! I can’t believe I have to chastise this audience—it’s because you don’t applaud enough! (*A beat, fed up*) this is our justice system. Deal with it.

MOTHER (*to FATHER, may overlap with BOB*): Oh God. What if the police don’t catch him? Do you think that criminal is still on the street? Do you think he will burglarize houses? What if he comes into our house? We have to check the alarm tonight. We just have to make sure we lock all of the doors. We have to check the storage closet.

BOB: (*To audience*) they are not worth what you and I are worth. We don’t treat them like people, why should you? (*Applause sign goes on*) Now applaud damn it! It’s our volunteer’s last chance!

MOTHER (*to FATHER; tension rising*): Sometimes the alarm doesn’t work for the door to the backyard. What if we walk right by him on the street and don’t even know it’s him? I’m so nervous I can barely move. Oh God! (*S. G. comes back on stage empty handed. She shrugs in confusion*).

BOB: (*He become very serious. First studies the cue card. To volunteer*) Go-go sit down... (*To S.G., shrugging*) I don’t know... (*To the audience*) what is the price of our fear? How much legislation has been enacted because we’re afraid of former convicts being on the street? How many have been put behind bars without evidence, without a fair process of justice, because of our overarching, societal, media-induced fear?

MOTHER (*to FATHER; hysterical*): Honey, we’ve got to do something! I heard this madman pointed his gun at regular people just getting their groceries. He attacked people regardless of what they looked like. He could get us! He could be outside right now! What are we going to do? He could go after us!

FATHER (*to MOTHER, yelling*): DAMN IT! SHUT UP! I don’t want to talk about it! I don’t want to think about it! I don’t want to be afraid anymore! (*FATHER throws remote at TV breaking it, a large flash, crash noise, and cloud of smoke emerge as The Price is Wrong cast disappears. The TV screens towards the audience go blank [and explode if effect is possible]. MOTHER screams, BILLY and SUSIE gasp. All members of the family take a long pause. FATHER regains his senses. MOTHER goes to examine broken frame on stage, she seems to see the audience as well and starts to examine them. The kids huddle behind their mother, afraid of*

*the audience. While still curious, the mother attempts to shield them from the audience's gaze.)*

MOTHER: (to FATHER) What will we do now?

FATHER: (A beat, looking at the broken TV set) we'll have to fix it or... (Looking at the audience) we'll have to get a new one.

BLACKOUT

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**The Working Class**

*Joseph Pelz*

I'm tired of seeing.

Seeing the rich getting richer  
And the poor, poorer.

I'm tired of working.

Working to make ends meet,  
And not affording meat ends.

I am tired of suffering.

Suffering through a pained back  
For work that means nothing.

I am tired of doing.

Doing so much for so many  
While being paid by the penny.

I am tired of being sick.

Sick with the thought of laboring  
And grinding my hands down to the bone.

I am tired of being forgotten.

Forgotten by the people I support  
Who task me jobs and n'er read the report.

I am tired of the injustice.

Injustice shown by the impartial elite  
Who smile upon our defeat.

I am tired of the misery.

Misery of my brothers and sisters  
Whose feet are adorned with blisters.

I am tired of dreams.

Dreams that never come true,  
Dreams of life anew.

I am tired of suffering.

Suffering just to survive  
And working three jobs to stay alive.

I am tired of being tired.

Tired of not being given the chance.  
Tired of not being understood.  
Tired of a government who has forgotten.  
Tired of being millions strong yet weaker than fine china.  
Tired of being the nation's backbone while totally spineless.

I am tired.

So very tired.

**Suck at Life**

*Thais Miller*

I suck at life through a straw  
made for bubble tea. Big bursts of tapioca  
overwhelm me. A few at a time and their flavor is sweet, savory. A bunch at once and I  
skip a breath,  
gulp down too quickly, and lose my train of thought, wishing only  
that I could spit out those globs  
again and digest them more naturally.

I suck at life through a needle  
into a cadaver. Gobbets of dried blood, like mosquito wings, grope  
towards the inside of the cylinder, clinging to the shaft, craving air like a child  
craves his mother—running from the stranger that  
clasps his hand.

I suck at life through a virgin smoker  
at a hookah party. Daintily pressing the tube against my mouth; eyes  
wide watching the other glimmering faces around me. But the  
coal is old and a clump of ash enters my throat and I cough  
for the first time and  
he mutters next to me, “yeah, it’s getting pretty  
strong.” Irreversible shame turns into one dry cluster in my lung, only  
to arrive on an x-ray years later with loving husband tears  
running down the palms of my hands wishing  
he could have the mass instead of me.

I suck at life through a tongue  
in a teenager’s girlfriend. Awkwardly grabbing for as much skin as  
possible, praying that she won’t pull away, unsure that she  
will want me to call tomorrow. With each sip of air another worry  
that luck won’t do it, that even though a sign from  
God set me up with this girl, it’s not going  
to last more than a weekend; this is just a fling.  
Each exhalation of air another reassurance  
that my emotions run far deeper  
than hers, that she only sees  
a good-looking body.

I suck at life through a pool drain  
on a sunny Tuesday. Spiders and rats swim  
fervently away from my strong suction. They get stuck in my filter  
and the pool man must take his long arm and hoist them

out. I let go of the substantial pestilence but  
retain the bacterial all the same—no  
spermicidal lubricant antibacterial cleanser  
can destroy the amount  
I exude.

**Metropolis One**

*Joseph Pelz*

Dangerous,  
Common words written on a sign  
on a fence in the city.  
Warning you to keep away.  
An old man cries from under a cardboard box.  
Stutter,  
you close your eyes and walk on by,  
blindness is bliss.  
His alcohol is his bliss.  
Ignorant girl,  
stranded in a parking lot  
holding her fetus in her hands.  
A hanger, broken glass  
and blood.  
Give me a dollar,  
God bless you.  
No  
God bless you,  
now find a job dirty slob.

Watch me in my glass loft,  
warm, unhappy, and listless.  
I am living the American dream,  
intoxicated with Starbucks and material.  
I am in my stainless steel cage  
indulging in plasma porn radiating from  
a rectangle in the wall.  
But the man under the box,  
the girl and the fetus,  
they are living the  
American Reality.  
They are cold, living and shamed.  
They are dangerous,  
like the sign on the fence  
above the man under cardboard.

