

A Cry to Remember

By Kelly Green

CHAPTER ONE

Hundreds of people fill Gallagher lecture hall. I find the first empty seat in the back row and sit down; relieved that I wasn't trampled in the frenzied mob of students outside. Friendly conversation fills the room, as bags are tossed underneath seats, and notebooks and pens appear in almost every hand. Drinks are brought in by some, who need the rush of energy that tea and coffee promise, and Professor Allen Lough stands preparing the materials at the front of the spacious, filled room. The conversations turn into whispers and Professor Lough begins his morning class.

"Welcome to your second year at Jamison University. As we discussed during the last class, there will be a lot of reading. The reading that I want done for next class is a short story called "A Cry to Remember". It's an interesting read, because it delves into the life of a woman, who suffered from a serious trauma. Causing her to lose her past memories. Mental illness, or any trauma to the brain can be extremely disabling, if it is not treated. Please, can some one tell me what effects a mental illness can have on a person?"

Everyone is silent; accept for some people sitting in front of me, who quietly discuss the hypothetical answer with each other before daring to reply.

"Well? I guess it's a quiet class on a Monday morning," he jokes, and laughter fills the room.

“Mental illness can cause so many disabling effects, that we would be here for days discussing them.” Remarks a young girl with certainty in her tone of voice.

“Correct, but give me only a few.”

“Well, memory loss,” she concludes.

“Excellent. How is the loss of one’s cognitive ability disabling?”

“If you can’t remember, then it will be difficult to function and complete daily tasks.”

“Exactly. Now, I’m not saying that people with memory loss are incapable of living a productive and fulfilling life; on the contrary. People who suffer memory loss have varying effects and lose it in different ways. For example, people who are mentally challenged often suffer from short term memory loss, but they are quite capable of living and working in our society. Others, however, like the woman in the story that you will be reading, require treatment, because people who suffer from memory loss due to a trauma, need to be treated by professionals, so they can regain their cognitive memories to continue living their lives. Now, this is not to say that people who suffer a cognitive impairment from a birth, or genetic defect, require minimal treatment or intervention; rather, they require technology, and intervention programs to prepare them for all aspects of life. People who lose their capacity to remember from a traumatic experience, however, do not require the same measures, because in most cases, talk therapy, coupled with medication remedies their memory loss over time. When I practiced psychiatry, I met a young boy who witnessed the murder of his father. The story: “A Cry to Remember” reminds me of that little boy, because he could remember nothing of the

incident. He actually thought that his father was still alive. It took many months of hospitalization, and home visits to his aunt for him to remember everything, so he could function normally. We also call this disorder, Amnesia. I'm sure most, if not all of you, know about Amnesia from movies and books, but there are different types of Amnesia. The type that we are discussing right now, and you will see in the story is called Fugue state Amnesia."

Everyone quickly writes down the name, as he continues talking without pausing to see if we have all grasped, or written down the name of Amnesia that he will probably have on a future exam.

"Losing one's memory can also occur when intoxicating substances are taken, such as alcohol."

He falls silent, as some of us laugh with reminiscent joy of the intoxicating state that we all knowingly enter on occasion.

"I am assuming from the laughter that many have experienced this state of glorious loss of memory?"

We all laugh, as some share stories with friends sitting next to them about their alcoholic induced memory loss, while others, like myself, sit quietly, waiting for him to continue.

"Well, during my under graduate studies and some times in my days as a post graduate student, I experienced the same lapse of memory and judgement. The difference between a purposely induced memory loss, and one that is caused by circumstances beyond our

control, is that we usually recover in one day or two; whereas one that is caused by a traumatic experience needs extensive treatment, and can often take months, even years for the person to fully recover. Those who suffer this form of long term memory loss must overcome immense obstacles to regain their dignity, independence and identity; therefore, they should be admired, and assisted with all of the resources that the mental health community can muster to insure their full integration and recovery in society and for their own welfare. I have some methods that I developed when I was conducting a study during my days as a research assistant for the Cognitive Development Institute for people who are enduring the effects of memory loss in relationships with a family member or spouse. As we discussed earlier, there are two types of memory loss. Memory loss from a birth defect, or genetic disorder requires intervention early in childhood. People who have this disability often experience difficulty in forming lasting and loving relationships with others in school, and in their family circle. The reason is not because the person is incapable of developing feelings of love, and other emotions. It is often due to ignorance of those who society considers to be able bodied, or as some say, normal. I personally dislike the term normal, because normalcy is a definition that is interpreted differently all over the world, so I will say from now on, able bodied, or cognitively able. People who have this form of memory loss have difficulties because they forget how to complete daily tasks, and thus, people who are involved with them on a daily basis frequently lose their patience; upsetting the stability and development of a healthy, loving relationship. This situation even occurs with people who have Attention Hyper Activity Disorder, or ADHD. Most people have heard of this disorder, and relate it to children in classrooms where the teacher is unable to control their outbursts and

