

Baylorian

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Johnny Pincoy

The War (PTSD)

“Oh, say can you see by the dawn’s early light”

The Suicidal thoughts sky rocket at night.

Whistles blowing, sirens wailing, Laughter soon crumbling,

And I’m sitting here, uncontrollably trembling.

Hands so sweaty I can barely hold on,

As bodies are scattered all over the lawn.

The helicopters flying, the people are yelling.

My sense of pride turns into grieving.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

And so it begins, the rockets! They’re everywhere.

So a complete silence curtains the air.

I can’t stop shaking, it’s hard to breathe.

Finally it’s over, but to much dismay,

The smiling faces turn to disarray.

“And the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air”

Gave proof through the night that our minds are no longer there.

As anger and depression set in, I begin to cry.

Everyone’s smiling again as I wonder why.

Why can’t I be normal, on the 4th of July?

Leah White

Cold Black Coffee

There was no chair across from me —
No option for anyone to even be there,
Which is fine for now. One day
I'll be ready to pull up a chair
Or maybe he will even bring his own
And it will be bold. And I'll like it.
And I'll ask him what he's having
To which I hope he says
“Many more moments like this
In this chair”
That will be there.
Maybe then I'll let my black coffee
Become cold.

Seth Stephens
The Ravine

Things were different. The days were quiet. Even the birds seemed to understand that silence was best. Humans walked with blank faces along the concrete trails, which led quietly under the green oak trees past the glass and the fences. Where the black birds and squirrels used to call and sing, the humans now walked in a vacuum of noise. They looked different now, too. Their hair had all fallen off. Most of them had stripped off their clothing, and they all had expressionless faces covered in blood from eating flesh, which they had not done before. Two weeks ago, it had been completely different. They had stopped trying to break down the glass and fences about two days earlier. Now, they had no purpose. No humanity.

A Bengal tiger paced slowly next to his river. Sapphire eyes fixed on white paws as they moved up and down, up and down. His feline black and white frame moved gracefully toward his favorite sunbathed rock where he settled down comfortably to look out through the mesh fence across the ravine. He wondered what the humans would have done if they could have broken the glass. He did not know why they had even tried. Since Randall quit visiting, everything had been weird and alien. There were no more bright-eyed human cubs calling at the glass and growling at him. No more packs of the furless creatures pressing their noses to the wall, hoping to hear a loud tiger roar. Now, if any of them stopped to look at him, they would smash their heads against the fence rabidly until they bled and would bare their blunt and clacking teeth at him.

The tiger's great white head turned to the left and looked at his own image in the water. He bared his teeth. White and sharp. That was good. Randall always looked at his teeth and would say, "White and sharp. Those are good teeth, Hercules." Randall was the only human he knew by name and the only one who seemed to not be afraid of the great cat. His teeth would need to stay white and sharp.

Before things began to change, Randall would arrive at Hercules's home and feed him. Hercules did not like being stuck with the thin pointy object when Randall first got there, because it made him slow, but eating was always good, and Randall would speak constantly, as if Hercules could respond. Most of what he said made no sense, but he had been the one to give the white tiger his name. He had always been there for as long as Hercules could remember. From the time he was a cub, Randall had been the human to bring him his food consistently. Sometimes a female would bring the food, but she never looked at his teeth or called to him. It was because of Randall that Hercules was as strong and intelligent as he was.

Hercules raised himself to sit on his haunches. He looked around at his home, the only one he had ever known. From the time he was a cub until now, he had remained here, next to the small river and the large rock. Toward the back, closer to the rock wall, there were three trees. None of them had leaves since winter had arrived. The stream ran from out of the wall down through the trees to the large rock where it cascaded down a ten-foot drop. The ravine was ten feet deep all the way around and was about eight feet wide from one side to the other. In truth, the ravine was more of a large ditch, just large enough to keep Hercules from attempting a jump. A fence rose out of the far side of the ditch and climbed about thirty feet in the air where it turned back over the ravine a couple of feet. It was not a very big area, but it was larger than where the next-door-neighbor orangutans lived. And it was Hercules's home. He had lived in it alone after his mother had left. When he was six months old, they came and took her away, and since then, Hercules had been left to rule his kingdom in solitude. He did not particularly remember his mother or think of her that much. She had always seemed mean and unhappy.

The tiger moved back to his pacing. He was hungry. He had not eaten in two weeks, and he was starting to feel a gnawing inside of him. He wondered if he could find food outside of his walls. Something told him that he could. He

stopped at the edge of the ravine and looked through the fence, sapphire eyes intent. In the distance, he could see the sick humans stumbling across a field where he used to see antelope. His eyes fell to the open space before him, and he dropped into a crouch as if to prepare for a leap. But he turned and resumed pacing. Randall always brought him meat. Where was he now? It did not make any sense for him not to visit Hercules like he always had. The tiger knew he had to eat.