**A Cycle of Casualties**

*Rachel C. Cupelo*

He shook with anger, his eyes on the old man like an animal on prey. This balding, fat, utterly wretched-looking priest, this defrocked SHAM of a man, had once been the predator. Now he sat in his gray jumpsuit, numbers on the breast pocket, yellowed, ratty T-shirt underneath. He sat and looked at the floor, the wisps that made up his white hair falling recklessly out of their combing. He didn't speak.

"I told them we had a major conflict of interest. They didn't want to hear about it."

Matthew rubbed his eyes tiredly, feeling far more than his thirty years. After months of piled paperwork from judge and local diocese and incensed Catholic constituency, and even the Vatican itself, here he was, in front of his client, for the very first time. He'd begged off this case more times than he could count, but the partners didn't want to know about the past; they only cared about the money this might bring them in the future, the thousands upon thousands of dollars the hierarchy in Rome supposedly held for "special cases" like these.

He stared again at the pathetic antique in front of him, a symbol of days long obsolete and a Church that had become a joke of religious history. He had known Father Louis Borgia once – from the all-boys Catholic high school his parents had made him attend, with its all-male faculty, mostly deacons and priests. One of many breeding grounds for an epidemic of sexual abuse and politically charged cover-up. Father Borgia had been his history teacher, his baseball coach.

The former Father Borgia looked up at him, expression meek, "Shouldn't we be discussing my case?"

Matthew's smile was grim, though slightly satisfied, "To put it succinctly, you're screwed. The evidence against you is astounding – ten accusers, all young males when under your charge; over a dozen witnesses of the same stock. All former students of St. Charles Academy. Your best bet is to try and plead down, although with the witch-hunt out there, you're gonna have a hell of a time."

Louis stared at the surrounding bars for a moment, then nodded, "I appreciate your honesty...and your help. I know you didn't want to do this. I understand how you might feel."

His eyebrows furrowed together, "Don't you DARE try to tell me how I feel, you old perve!"

He winced, "Matthew, son, please – "

"Last name is Cicero; use it with a 'mister' in front and I'm more apt to answer you," he snapped, "You're not the one in power anymore. Don't think you can twist my brain into understanding yours. I've been immune to that since I graduated high school, since I left that hell-hole."

"I never hurt you – "

"You think that makes a difference?! I saw it, more times than I wanted to remember. I knew but like the others I couldn't say anything when you walked out of the

showers with one boy and gave another an hour-long ride home that should've taken ten minutes!"

Father Borgia again looked at the floor; his hands were clasped together so that they didn't shake quite so badly, "These are the things I've tried to reconcile with God, my affliction – "

"Your *affliction*. PEDOPHILIA, you mean! The *AFFLICTION* you tried to hide behind vestments and a copy of the Bible, for Christ's sake – "

"Do NOT use the Lord's name in vain in my presence, young man!"

The glowing rage in the priest's eyes actually made him take a step back. That was awe-inspiring, he thought – the fear he still managed to incite in a schoolboy already grown.

He shook it off abruptly, "That judge is going to make an example out of you, and you MUST know that the only reason my firm took on this case was because the Vatican offered us six figures." He thought a moment, "I take that back – they're probably swindling that judge into protecting you as we speak, and you MIGHT get off. But I'll know, Father Lou, I'll know what kind of person you are."

The old priest shook his head, "Don't count on it, Mr. Cicero."

"Beg your pardon?"

"How many ill-doings of how many priests has each and every diocese in this country hidden from the world? If the College of Cardinals wanted me protected, they would have had me moved. But they knew they had to make an example out of a few, and they picked me as their target. They tossed me. They fed me to the local wolf pack that is the District Attorney's Office. Oh, I'll spend the rest of my life in comfort, but it'll be in a prison cell."

Matthew longed to slap the bitter half-smile from Father Borgia's lips, "It's the least of what you deserve."

"Such anger you have towards me and my brothers of the cloth. I cannot blame you. I swore I would never do it after it was done to me."

He actually chuckled when Matthew's head shot up, "Like all the rest who hate us with such passion, you cannot fathom that we were once victims too. But we have committed the ultimate sin: taking the wrong perpetuated against us, and victimizing the next generation."

The attorney's nails sunk deeper into the sheaf of paper he held in one hand, "You could at least *pretend* to be sorry, you depraved piece of shit."

Father Borgia frowned, "You know less about me than you think you do. Don't make assumptions about my feelings."

"You deserve nothing from me."

"A little humanity might do us both some good."

Matthew threw the papers onto the metal table, "And *that*, you'll die without."

He didn't remember being thrown up against the bars; one moment he was standing there, and the next Father Borgia had him pinned to the cell wall by the shoulders of his jacket.

"You think I don't KNOW? You think I don't understand what I've done to these boys?! *YOU THINK I DON'T GET IT?!*"

The old man had lost himself to his grief and shame; his eyes were wide, his being red from forehead to neck, his knuckles the color of his dingy T-shirt.

Matthew swallowed hard, legitimately afraid, "Father Lou, *please* – "

Father Borgia threw him away just as a guard walked past, stumbled over to the steel toilet, and threw up.

The perpetual smirk having left him, Matthew walked over to the table and poured two glasses of water, handing one to the fellow kneeling and huddled on the concrete. He accepted it gratefully, took a swig, spit it into the toilet, and wiped his mouth. Tears fell from his eyes, down his shattered expression to splash onto the black number printed on his jumpsuit. Still on the floor, he took a heaving breath:

"I know I'm a monster. I know I'll be labeled a sex offender. I *know* I have done something I can never be forgiven for, at least not while on this earth." He finally looked up at his unwilling attorney, "Don't ever accuse me of not knowing the harm I've done."

Matthew bit his lip, "I just meant – "

"You're bitter and angry; I get it. You have every right. But they got me, son; Thank God Himself, I'm not going to be doing this anymore. And even if *you* can't be, *I* am grateful. For once my existence can be honest."

He didn't say anything, just nodded, so Father Borgia kept going, "I have taken my control over others and abused it. There is nothing more shameful..." he trailed off, then, "There are other men in here, young men like you, young men that have probably been abused by people like me. They did wrong because we helped to vilify their understanding of the world. They don't deserve to be in this inhumane place; I do. You should be helping *them*, not me."