negative behaviour. What many people do not understand is that this mental disability happens in adults, and people of all ages. Although treatment is available, it is important for people to learn how to cope with the effects of memory loss and hyper activity, if they want the person to function in mainstream society. I believe that some of you will write your article on this area of cognitive disability, while others will probably write their assignment on the cognitive impairment that is examined in “A Cry to Remember” called Amnesia.

In addition to the reading that I want completed for the next lecture, I want everyone to write an article on dealing with memory loss. Use some of the techniques that the main doctor uses in the book, but develop these methods with your own strategies to help people cope and overcome this debilitating, yet interesting illness, or as it is also termed, disability. I’ll see you next class.”

The room empties, and I put my note taking device into my bag. Professor Lough approaches me, and helps me leave the room.

I walk down the long corridor to go to Lamar; a popular place for students to meet, discuss, and relax before exams, upcoming classes, etc. Walking into the café, I hear a voice calling my name.

“Michelle! Oh my God! How are you?”

Turning to get a glimpse of at least the outline of her face, I recognize her right away.

“Leah. How are you doing?”

She hugs me, as people often do when they remember a good friend, and I order a strawberry tea, and muffin. She pulls up a chair, and we sit together to catch up on everything that has been happening, since we spoke last year.

“How are you and Ahmed?”

“We broke up. His mother and I just didn’t get along. She thinks that because I am not a religious woman, I’m evil. I got along with the father, but the mother is in my opinion, the direct descendent of Satan.”

She laughs and I echo the gesture, as I sip the warm, refreshing tea, and eat my muffin hungrily.

“What did she say that broke the two of you up? I think it’s so stupid when I hear people breaking up over religious differences.”

“It wasn’t our decision. It was hers. She basically runs the entire family and decides who is going to end up with whom, when, and what time each family member can take a breath of air away from her looming presence.”

“Des his father not say anything?”

“Oh yes, but then she cries and makes people feel guilty, so in the end, she gets exactly what she wants.”

“The wonderful skill of manipulation: women are the master of that trade most of the time.”

“I agree.”

“What was your last class?”

“Mental and cognitive impairments.”

“Oh, cool.”

“I like it; speaking of which, I should start preparing for that assignment that is due for the next class.”

“All right, well, give me a call some time, will you?”

“I will.”

I sip the last drop of tea, and leave to use the zoom text machine to enlarge my reading materials at the disability centre. The crowded corridor is a slow moving mass of people; walking in all directions, and paying no attention to others. I open the door to the room where people get printed materials enlarged. I hear the constant humming of the two computers and the zoom text machine, as I wait to be given a number for my turn to use the enlargement device. A middle-aged woman, who is sitting at the reception desk, looks at me with a smug expression.

“May I help you?”

“I just need this enlarged, or can I have some one else enlarge it for me?”

“Enlarged?”

“Yes. I need it in large print.”

“All right. Well, I’ll send it to the person who enlarges print. You’ll get it tomorrow.

You might even be able to get it for today,”

she informs me, as she moves some papers around on her desk and types some information into the computer.

“What is your name?”

“Michelle Johnson.”

She types my name into the computer, and lets out a sigh, as my name comes up onto the screen.

“All right. You’ll have it done for today. I can actually get it done for you now, if you can wait for about fifteen minutes, is that all right?”

Her expression softens slightly.

“The sitting room is the room on your right, when you go out of this door. I’ll be sure to call your name on the intercom, when it is done.”

I wait patiently in the waiting room, as names are called one by one, and each person leaves to get help from numerous counsellors, and transcribers. My name is called, and I walk into the room where the receptionist cordially hands me the enlarged document.

“Thank you.”

“Your welcome.”

I put the materials in my bag, and leave; desperately wanting to get home to relax, and hopefully get all of the reading done today.

