Henry Dixon

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American Literature

Mr. Baker

Creative Writing

Exit

The curated hallways were uncharacteristically void of any life; the floor was without any nurses wheeling unconscious patients, without mentally vacant businessmen bumping carelessly through the double doors, without doctors frantically demanding epinephrine, or more morphine. The expressionless hallways were absent of any motion, save my pacing and the (admittedly subtle) occasional fluctuation of electric current that caused the lights to become momentarily brighter (and then darker again). The anxious shuffle carried out by my feet had long since progressed into a haphazard wander down the endless maze of halls. My capricious pace slowed and wandered indirectly between the two dimly lit walls. Deliberately and haptically[[1]](#footnote-1), I placed my feet on the colored tiles, while lazily but consistently avoiding the lines on the linoleum floor. The smell of rubbing alcohol and the impersonal nature of the hallways normally should have kept my mind on edge, but the knowledge of the current state of my life provided sufficient apprehension for the time being.

Even the fundamental layout of this room cried of painstaking preparation and overuse of harsh right angles. It was as if the contractor or architect tasked to create the room had forgotten his protractor and was rendered unable to include any curvature into the environment. Instead, this mystery constructor was doubtless forced to make due with straight lines intersecting at exclusively ninety-degree angles. Unnecessarily bright light leaked through the solitary glass window placed directly across the hallway from a bench, the only object contained in the hallway other than my coat and my notepad, which lay draped across the length of it, and in my hand, respectively. The light fell on the coat directly but reverberated throughout the hallway with a magnitude that seemed unnatural, despite it being the only natural presence in the entire vicinity. The sunlight seemed unable to mix with the fluorescent light that filled the space with its colorless illumination of every idiosyncratic detail, which seemed few and far between.

Although there were probably merely twenty feet between the two sets of double-doors that defined the lengthwise boundaries of the hall, there was plenty of room to accommodate my movement. Nonetheless, I shouldered the set of doors as I had resolved to make my way back to the waiting room in the hope that I might be inspired to write something if I seated myself.

Shortly after I had begun to clear my mind, a man (presumably a doctor) entered the waiting room clutching a clipboard. His face was essentially expressionless; I could not decipher any intent from what I could see. Instead of the typical white and blue, "business casual for doctors and other medical personnel" attire, this man exhibited a long white lab coat. He extended his hand and introduced himself as Dr. Wilder Schrödinger, but he did not divulge any further information. Schrödinger gazed about the surroundings from behind oddly thick glasses. As his eyes traced the contours of the room, they eventually reached the corners of my figure, prompting the man to examine me as he probably would a mouse. As he approached me, I noticed that he reeked of coffee, cigarettes, and a scent I couldn’t exactly place, but it reminded me of a funeral I had attended.

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In first meeting Schrödinger, I had not mentally designated him as a pontificating atheist, but the doctor had seemed like a fervently non-religious man. The only way I could think of to adequately sum up Dr. Wilder is "slightly off." Although he seemed much too young and his features screamed of inexperience, there exuded an aura of experience, as if he had been healing the community for forty-five years and knew all of the esoteric subtleties of curative medicine, despite his blatantly boyish appearance. However, one mustn't confuse the term "boyish" with the term "innocent." His appearance was indeed that of a young boy, but his affect was markedly darker.

When I first entered his office, I remarked the absence of evidence of any kind that a Dr. Wilder Schrödinger exists, existed, or ever will exist. There were no photographs of any theoretical offspring, no evidence of a significant other, and his pens were all black and white with no shades in between and no writing printed on any of their casings. The only *decoration* - if you could even call it that - to be found within the walls of the office was a cross that hung just to the left above the entrance. It dangled slightly off to the side above the door frame, but it was not displaced enough so that it seemed purposely off-center; rather, it sat awkwardly adjacent to the two places one would think it should be.

In conversational discussion, there are two types of people: the people who refuse to make eye contact with the person (with whom they are entertaining the conversation) and the people who relish in the eye contact, deriving intimacy from the connection. Dr. Wilder did not fit neatly into either mold. He did not participate in this connection between two beings; the doctor instead forged an extraction of information for himself. He would glare into my eyes for the amount of time that made me want to break from his gaze, but when it was over I had learned nothing about him. Even though his gaze was controlling and lasted for inordinate amounts of time, the doctor seemed just as enthusiastic about completely ignoring my existence for minutes when I spoke. His eyes flicked around the room as if he had to keep track of the position for every item within his vision so that he could create a three dimensional composite of the scene later. I had no doubt that he caught the subtleties of the room - any shifting shadows due to an inconstant ambient light, a slight air pressure differential causing papers to ruffle, and anyone who passed by in the hallway that Schrödinger observed through the tapered doorway.