He got up, with some struggle, bones creaking, and paced across the cell, "You know, Matthew, your representation of me isn't fair to either of us. Maybe I should – "

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm the best chance you got, old man. Get used to it."

When he looked back at his attorney, there was the slightest tug of a smile on the young man's face.

"What?"

"I didn't think it was possible, but...you get it...and so do I."

Father Borgia looked at him curiously but signed the papers thrust at him, entrusting his life with the compassionate young man whose existence he'd already scarred...a young man who, much like himself, had come to clarity about what this day was meant to teach them both.

"I have to go see another client."

"Another?" the priest looked up at him, "You have spent too long in this place already. It is bad enough for our souls, let alone yours. Tell the other man that I will pray for him...though I do not deserve that privilege."

Matthew smiled, "I'll tell him. He's a new client, I haven't even met him yet. But I'll let him know, Father Lou."

"Thank you, Matthew. God bless."

He walked out of the cell and across the wide hallway to another much like it. This new client was a college student, in for a string of break-ins against...

He looked again at the file. All the properties were Catholic churches. The perp would break through the back doors, smash in the stained glass, trash the altar, and then set fire to the prayer books and Bibles. The only reason he got caught was because a priest at one of the churches had come back to get his vestments for the tailor. The boy had beaten the priest until he was half dead, but the old man had been able to identify him. Matthew shook his head, hard. It was only a coincidence...

The young man in front of him, Frank Doyle, was an imposing giant of a man with dark hair and intelligent eyes. But his hands shook, and he looked at Matthew with an earnest frailty that made the attorney's eyes fill with tears.

"How are you today, Mr. Doyle?"

He was incredibly soft-spoken, "Fine, thank you."

"Good. Now, let's get down to business. About your defense – "

"Mr. Cicero?"

"Yes?"

"What was the name of that priest, again?"

"Priest?"

"Your other client. I've seen him around, and you called him 'Father.'"

"Yes..." Matthew murmured, trying to concentrate on his files, "Father Louis Borgia."

He looked up when he heard the young man begin to weep, "What is the matter, Mr. Doyle?"

He wiped at the tears streaking his face, sobs catching in his throat, "Tell Father Borgia...when you get back to him, tell him...tell him not to worry. I forgive him."

**Defeat**

*Joseph Pelz*

It is inevitable  
that with every step forward  
we take two back.

It is uncanny  
how progress toward  
falls short in because we lack.

In a cyclical sense  
we sail to the highest high  
which renders an outcome most base.

In a cynical comedy  
we are hung out to dry  
after winning the hard fought race.

It is absolutely extraordinary  
how true this is to existence,  
a test of our mettle.  
It is absolutely necessary  
to test our resistance  
until our fears, like steam, scream from the kettle.

It is part of life,  
a part without rejection,  
though it may leave us a lighter pallor.  
It is an enigma  
that upon closer inspection  
builds true individual valor.

**Empty Cell Windows***Sonia Tabriz*

I don't think I was scared... no I wasn't scared. Nervous? Maybe. But that dissipated when I realized that "they're out" really meant that the prisoners were out of their cells, but safely contained behind bullet-proof glass and locked metal doors. After awkwardly walking through a metal detector, run by a lady who seemed frustrated at our eagerness, my eyes met with the deep-set eyes of a young boy no older than 13. He was sitting in a visitation waiting area with a lady I presumed to be his mom. The soft lines of his young face lingered in my mind, as I found myself searching, modestly of course, for a resembling face among those of the prisoners' held in this supermax prison. But had no luck. Perhaps this is because most of the inmates were behind closed doors, but most likely because I was apprehensive, unable to look these men in the eye.

After being warned about rowdiness and obscenity, we began our tour of the supermax, formally known as the Maryland Correctional Adjustment Center. Heavy set metal turquoise doors opened upon a numerical command that corresponded with a black, spray-painted number above the entranceway. Surrounding a narrow hallway was glass, separating the inmates and their cells from the guards and us. Behind the glass were two levels of cells, and a short set of stairs connected them both to a small recreational area. A banging thunder echoed from some of the cells while others remained quiet; some inmates cursed and whistled while a heavier set, dark-skinned inmate greeted us and asked us whether we were in college or high school. None of us answered, and as I felt drawn to respond I turned my back and continued walking the opposite direction. He was a killer, or rapist, or mass murderer, or something; I forced myself to remember this and repressed my urge to address these men.

Somewhat disappointed in my weak nature, I began to pan the cells more openly. The caged shower in the corner housed a bald-headed man who yelled with a thick Spanish accent, threatening our lives and daring us to approach him. As the Correctional Officer spoke of that inmate's violent history, I looked around and began noticing eyes; fragmented faces of all colors, shapes and sizes peered through small windows in the cell doors. I was reminded of a dark forest, the kind you find in a children's book, with owl eyes piercing through the night. I scanned both levels of the cellblock and found myself drawn... not to those with faces but rather the openings that remained clear of curiosity. Allotting one opening for the hostile shower occupant, I wondered what could possibly be more amusing in an 80 square foot cement cell, than five girls walking the halls. Maybe these inmates were sleeping, maybe they just didn't care, and maybe the perpetual lack of female interaction had driven them to homosexuality. My mind simply could not grasp it. It's like with the owls, at least when you can see their wide, yellow eyes you know they are there; there lies less fear and anxiety in the things you can see. It's in the dark niches, the quiet and seemingly calm areas of the forest you feel most afraid. Absence leaves you intrigued. The unknown leaves you paralyzed. Those cells were the dark niches of my imaginary forest, and I longed to look into them, and discover what was hidden inside them.

Perhaps the empty cell windows belonged to the worst of the worst, the smart ones who laid back and kept quiet until their next big attack. Perhaps they belonged to the young men drowning in depression, talking to the walls and longing for the company and acceptance they never had. Or perhaps they belonged to the lost ones, compulsively scrubbing their floors in fear of manifested roaches or adorning their walls with feces as a form of decoration. After watching endless documentaries in class, I wondered if what they explicated about prison life really rang true; if the insanity and hopeless craze they claim are bred within these institutions, truly exists.