CHAPTER TWO

Student housing is abundant in this urban sprawl, but one always has to be aware of slum lords. In other words, those who take advantage of naive, young adults, looking for their first house or apartment. I remember arriving at my current apartment for the first time last September. The bus emptied, as people busily walked about the station with bags, briefcases, and some of them it seemed, had all of their possessions in one bag. Feeling overwhelmed by the hustle of the bus station, I nervously dialled the operator from a pay-phone; Desperate to find a cab to take me to my new life. I finally found the number for a well-known cab company: thanks to the kindness of a passer-by, who asked me if I needed help. The cab driver said nothing, as he sped through the busy streets. I paid the driver, and walked into the house that I still share with two other girls, Sandra and Tonya. I can still remember the shy exchanges that we gave each other, as we nervously moved our bags, and boxes into the spacious downstairs rooms, while trying to avoid each other, for fear of conflict due to fatigue and stress. Each of us have separate rooms, with the exception of the bathroom, and kitchen, but we still manage. No strict schedule is needed, because we are hardly home at the same time.

Sandra is in the kitchen, and looks up from her notebook with tired eyes.

“What’s up, Michelle?”

“I have reading to do too, so I won’t bother you.”

“Oh, I was gonna take a break soon. I might go out to get something to eat at that Steve’s burger house. Want anything from there?”

“No. I’ve had enough grease to block my arteries for two years.”

She laughs, and I sit across from her, and try to concentrate on my reading.

A Cry to Remember

By Anita Brown

I awaken to the usual screams and noises of human desperation down the hall. My door opens and Doctor Arthur Bradley steps into my sight. I rise from my position on the bed to greet him. He is shorter than I am, but distinguished and serious in manner.

He closes the door and asks me,

“Do you feel like talking to me yet?”

“No,” I state angrily even though I know I will end up talking with him. I watch as he takes off his brown, denim jacket and sits across from me folding his hands, patiently waiting for me to begin.

“You’re going to be sitting for a long time doctor!” I scream in frustration. Our last meeting had not gone well and I don’t want to start this painful process again.

“That’s all right Melissa,” he says calmly. Pulling out a cigarette from his jacket pocket. I watch him search desperately for his gold plated lighter that had the initials, AB engraved in the centre.

“Melissa, you know it would do you some good to talk about your husband’s murder.”

“No, no it won’t. He wasn’t murdered.”

“Then how did he die?”

“He didn’t die. He’s alive, but you people are keeping me away from him. Away from my life, and my dignity!”

Doctor Arthur tilts his head and smiles in amusement deepening the laugh lines around his mouth. His dark brown hair falls over to the right as he continues watching me.

“I have a written letter from him.” Frustrated by his incredulous demeanour, I give him the letter I had kept in my nightstand drawer. Surely now he would believe me. He reads it and sets it down on the nightstand beside him. He looks back up at me with pity and sadness in his eyes.

“Melissa, your housekeeper found your husband lying on the bathroom floor with no pulse. The autopsy showed he had been force to take two times the lethal dosage of his heart medication, Simvastatin. Your husband wrote this letter in November. He was murdered two months ago. The police interviewed family members and they all had

valid alibis. You were brought here due to the news of your husband's death. It pushed you into mental shock."

I stare at him and glance down towards my nightclothes trying to remember my husband's death, and my other family members. I could remember nothing about my past. I am surprised I can remember each day that I live in this place, but I know I am here but I want to feel life. I am so desperate to feel something more than knedles, the bland taste of cafeteria food, and the relentless, yet mechanical questions that doctors and nurses ask each day. I often find myself pounding the meagre pieces of furniture that are in the room and scream for what seems like hours.

"Do I have any children, or siblings?"

For now, my thoughts are questions that fill my mind, until I fear it will explode. The foolishly patient Doctor Arthur continues sitting at the foot of my bed on the single, rusting steel chair that is so uncomfortable, that I decided several weeks ago to just sit on my bed when I wish to relax, or sleep. He is right about one question: that is the question of my past before I woke in a small, colourless room, and was told that I have been sent here for my own welfare. Blurry memories begin to come to me, but nothing definite. It isn't worth telling Doctor Arthur, until they are clear. My eyes suddenly move to his face, as I continue to think with all of the strength in my body.

"What do you remember Melissa? Anything you remember, even if it is blurry or small, tell me."

I shrug my shoulders and say nothing.