Hercules moved back to his favorite rock and lay down. One of the rabid humans entered his peripheral vision from the right side. It was male. The Bengal watched it closely as it staggered by. It stopped and turned to look through the fence. When it saw Hercules, it clacked its teeth and pressed its head in the fence and made an awful screeching noise like no noise Randall had ever made. Perhaps Randall had become ill like the other humans. Now, two hands and a head were frantically tearing at the fence, trying to break through into Hercules' home. The tiger stood up. He was angry that whatever was wrong with this human could have also been wrong with Randall. He roared a mighty roar, so loud that it knocked the attacker back away from the fence. Swishing his tail, the tiger sat back, satisfied.

The sun was high in the sky when Hercules stalked away from the rock and back into the cool shade the rock wall provided. He stretched out beneath the trees and slept and dreamed.

He was in a dark area. Green undergrowth was all around him, and he seemed to suffocate. The air was so heavy and humid. He began to pant. His white head looked upward. All about him, tall trees reached up much higher than his fence reached. The ground below his paws was damp, and he caught a familiar scent in the air. He glided through the undergrowth toward the scent. When he emerged from the bushes, he saw his mother. She stood eyeing him fiercely, two body-lengths away. She held her head high and turned to stalk away. Hercules moved to follow her, but she wheeled on him quickly, snarling

viciously. He watched her trot off into the darkness.

He was lost. This place was new to him, but its scents and sounds were somehow familiar as if he had dreamed of them before. He felt strong. Going into a crouch, the white tiger leapt, soaring through the air. Hitting the ground at a run, he felt his claws sink deep into the wet earth. He weaved in and out through the trees for what seemed an eternity. Then, before he could realize what was happening, a cliff appeared before him. It was like his ravine except wider and much, much deeper. He was in the air, sailing. Then, he was falling. On the ground below, he could see the sick humans reaching up to grab him. He was afraid.

Hercules' head shot up when he heard the door in the rock wall opening. It was dark now. He rose quietly and turned his head around the tree to look at the door. It was Randall. But it did not look like Randall. This man had fur covering his face, and his shirt was torn and bloodied. He did not have a cap on, and his long, tangled black fur was matted and dirty. His blue eyes had been very warm, but now they were cold and wild with red streaks running through them. When he saw the tiger, he dropped into a crouch, holding his left hand out. The cat eyed him suspiciously. He did not look rabid.

"Hercules," the man said, taking a step forward. "Remember me old pal?" Hercules took two giant paces forward and sniffed the extended hand. The man cringed. He never cringed before. Hercules sat back satisfied that this human was indeed Randall. Now, Randall just needed to stick him with the pointy thing, and then Hercules could eat. But Randall did not pull the needle out of his pocket. He just sat on the ground and looked at the animal.

"I was hoping you would remember me," Randall said. "Hercules. You were always my favorite out of this whole zoo. It's nice here isn't it? Nobody but you. No one trying to eat you. Sorry I haven't been here to feed you; two weeks ago, the whole city became infected. That's when the whole world went crazy. People turning to zombies and dead set on eating each other. 'Dead set', that's an ironic

thing to say eh?" He stopped and looked at the tiger's great white head, which moved slightly to the side. "You don't even understand a damn thing I'm saying. If I wasn't crazy before, I am now. Talking to a tiger because mankind is more dangerous than he is. It's all crazy out there now, Hercules. Everyone is dying and turning. People killing their families just to survive. I'd rather been eaten by you than one of them." He pointed out through the fence. "At least you're supposed to be a monster. A graceful monster though."

The two sat for a while in silence, looking at each other. Then Randall dropped his head into his hands and began to sob softly. Hercules could smell the salt.

"I killed Madeline," Randall said, lifting his head from his hands to face the tiger. "She was sick, so I had to, you know? Sometimes you just have to do things like that. She wasn't really Madeline anymore. She was one of those sick monsters." He continued to cry. Finally he stopped. Hercules stood up slowly, stretching. He was hungry, and he had to eat. Randall always brought him food. The man looked up. He was frightened. He rose and began backing slowly toward the rock wall. Hercules followed. He crouched into a stalking position and bared his great teeth.

Randall smiled. He was almost at the door. "White and sharp," he said, and he laughed.

The great cat leapt and caught the man's head between his great paws. His momentum smashed his prey's head into the wall, causing an explosion of blood and brains to spray across the rocks. Randall was dead and Hercules was eating.

Hours later, Hercules sat licking his white paws. He could still taste some of the man's blood on his tongue. It was good to be full again, to not to be hungry. He was satisfied and felt stronger than ever. He looked up at the night sky and then toward the fence and what lay beyond. There were more humans in the field now. His sapphire eyes gleamed. He stalked in the direction of the ravine until he stood at its very edge. He turned and paced back to the rock wall. A bloody heap of bones, entrails and fur

lay mottled next to the wall. Hercules never glanced at it. At the wall, he turned slowly. Facing the ravine again, he broke into a run. He felt the power surge through his sinewy limbs, and his muscles felt strong beneath his supple skin. His white fur shone silver in the moonlight as he streaked toward the ravine. At the edge, he ran into his crouch, so low that his chest scraped the dirt beneath him. With a great lunge of strength from his hind legs, Hercules was soaring through the air, over the ravine and toward the fence. Suspended in the air over the ditch, the great white cat looked majestic and wild. He roared louder than he ever had before. His bared teeth shone white and sharp. His white and black striped face looked savage. He was a white Bengal tiger.