When I requested to be locked in a cell by myself, a creative idea I was proud to announce, I realized that this madness did not take long to develop. I found my eyes darting from corner to corner, afraid to look up because of a prior warning about bug infestation. A rancid stench left me immobilized. I was a prisoner for but a minute, but I was paralyzed.

So perhaps the empty windows belonged to men terrified as I was, an inescapable discomfort and immobility, a state of mind that drives these hiding men to utter apathy. Indifference bred by routine: one-hour recreation, a caged shower, and lunch trays, mundane happenings that proved to be the only means of distinguishing day from night.

It was these men, the ones I couldn't see, that left me contemplating the life here in prison. The notion that these empty windows didn't just signify empty cells or catnaps, but rather provided evidence of a deep-rooted problem within the system. A problem that, as I gazed intensely into cell 97, I devoted myself to uncover. I never found that young boy's face resonate in that of an inmate's. The faces that I saw had instead been robbed of the innocence that radiated from that young boy's stature. And when we walked back out into the waiting area, with the thick oddly colored doors closing behind us, he was already gone.

**Poetic Justice**

*Katlyn Miller*

I walk around  
Hiding behind glazed eyes  
Empty in the world's view  
A blank stare defines my soul

I'm holding on for dear life  
A tireless strain for steady grip  
Wearily fighting a losing battle  
Grasping at thinning faith

How much farther can I slip  
In my search for strength  
Before the final fall  
The heartbreaking crash

What kind of life do I lead?  
Devoid of joy, engulfed by fear  
Wandering the mirrored maze of despair  
Constrained by weakness

I am a mere outline of a person  
The shadow of a target  
Paper thin and easily punctured  
A victim in the beholder's eyes

How cruel to face my broken self  
My shattered hope  
Burdened by shame and embarrassment  
An unforgivable exploit of vulnerability

With cuts and bruises deep beneath  
I hide tears in my pillowcase  
Salt stings my cheeks each night  
The stain of damaged goods remains

The secret pains from fingertips  
Sleepless nights I won't forget  
My heart hangs broken  
Sewn shut with my last strands of dignity

Can an incomplete shell like me  
Rebound from depths of exhausted anxiety?  
I have no more patience  
I must break free

My heart races; my insides swell  
The surge of unbridled emotion  
Busting against my ribs  
I struggle to breathe

As I caress the curves of my new love  
The feeling of revenge against my skin  
The rush of power and protection  
fear and safety intertwined

The pop and lock of a well oiled gun  
a flick of the safety  
As I gently squeeze the trigger  
A smooth and satisfying kick

With the sweet smell of gunpowder  
The taste of retribution  
One shot reverses my curse  
But two solidify my standing

I have walked dead so many years  
One choice a release to freedom  
That springs from his death  
My surge of poetic justice.

**Burning Sun**

*Joseph Pelz*

Some day my burning sun will rise.  
It will clear away the cobwebs  
and burn off the fog in the road.  
Some day my burning sun will rise.  
It will shine on a beaten part  
coming up before me leading me home.

Some day I won't despair.  
I will not sit here and ponder,  
wondering what I did wrong.  
Some day I won't despair.  
I'll get off this dark heap  
and shed this terrible luck.

Some day I'll be free again.  
These bonds restraining emotion,  
releasing and redeeming.  
Some day I'll be free again.  
Never more to worry about captivity,  
ever more to run.

Some day will never come.  
It is only an illusion I see,  
a lie to make me hopeful.  
Some day will never come.  
It is just the same day after day,  
hour after hour, year after year.

Some day my burning sun will rise.  
From the depths of my dreams  
and I will float off into oblivion.  
Some day my burning sun will rise.

*Kristen Luppino*

**Musings Five Hours Before Death**

Where do I go  
After I'm gone  
When the needle is out  
Out of my arm

KCL's done its work  
And lifeless I lay  
When the world "can forget"  
That Horrible day

They'll lift a lifeless rag  
Out of the chair  
And heave it in a coffin  
I asked to be put there

Since I know my veins  
Will burn at death  
Cremation just  
Didn't seem best

So I'll lie there boxed  
Until she takes me  
To the church  
My soul to free

In she'll walk with my son  
And then she'll see  
Despite all those she told  
The pews nearly empty

The people will sing  
While I depart  
They'll tell me goodbye  
With half of a heart

Good riddance will be  
Bade by a few  
They will probably leave  
Before it is through

And when service is done  
When she comes out  
There will be folks with signs  
Protestors will shout

Then they'll forget  
Because I am gone  
And in heaven I'll sit  
I've done no wrong

And later when  
He strikes again  
They'll know it wasn't me  
It was him

**Execution Man**

*Rachel Cupelo*

Hey, Execution Man....

What's your day like?

I could take a wild guess.  
Conjecture of the brutal,

I'm good at that.  
But I don't like it much,  
Not in this context.

I couldn't do what you do.  
I don't have that strength,  
My soul doesn't own that damage.  
Yeah, damage...  
I can't imagine you being whole.  
Not after that.

Just reading about it  
Inspires nightmarish fantasies.  
I see, in the visions behind my eyes  
Jews choking on their gas showers,  
Courtesy of Nazi Germany;  
The burning alive of some supposed witch-woman  
At the stake;  
A Roman slave being torn apart by lions  
In a Coliseum full of screaming spectators.  
Modern execution this is purported to be, and yet  
I see the brutality behind it,  
In immortal visions of the past;  
For while the method has changed,  
The end to such means remains the same.

Do you envision as I do, Execution Man?  
A process of democracy,  
A vision of inhumane brutality,  
A contradiction of horrific proportions,  
Carried out in the name justice?

Do you sleep well at night, Execution Man?

I could never,  
But then you are not me.  
If you see this as justice, quit now  
While you still own your soul.  
For if this is justice,  
It is merely a pretense  
And I want nothing of it.

Execution Man, you do as your job bids you;  
Can you reconcile that with human decency?  
It isn't your fault, of course,  
But I hope you stop to consider  
Every once in a while  
Just what it is you do.

I read about the American execution,  
Some figurative meaning of justice,  
And my breath catches in my throat.  
I feel panicked, claustrophobic;  
I am ready to cry  
Ready to scream, or be sick.  
I am terrified.  
I can't imagine knowing the very moment I am to die.  
That seems punishment enough...  
Even punishment too much.