“Even if my memories were clear, why should I tell him anything, other than the fact that the room needs to be painted with a colour that doesn’t resemble death?”

I don’t want to tell him anything. He’s a stranger. I don’t know him. What if he wants to harm me, instead of helping me? I know he is a doctor, and he seems sincere in his desire to help me, but I still feel uncertain about his motives. I sit with him and look at his face for a clue. I can’t find anything that will reveal his real intentions to me.

“No Doc,” I say with finality.

“I don’t remember anything, so you can leave now.”

He begins to speak with an unusually composed tone.

“I understand how you feel.”

“No you don’t,” I laugh bitterly.

“You don’t know what it’s like to wake up in a dark, empty room that isn’t your home, with no recollection of your life, or where you used to live! You can’t even begin to fathom the emotional vulnerability I feel having to trust strangers. Strangers who tell me they are trying to help me remember my past! No, I’m certain even your PHD didn’t prepare you for this task.”

I sit back on the one, flat pillow and lower my eyes so I can’t see his face.

“Melissa, my job is to help you remember. No, I have never been in your situation. I realize I can’t begin to imagine how you feel. You must realize, however, that

if you don't start talking to people about your feelings, fear and frustration will hold you captive until you die! I have always believed that if one is suffering, it is ultimately their decision whether or not they want to be free from their situation. Either you talk to me and let me help you by guiding you out of your misery, or you can live in this meaningless existence for many months and years to come. I'm not going to give you your identity. You have to earn it back and remember yourself by talking to me so I can give you ideas on how to help you remember."

I continue to stare at my tattered bedding, then at the grey, chipped walls, and then at his face once again to help me find answers to his true intentions. He taps his left foot on the hard tile floor, waiting for a response, but I give him none. I must have been intelligent, because I am untrusting. Educated, because I know that a degree does not prepare you for the real doctor patient relationship. I sympathize with him, but don't want to trust him yet. He says I have to earn my memories and identity? My answer to his statement is that he has to earn my trust. He remains seated on the hard, uncomfortable, cheap wooden chair waiting with the patience of a monk. The room remains silent for what seems like hours.

"Melissa, what is your favourite food?" he asks desperately.

"I don't know."

"I'm going to get you something to eat, but I'm going to give you foods from every food group available."

He stands up from his chair and leaves me, admiring his persistence. Five minutes later, he returns with a platter of food that could feed an entire village of starving citizens. I smile gratefully and begin to eat some rice and chicken. The rice is tasteless and I tell him my opinion.

“I know it’s tasteless, but do you like the texture in your mouth?”

“Yes, it needs to have some pepper, or something to make it sweet and flavourful. If it has something to give it flavour, it would taste delicious. I think if Garlic or Pepper were added, I would like it a lot better.”

His expression shows his satisfaction with my response. He allows me to finish the rest of my meal without further questions. I eat the large meal with silent pleasure and gratitude. I understand his motive for feeding me. I finish everything on my plate, and he hands me a pencil and ten sheets of blank paper.

“Melissa, when I see you tomorrow, I want you to have some thoughts and feelings written on paper. I understand you don’t want to tell me directly, but if you write down whatever you are feeling or remember, it will be the first step to your recovery.”

I nod my head in agreement. He leaves, closing the squeaky, wooden door behind him. I begin to feel the usual pangs of anger and frustration, as I sit alone in this man-made Hell. I want to cry, but there is no use. I want to scream, but it will go unheard. I think about Doctor Arthur and the food I had eaten. I begin to understand his earlier arguments.

“You have to earn your memories, Melissa.”

This statement plays over and over again in my mind, as I stare at the walls, and then at the door. I long for something to help me begin earning my memories back. Doctor Arthur told me that I was sent here after I learned of my husband’s death, but who would send me to a place with rooms no bigger than a bathroom with no photographs of family or friends?

“It is a lie,” I conclude in my mind, and fall to sleep in bitterness.

My eyes open after a dreamless sleep. The sun that shines into my room from the half open window, is my natural alarm clock each day. The actual time, I am uncertain. The bustle of nurses, doctors, and cheerful good morning chatter, provide me with the knowledge that it is early morning.

“Mrs. McNally, it is time for your medication,” informs Nurse Kathy in a room next to mine. The woman protests, but as usual, protesting the young, beautiful Nurse Kathy, goes unheard and the protest suddenly stops.