Presently, he shuffled through a stack of papers that rested on his desk, carelessly aligning the edges of the pages by quick raps on the desk.

I believe he was addressing me when he said, "we will leave soon, Marcus," but the only reason I thought so was because I was the only other person in the room, and I he happened to use my name. He uttered this mix of syllables without looking up from his papers in a mere mumble; if I had not known better, I may have thought he had been talking to himself.

"I just wanted to tell you that I am grateful for your help, and for letting me observe you. I think this way is better for people."

"Yes." He stopped before continuing. "Come. We will go now."

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I entered the compact room just after Schrödinger as though I were being dragged by his coattails. As I entered, my first impression was not about the objects contained in the room, but instead the divergence between the blinding fluorescence and the crisp, sharp darkness in the shadows. The room's lighting contrast was attained through the use of one sole bulb glowing at the room's center.

A man was seated at the sturdy aluminum table under the light. Obviously, he appeared restrained (due to legal considerations) and his face appeared as a dark shadow of an object just as most things in the room did. Presently, Schrödinger addressed the stranger.

"I brought a friend," he offered, gesturing towards me. The stranger did not move or make any sound to confirm his hearing the doctor, choosing to remain in his neutral position. The doctor shrugged and cheerily addressed the man again: "I'm glad it is not a problem. Do you mind if we sit?" He continued, without waiting to see the man's inevitable non-response, "Of course not."

The doctor slowly lowered himself onto one of the chairs across the table from the man, and motioned to me to sit in the chair adjacent to him. I sat and glanced at my notepad, realizing that all I had written was heavily scrawled and near illegible.

*Jan. 14, 1987*

*Learn more about Dr. S*

*Seeing Mr. Gray at 3pm for cover story*

I readied my pen, and looked over at the doctor, wondering how I should be conducting myself. He glanced through a pile papers carefully, in complete reticence. The door plugged the only opening in the room, and the doctor's lack of any commentary fostered an almost-silence. The only sound I could hear was that of the fluorescent lamp whose loose magnetic ballasts caused a distinctly audible hum. I faced him expectantly and wondered if he had overlooked about my existence. I honestly believe that he may have temporarily lost the ability to sense my presence; although he occasionally looked up from the papers, his eyes never rested on me, nor did he acknowledge me in any way. And although one normally reacts to information as he or she absorbs it, Dr. Wilder maintained a completely flat face for what seemed like five minutes. He lacked any visible emotion, but his face did not appear negative to me. To be clear: the man did not seem as though he were reading something that he viewed to be averse, but he also did not seem content or pleased with anything. Rather, the doctor read through the plethora of information as you or I would read a sign designating the location of a restroom.

"Doctor, did the scans show anything of note?" I decided to force him to decide how he felt about the information by asking him directly; his features lent me no information and he did not seem liable to offer any by his own accord.

"Of course," the doctor stated without moving his eyes from the printed words on the paper, disclosing no more expression than he had exhibited in the past five minutes. The doctor now addressed the stranger, still looking at his papers. "It is the opinion of the Board of Appeals that you, Theodore Gray, are fit, able, and ready to be released into familial care, and that you are sufficiently rehabilitated to re-enter society." Schrödinger paused his recitation and for the first time, Mr. Gray looked up, illuminating his features for the first time. Theodore Gray looked to be about the same age as the doctor, but his features appeared distinctly weathered just as an old boat might. He spoke, and it was the first time he gave me any indication that he had the capacity to think.

"Thank you, thank you, doctor. I won't fuck it up, I promise."

"Yes. We will preform medical tests to ensure your physical health and presently you will be free to go." Without releasing the handcuffs, Schrödinger began attaching a snarl of wiring to various joints, organs, arteries, and other parts of Mr. Gray's body that apparently needed medical investigation. Although restrained and smothered in the mess of diagnostic equipment, the man smiled with a (albeit apprehensive) satisfaction. Seeing the childlike happiness leak from the cracks in his visage surprised me at the time. Logically it was not surprising to me that a man who had been incarcerated for years on end to feel a stroke of contentment at the news of his release, but the innocent grin smothered over his face while handcuffs encircled his wrists was enough to make me feel slightly uneasy.

The doctor's fingers rested over a small control pad that he had placed on the table. "Hold still for one minute, please." Schrödinger's voice maintained the machine-like quality it held since our entering the room, but I thought I noticed the doctor smile slightly.

For only an instant, I perceived a look of incredulity and bewilderment overtake the man's face. There was a subdued noise as his skull crashed into the metal as his body slumped over the table.

1. **Haptic:** (*adjective)* of or relating to the sense of touch, in particular relating to the perception and manipulation of objects using the senses of touch and proprioception. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)