**Behind Bars**

*Joseph Pelz*

Strange things done  
Under a fluorescent sun  
Where men reside in a cage.  
Iron bars close on hearts,  
White knuckles clenched in rage.

When the doors slam shut  
A sucker punch to the gut.  
And out goes the light,  
the reason to live;  
The prisoner's grave plight.

Freedom is lost  
And a human the cost,  
Frustration to the surface rises.  
In the shadows men hide  
Deceit just one of the disguises.

Scared to live,  
Your dignity to give,  
Gone to the dominant cat.  
Yet just to get by  
Some tell a lie;  
The snitch – the dirty rat.

At the end of the day  
All one can do is pray  
By the light of the liberated moon.  
Hoping for the best,  
A life subject to arrest  
And violation by the cellblock goon.

**The Monument**  
*Christopher Dum*

A man in an orange jumpsuit is nothing if not intimidating. The sight sparks a certain curiosity blended with apprehension and fear. I mean, inmates must pose a threat because heroes of the 21st century don't end up in unflattering pieces of bright clothing. So what was the crime? Murder? Kidnapping? Rape? In my tenure among the general populations of Curran State Penitentiary, I encountered these men on a daily basis. And each time a new inmate walked through the big, rusty gates I would instantly wonder what they had done to end up there.

I convinced myself that all of these young, testosterone-filled men were capable of the most heinous crimes and not for lack of evidence. Take for example, Mark Powers. At age twenty-four he set his ex-girlfriend and her entire family on fire while he watched from across the room. By the time the police and fire departments arrived, Powers was calmly smoking a cigarette on the front lawn. One fellow named Eugene Sibhorn had woken up one morning; loaded a semi-automatic rifle and walked to a café around the corner where he emptied the entire thirty-round clip into the morning patrons. Twelve innocent people lost their lives. The thirty year-old ex-Marine was apprehended before he killed himself, one of the few mass murderers who did not commit suicide after the commission of his crime. And then there was Allen Fulmer who was serving a ten-year stint for several armed robberies. In the secrecy of his cell, he managed to construct a knife made out of a broken chair leg. Then one Sunday morning, he decided to take revenge upon another inmate who happened to owe him twelve dollars. A fellow correctional officer told me later that Fulmer stabbed the man over twenty times and that with each stabbing, those on the tier could hear the sound of the blade hitting the ground underneath the poor victim's body. In a macabre occurrence, the victim actually looked up at Fulmer after taking several thrusts with the weapon and said weakly, "Okay man, you got me. I'm dead." In or out of prison, these men were dangerous.

From the beginning of training, our instructors emphasized that the inmates were not our friends. I can clearly remember Sgt. Hill standing before us in a classroom, showing a battle scar on his right bicep. Pulling up his shirt, we could see the wrinkled and uneven skin, where a shank had sliced fast across the muscle during a riot. Hill looked over the class, met our eyes.

"These men are not to be trusted, confided in, sympathized with, and maybe not even worthy of an ounce of respect. But in a way, we have to respect them, like one respects a loaded gun," he said, flexing his wound. He sneered and turned on a slide projector, the lights dimming in the sweltering classroom.

Up on the screen were color pictures of real life horror; before and after photos of guards who were attacked and brutalized by inmates. Hill jabbed a thumb at towards the screen.

"This is what happens when you lose concentration. This is what happens, when *you* lose your respect."

I don't remember who he was looking at when he said it, but I'm sure whoever it was, never forgot that stare. The images turned our stomachs and like the slides that my kids were shown in health class of diseased sexual organs, they were meant to scare the shit out of us.

The scare tactics worked so well that officers lived in a state of paranoia on the tiers. One day I was sitting with a buddy and talking about where I grew up. My supervisor came over and poked me in the chest.

"Officer, you need to be more careful out here."

"What's the problem?"

"You're going on and on about where you live, your personal life, which is all well and good to us CO's, but these guys," he turned his head on a swivel around the cells. "These guys will read your fucking lips."

"Alright, I'll cover my mouth."

"Yeah do that," he said, staring at me from behind a pair of dark aviator sunglasses. "Or better yet, just keep your goddamn mouth shut."

This worried me so much that I made sure to always turn my head when talking into my radio or to another officer. And I didn't dare mention anything about my family life. Inmates could hate me or want to kill me, but the thought of them pursuing an agenda against my wife or my two little girls was unacceptable. As far as the prisoners knew, I was just a CO with no friends, who was raised in the wild by wolves and who had the dating history of a 5 year-old.

I had bought into all the training. The inmates were my enemies and making it through a work day without them getting to me was something to celebrate. In fact, some times I truly hated them. The constant noise of shouting, TVs and radios, banging on the bars, echoing for eight hours a day quickly took its toll. When I came home each night or morning the stresses of Curran would be latched onto my back like leeches. One night I found myself quite offended when my wife told me that Curran was slowly drying up my "boyish good looks." Curran and its residents became the scapegoat for all of my problems. It was just that easy to hate the place and everyone inside it. The stench and atmosphere of Curran penetrated my pores on a daily basis, staining my insides. I was locked in a mindset and it seemed as inescapable as the walls of Curran itself.

It was an early Thursday morning in May when a supervisor named Bayles called me on the radio.

"Hey Chris, I need a hand on Ward 7 if you can."

"What's the situation?" I asked nervously.

As a relatively new officer, when calls came asking for me, I always feared the worst. On my third day as a CO, another supervisor needed "a hand" and as the new guy, I had to take the call. What he failed to tell me over the radio was that an inmate had smeared his cell with feces and in a move that defied all logic, refused to leave it. He then proceeded to cover himself with his own shit and taunted the guards to come in and get him. Armed with several pairs of gloves, I struggled with this abomination for several minutes, feet slipping on the muck-covered floor, the stench overpowering me, until I finally realized that in order to get him out I would have to "dive right in." And so

I did. I got him out of the cell and he got me out of bed with my wife until the stench went away.

“I need someone to pull escort duty for me. I’ve got a guy with a hearing today.”

“Sure thing, I’ll be right over.”