The sound of high-heels click fast down the hall, and disappear. I pray those footsteps, who I fear to be Nurse Kathy, do not return and walk into my room. I turn on the light on my nightstand to see my mundane surroundings, and notice a fresh pair of pants and a white shirt folded at the end of my bed. Feeling a small amount of gratitude to the anonymous staff member for bringing them to me to provide me with some self

worth, I quickly put them on, and for the first time in what feels like a year, I rise from the bed, and feel like a woman. Knocking is suddenly audible on my door, and I answer it with some caution, as I feel reluctant to allow anyone to destroy my present state of happiness and normalcy.

“Hi Melissa,” says Doctor Arthur politely. He sits down and looks at my fresh appearance, and writes some illegible thought into his note pad, and then begins his usual session.

“Do you know who gave you that outfit?”

“No. I awoke several minutes ago and it was folded at the end of my bed.”

“All right. What if I told you that it was brought to you from Nurse Kathy?”

I laugh, and say nothing more.

“Why are you laughing, Melissa?”

“Nurse Kathy brought me this outfit? Doctor, I may be deemed insane by the majority of so-called normal people, but insanity is not stupidity.”

“You are right. Insanity is not stupidity, but why do you refuse to believe that she brought you these clothes?”

“Oh, let me see. Umm, if I tell you, I’ll have to kill you. Conundrums are what make life interesting, Doctor Arthur. If I tell you, are you willing to risk your life for my answer?”

“No Melissa. I believe that there is no philosophical equation to my question. You will not kill me. Why would you kill a person who wants to help you?”

“I don’t know. You should think about that question and when you have answered it to my satisfaction, then maybe I will answer your question.”

“Pro quo, eh Melissa?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“I have one question that I know you will answer.”

“What’s that question?”

“Did you write any of your thoughts down for me?”

“No. I couldn’t think at all. I guess this old brain is as empty as the hall outside my door.”

“Oh, see, that’s where you’re wrong.”

He sits on the edge of the old, uncomfortable chair across from me

With a confident look appearing on his face.

“Wrong? I don’t think so Doctor Arthur. How am I wrong when I tried with all of the strength in my body, and could think of nothing?”

“You obviously didn’t use all of your strength Melissa.”

“Yes I did, and it was so emotionally draining that I found myself falling asleep.”

“You have to try harder to ignore the urge to fall to sleep whenever you feel strain.”

“Yes, well the medication that is injected into my bloodstream by your altruistic Nurse Kathy takes away my ability to fight fatigue.”

“Oh, so that’s why you laughed earlier when I mentioned her name.”

“Hell no. If you must know, I personally think she’s a fraud, and doesn’t really want to help people, rather, wants to keep them in this trap.”

“This is a necessary facility, Melissa. It is for people who have suffered serious mental trauma, and in your case, Amnesia, so they often need medicine to help them overcome and come to terms with what they are blocking out of their mind.”

“Yes, well, I don’t need some strange woman, wearing a so-called nurses uniform, which in my opinion looks more like a piece of cloth that she throws over her shoulders each morning injecting me with some drug that is unknown to me every day to help me remember.”

“Melissa, it is to just make sure that you don’t harm yourself.”

“I won’t harm myself, when I have others doing it for me.”

I laugh at this statement and look at him with a sly smile.

“Melissa, I think it is in your best interest to try to write some thoughts. Anything that comes into your mind down on paper today. Remember what I said yesterday, and please, you must understand that even though you believe others don’t have your interest at heart, I do have your interest in mine.”

“Yes. I understand.”

I place my hands on my chin and try to study his face, tone of voice and body language to decide if he is telling the truth, or if he is lying. I look at him for several minutes, as he scribbles earnestly on his notepad, and then flips through some more papers.

“I’m going to go now, but before I go, I’m going to give you a book of blank papers to motivate you to see this task through to the end.”

He places them next to me on the bed, and I nod with appreciation.

“All right. Remember, anything that you write is excellent; whether or not it is about you directly, it will help you start to remember your past identity. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

He shakes my hand quickly and leaves the room.

Wanting to humour the good doctor, I begin to write my thoughts on paper, and for ten minutes, I can think of nothing. Impatiently, I rip the paper into little pieces.