Ward 7 was called the “Jerry Ward” by some officers because of its population. About five years ago, at the urging of several activist and medical groups, the Warden at Curran created Ward 7 with the purpose of housing older prisoners and those with debilitating diseases such as AIDS and cancer, away from the general population. In essence, it was a nursing home inside a prison, thus the “Jerry Ward” because of the geriatric population. Studies had found that unlike the old days, there was a lack of respect for older inmates and they were now more vulnerable than ever to violence and exploitation within prison. As one inmate named Clemens told me, “Young guys used to respect us, they wouldn’t touch you. Now, now they just bust you up for nothing, maybe a cigarette, maybe for nothing. Just to show that they tough.”

In order to decrease possible violence, it was decided that segregation would be the best solution. Not everyone in Ward 7 was on their last breath, but a sense of dread did loom over the place because of the high number of inmates who would die because of illness.

A “hearing” referred to a case review before the Medical Parole Board. Inmates suffering from particularly devastating diseases can apply for early parole if they can prove that their disease renders them no danger to society. I can tell you that the success rate is not high, but any inmate can put in paperwork for a hearing. If they’re lucky, then they just might get one.

When I first got to Ward 7, I began to realize how much emphasis there is in the free world on looking young. My wife uses lotions for wrinkles, and I eat healthy food to keep diseases at bay, and we all try to exercise to keep our bodies in the right form. In a place devoid of such luxuries, individuals age at an accelerated rate. The men of Ward 7 shuffled about with the aide of canes and walkers, 50 year-olds looking as if they were in their 70s. When I arrived that day to assist Bayles, I couldn’t help but be struck by the ghosts of men navigating the halls.

“Hey Chris!” Bayles’ booming voice was the most recognizable in Curran.

I turned to see him approaching from down the hallway with an inmate in tow. Emmet Bayles was a footballer player in high school but years of sedentary work in Curran had added several pounds to his frame. The inmate at his side stood with a hunch, but he was almost as tall as Bayles. Clad in a blue jumpsuit, he looked like a man who had come get the morning paper from driveway. I would have put him at sixty but who really knew at Curran. His thinning gray hair was parted down the middle and wisps of it hung down over his eyes. I would hesitate to say that they were sunken, because that makes him sound like a zombie. But honestly, that’s what he looked like. This offender was a shell of whatever man he used to be. Alive, but not living or maybe living but not alive.

Bayles and I shook hands and then he gestured to the inmate.

“Phillip Morris, just like the cigarettes. Except I haven’t killed anyone,” the inmate said, extending a shackled hand as far as it would go and flashing an eerie smile with a hint of warmth. Morris took my hand in a grip that was surprisingly strong.

“You didn’t like the joke did you?” His eyes shifted back forth between Bayles and I. “He told me that you might not like it. Don’t worry. I’ve got others.”

Laughing, Bayles slapped me on the back and turned to go down the hall.

“See man, piece of cake. Bus leaves in thirty from the rear gate.”

Philip and I made our way down the beige hallway towards the elevator. When designing Ward 7 the Warden decided that the new paint needed to be nice and calming. I suppose it actually did have an effect because in the 5 years the Ward had been open, there had been no incidents of violence. My companion was a chatterbox, reminding me of an uncle I once had who would talk about anything and everything, switching topics as quickly as he drew his next breath.

“You wouldn’t believe it, but I had the best cherry pie today. I remember when I was younger, on the tiers, the food would just be horrible, like your pets wouldn’t even touch it. You know? Sometimes, they would just take the leftovers from a few days or so ago, roll it into a giant ball and bake it. Prison loaf, that’s what they called it. They should’ve served it for brunch. Did you know that most brunch is just leftovers too? All laid out nice and neat, but it’s just really reheated, nothing’s newly prepared. Can’t get anything fresh on Sunday. And fish, don’t buy fish on Monday, that’s not fresh.” With an audience, Phillip ran on and on like an excited little kid.

We got to the elevator and stepped inside. Phillip looked up at the security camera and waved. I figured he must have been in Curran or at least institutions for quite some time because he seemed very at ease. As he talked about playing cards earlier in the day, it suddenly struck me that Philip was almost a dead on match for Dustin Hoffman in *The Rain Man*. He was a man whose mouth couldn’t quite keep up with his thoughts. Phillip didn’t notice my smile as he was too busy reminiscing about the last free trip he could remember taking on an elevator.

“If I had known it was the last time I was going to ride an elevator without these things on,” he rattled the cuffs on his hands, “I would’ve pressed every button for every floor and would’ve rode up and down that thing all damn day.”

On cue, the doors chimed and we stepped out into the parking lot around the back of Curran. Even I had to stop for a second and blink in the bright sun that was cutting through the barbed wire around us and bathing us in its light. For a moment it was as if I had been freed from a day of punishment in prison. Phillip slowly turned in a circle, looking around and savoring the fresh air.

“Come on, we can’t miss the bus,” I said, touching his arm lightly.

“Some guys dread going to court on nice days. Did you know that?” Phillip stared at the sky through the mesh covering the parking lot.

“Really, how come?”

“Because they can’t handle that little sliver of sun and fresh air. It teases them. They say it’s like torture,” he said, walking towards the bus but still staring.

“You don’t seem to mind.”

We were at the doors of the bus now. Phillip put one foot on the step and looked me in the eye.

“No, son. When you’re in my situation, you better take what you can get.”

There were several other older inmates going to hearings as well, but Philip walked to the back without acknowledging them and sat with his face pressed against the window. For an instant, it almost felt like the blue government bus had turned bright yellow and Phillip had regressed into a little boy about to take a field trip through a fascinating, new world.

Curran was unique in that it sat in the middle of the city. The courthouse where the hearings took place was only about a mile away but in the morning traffic, the bus ride dragged on. Phillip didn’t seem to mind. I watched him from my seat in the front, watching his eyes linger on the storefronts, then to the sidewalks filled with free people walking on their own, even the squirrels scampering among the trees.

To my surprise, the hearing room was nothing like what I expected. We were made to wait in the hallway before Phillip’s name was called. One side of the room was just a simple glass wall and we could look inside and see some of the hearings taking place. Although we couldn’t hear the rejections, we could tell what happened just by gauging the reactions of the condemned. When our time came, we were ushered into the back of the small room. The board sat at a simple white table with a microphone and several glasses of water. There was a black male, a white female and a white male, all of them in their 40s or 50s. I sat next to Phillip at our table, a microphone in front of us. There was no attorney to represent him and Curran could not spare any doctors or nurses. It was just him and me.

“Mr. Phillip Morris. You are sixty-two years old. Served thirty years of a life sentence for armed robbery, your third strike,” the woman spoke first, reading out of a stapled packet of papers. She looked up at us and adjusted her glasses. That was the last time she ever gave us a glance. She continued to illuminate Phillip’s unfortunate history until it was his turn to make a statement. He took a sip of water and learned forward to the microphone.

“Sirs and madam, I’ll make this brief because I know you value your time. As you are aware, my lung cancer has progressed to a terminal phase. While doctors have not determined exactly how long I have to live, it promises to be short. I must sound like a broken record but not a day goes by that I don’t think of what I have done. Not a day goes by where I’m not sorry for what I’ve done.”

It was almost paradoxical to hear how eloquent and thoughtful his words were for a man in his position. But then again, a man has a lot of time to perfect a speech in prison. Unfortunately for him, the board members seemed nonplussed. I think one of the men was actually falling asleep. Philip continued, unphased.

“I am asking you to please grant me this compassionate release. At my age and in my condition, a life of crime is the last thing I want. I’ve been surrounded by criminals for years. I would like the chance to see my family.”

“Does your family want to see you?” the white male interrupted. The black male next to him stirred in his semi-slumber. The board member corrected himself, “What I mean is; has anyone offered to take you in if you are released?”

“I have been in contact with friends and relatives who would be open to having me in their homes. I am willing to wear whatever sort of tracking device is required of me. Although my crimes did involve a weapon, I have neither harmed nor killed anyone. I ask you please to consider granting me this compassionate parole release so that I may live out whatever life I have left outside of prison. Thank you.”

Phillip sat back quietly and slumped, resting his chin against his chest. I wasn't sure what to do so I slid a glass of water over to him. He took a long sip and then leaned back in his chair, eyes closed. The board left the room to discuss. In five minutes, they were back. Philip leaned over to me.

“This is a good sign?”

“I honestly can't say,” I told him softly. But deep inside, I feared the worst. Looking back, I think the board had made up its mind before Philip had even walked into the room. The three members took their seats and the women pulled the microphone close to her. She shuffled a few papers for show and then began.

“Mr. Morris, the board has come to a decision.”

Philip stood, but I stayed in my chair. I wish now that I had stood with him or helped him to his feet. Just given him some feeling of support in that hostile room.

“Despite your current state of health, the board feels that because the violent nature of your previous actions, along with numerous incidents which showcase your apparent disrespect for the law, your petition for compassionate release has been denied. As per state law, you have the opportunity to appeal this decision within 90 days. This hearing is now closed.”

She dropped his folder onto the table and pushed back her chair. The other two members glared at the edge of the table in front of them. I'm not sure they had even registered that the hearing was over. Philip nodded and turned away. I could see his lips trembling. I put an arm on his shoulder and we made our way towards the exit. As he walked down the aisle to the door, he looked over his shoulder at the board members. They were quietly chatting, even smiling at each other. Then, in what I think was a quite reasonable reaction, Philip lost it.

“Fuck you all!” he fumed, turning now fully to face the board. They were instantly silenced. “How do you even sleep at night?” he continued. “Goddamn circus is what this is! You don't care about inmates! Probably didn't even read my fucking file!”

The woman looked at me, as if she expected me to whip out a taser or send a blast of Mace into Philip's eyes. Instead, I turned him again towards the door and steered him out.

“Yeah you sit there smiling at each other and joke while you send prisoner after prisoner to die. This is all a big fucking joke huh? Well it's not! It's my goddamn life you sons a bitches are dealing with. It's my life!”

He didn't stop the whole way back to Curran, sitting in the back of the bus, mumbling to himself, half wheezing with rage. When we got back to the facility, I needed another CO to help me get Philip to his bed. The infirmary that Philip was in

housed about twenty inmates, all in beds separated by curtains. I filled out the paperwork regarding the hearing while another CO put Philip in bed. Bayles caught me at the supervisor's station.

"How'd it go?" he asked, already knowing the answer.

"Depends whose side you're on. Poor guy lost it pretty badly. And I'm not trying to be clever."

Stuffing his hands in his pockets, Bayles kicked at some dirt on the floor.

"Yeah well, I haven't seen one of these guys come out on top. Hell, I'm glad you took him today. I dunno if I can take any more. In fact, I'm thinking about getting out of here."

I looked at up at him.

"You're kidding. Out of here?"

"Just back to the tiers. Away from this," he pointed around at the white sheets, frowning.

"You actually want to go back into general population?"

Bayles met my eyes and I could see he was very serious.

"Do you have any idea how fucking depressing this place is? Walking around these halls with dying men; reduced to getting their meals through straws, and pissing in tubes. Every time a guy passes or gets rejected at the board, it just eats away at whatever good is left inside you. A few more months and I think *I'll* be dead."

Bayles leaned against the desk and I read the wrinkles in his face. We stood in an awkward silence for a few moments then Bayles shrugged and walked away. I opened the glass door separating the COs from the infirmary and stepped out into the heaven-colored collection of beds and sheets. Walking past each bed, I stole glances at men who looked to be in much the same shape as Philip. When I got to his bed, Philip had calmed down and seemed to be resting. He opened his eyes as I tried unsuccessfully to pull up a chair without disturbing him.

"What, you haven't seen enough of me today?"

"Well, after what happened, I wanted to see how you were doing."

Philip uttered what could have been a laugh.

"You know, when you say that, I actually believe it. Times like these, I think I might've been better off had I raped and killed somebody. Then at least I'd deserve to be stuck in here. You think I deserve to be here?"

I sat and shrugged.

"You know I really can't say."

"I know, I know. It wasn't a fair question. It's not your job to judge our worth."

"But you know, I do it so often, you'd think it was," I mumbled.

"Well, I wouldn't blame you."

"It's like every man has two sides. And some of them, we see the bad, and some of them, we see the good. It's just a matter of which side you see, and which you think is stronger. I can sit here with you and say that maybe you should be let out. But then I'll turn on the TV, see some guy who microwaved his baby and I'll say to myself, hey, maybe he should rot away in here."

"That's not even close to what I did and you know it," Philip snapped at me.

“I’m not sure what I know anymore.”

I was empty of answers and I needed to leave, needed to be out of the ward. I stood and took a deep breath.

“I’m sorry,” I said, “But I need to go. I wish you the best of luck with your appeal.”

Phillip nodded with his eyes closed. As I turned to walk away when his hand latched itself around my wrist, rattling his cuffs against the rails of the bed. Startled, I turned back and looked at him. Philip’s eyes were wide open, his face in a grimace, his blue eyes boring hard into mine. At the end of the room, another correctional officer looked up and made towards us, one hand going for his Mace, but I waved him away.

“I’m scared. I am so fucking scared about dying in here. I don’t want to die in prison. I would do anything not to die here.”

His eyes were wet and seeing him like this, feeling his fingers wrapped around my wrist, was so jarring that I shook. I didn’t know what to say or do, so I just stood there as he uttered what would be the last words I ever heard him say.

“And for the last few months I’ve been crying myself to sleep. I wake up in the middle of night just shaking, like a little boy, lying in soaked bed. Why? Because someday when the morning comes I’m not going to wake up. If some old prisoner dies at night, and there’s no one there to see it...”

He trailed off and bit his lip, fighting back tears. I stood looking at him, my energy drained from my body and now resting in an invisible cloud of strained emotion between us. When he finally goes, I left the room but could still feel the haze hanging in the air.

It would warm my heart to tell you that Philip won his appeal and was allowed to leave Curran for the last days of his life. But unfortunately, like over half the inmates who apply for compassionate release in Curran, Philip passed away before a decision could be made on his appeal. By the time I heard about his passing no one could remember the exact time or circumstance of his death. All I knew was that a nurse arrived in the morning and found Philip lying lifeless in bed. His death was unexpected. At Curran, when staff feels a Ward 7 inmate has less than 10 days to live, a vigil is held by his bedside until he passes. Philip Morris died without that comfort. His worst fears were realized. They were the last things he ever knew.

A week or so later I was in the locker room changing after my shift. I stripped off my brown uniform which on a typical day reeked of urine or vomit, and pulled on a smooth white shirt. The door opened and in walked Rusty Sherman, the public relations officer. He opened the locker next to mine and began to take off his gear. As he checked his white mustache in a mirror he glanced over at me.

“So get this,” he said, scrunching his nose to search for long hairs.

“Yeah?” I was ready to go but fiddled with my bag as he spoke.

“I’m giving a tour today, a bunch of college students, and I’m at the monument, you know, the one for fallen officers?”

I nodded and zipped up my bag, throwing it over my shoulder.”

“And this girl, maybe eighteen, twenty years old. She asks, ‘why don’t we have a monument for fallen inmates?’”

He looked up at me, waiting for me to acknowledge his statement.

“Wow, well, that’s something

“That’s something? That all you can say? Fucking stupid is what I say. Fucking crazy! Putting these guys on plaques!”

“I dunno Rusty, maybe we can make a plaque for their good sides,” I said with a smile, trudging to the door. Pushing it open, I turned and looked back at him. Rusty now had a towel wrapped around his huge frame and a bottle of shampoo in one hand. He looked at me and threw back his head, laughing.

“Their good sides! That’s good Chris. The damn thing would be almost invisible! Ha!”

He strode off towards the showers and out of sight. I could still hear his chuckles echoing off the porcelain.

*No, I thought to myself. It wouldn’t.*

## Editors

**Thais H. Miller**, Editor, is an undergraduate honors student at American University, majoring in Literature and minoring in Music Performance. Her novella, *Our Machinery* was published in *Predicate*, a literary magazine through Brown Paper Publishing. Her poem, "The First Time I Saw That Place" was published in *Burnt Offerings* (2007) as well as the Spring 2007 issue of Tacenda Literary Magazine. After completing her undergraduate degree, Miller hopes to pursue her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing.

**Christopher Dum**, Associate Editor, is a Master's student at American University studying Justice and Public Policy. His poem, "Hey, CO" appeared in the Spring 2007 issue of Tacenda. After completing his Master's degree, Christopher hopes to pursue a Ph.D and study prison hospice programs. In his free time he enjoys reading, movies and the outdoors.

## Contributors

**Rachel Cupelo**, originally from Upstate New York, is a graduating senior at American University, majoring in Justice Studies. Her major interests in Justice concern youth and families; she has spent time interning for both District of Columbia Family Court, as well as The Campaign 4 Youth Justice, an organization dedicated to the special needs of youth in the system. She has been practicing her other passion, writing, for much of her life. After graduation, Rachel plans to attend law school.

**Kristen Luppino**, is a sophomore at American University majoring in Political Science and Mathematics. Kristen is currently the President of AU's creative writing club which meets once a week and is open to students, faculty, and community members. Originally from South Carolina, she enjoys camping, hiking, and just about anything that involves playing outside.

**Katlyn Miller**, is a junior at American University from Anchorage, Alaska. Katlyn is majoring in CLEG (Communications, Legal Institutions, Economics and Government). Katlyn is also pursuing a certificate in Advanced Leadership Studies offered by the American University School of Public Affairs.

**Joseph Pelz**, is a senior at American University majoring in Criminal Justice. He is originally from Toronto, Canada but grew up in Miami, Florida. He is fascinated by prisons and prison life because it runs so contrary to how a human should live his or her life. In that respect the prisons as an "institution" offer him significant insight and inspiration for his writing and his hopefully future work.

**Sara Rubenson**, is studying art at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. She enjoys working with all kinds of mediums but mostly works with oil and acrylic paints.

**Sonia Tabriz**, is a sophomore at American University, majoring in both Law & Society and Psychology. Upon visiting the Maryland Correctional Adjustment Center with Professor Robert Johnson, Sonia was intrigued by the intricacies of prison life and was inspired to explore an underground world with which most people are not familiar. She looks forward to attending law school upon graduation, focusing on the juvenile justice system, and aspires to practice law and continue writing on issues of criminal justice and deprivation of liberty.