With the paper destroyed, I bury my face in my blanket and chew it to relieve my frustration and lack of identity. I hold the blanket between my teeth for two minutes and scream, but no one comes to see what is wrong. I release my jaws and there is a hole in the fabric. I am not worried about the ruined blanket. It is so cheap and worn, that a hole gives it character. I trace the small hole with my index finger, and feel a sense of emotional freedom. Freedom from my anger, and maybe one day, released from the prison of amnesia. I don't feel like writing. Doctor Arthur's questions and psychological manipulation tires me. Oh God, I know I shouldn't think this way. I know he is trying to help me recover my life before I lost my dignity and personal identity.

Feeling sympathy for his struggle to help me, I try to regain my energy to write and remember. I pick up the shreds of paper I tore earlier to dispose of them, but there is no place to throw them away. Letting them fall to the floor I ignore them. I relax myself with the pencil in my hand, and try to write random memories of my past. I emboss the words into the paper with my pencil. Desperately trying to remember what happened to my husband and everything else for that matter.

People shouting, two women crying and a man saying Richard is dead.

I drop the pencil and paper onto the bed and feel chills running down my spine. The hair on my neck stands upright, and I tremble with fear. I run to my room door and scream. Slamming my head into the hard, wooden door. One, two, three times in desperation and fear. My cries for help, as usual, are in vain. I feel even more frightened than usual. I don't want to remember anymore. Hearing my screams, Doctor Arthur bursts into my room to see what is wrong. I can tell he is deeply upset to see me in this

state of frenzy. Tears fall from my eyes. I continue to tremble, as he patiently helps me sit on my bed.

“Do you want a glass of water?,” he asks sympathetically.

“No,” I sob.

“No thank you.”

Nurse Kathy suddenly bursts in behind Doctor Arthur. Pretending to care about what is wrong with me.

“Doctor, is she all right?”

“She’s fine.”

“Yes I’m fine. I don’t need anymore help.”

“Well, Melissa, I think you need a little bit more time to recover before you can say that you don’t need any help.”

She walks over to where I am sitting on my bed, and Doctor Arthur frowns slightly, as she checks my blood pressure.

“It’s high. I’m going to give her some diazepam. I think it’s high, because she had an anxiety attack.”

“She doesn’t need diazepam,” he says with finality in his tone.

“She needs something to calm her down. She should have some medicine to ease her recovery,” she protests.

“She needs nutrition, time, kindness and someone to help her by verbal and written communication!” he said briskly. Signalling with his hand for her to leave the room. She looks blankly into the hall, and leaves without saying anything else. He remains seated across from me. His hands folded in his lap; waiting for me to gather my nerve to speak with him. I watch him for several minutes, but don’t know what to say. His expression begins to show signs of impatience.

“Melissa,” he says firmly.

“I would like to see what you have written down so far. What made you so afraid?”

I show him my random, desperate writings. He smiles in approval and satisfaction, hands me the paper, and instructs me to write some more.

“You can write some more when you’re ready. I suggest you get some rest, because you’re mind and body are under a lot of stress right now.”

I stretch, and tell him to leave. He closes the door behind him, and I close my eyes, but only momentarily.

The small, empty room that I live in is silent, so silent that I wonder if anyone exists outside. I hear Doctor Bradshaw, Nurse Kathy and other doctors and nurses talking and laughing in the long, winding hallway, but no other sound is made from the

rooms surrounding me. The echo of their laughter is the only sound I hear. The constant humming of the light that shines dimly in my room, the cold, damp air, and the laughter from the doctors and nurses in the hallway, make me want to sleep and forget where I am. I want to forget their laughter, the humming of the light and the eerie silence from the other residents. I want to hear a kind voice. I am tired of being afraid. My fear heightens when I hear their laughter coming closer to my room. I grab another piece of paper to rid myself of fear. Ignoring their laughter and the eerie silence, I concentrate on writing my memories, so I can be set free.

Room painted with bright colours with a long wooden table, chairs, and people sitting around the large table. Woman standing beside a young boy, who is scanning his hands across a page in a book.

I smile slightly, as I wonder if my recollection is imaginary, or the reality of my past. Deep inside, I hope it is not false.

I rest the pencil on the paper, and walk to the coffee room to get a refreshment. Two other women enter to get their coffee, and one of them stares at me, and then looks down at her tattered dressing gown. We say nothing to each other. What do I say to them? I fear that if I say anything, they will be unable to reply, or will scream in fear or frustration. Quickly, I pour my coffee and return to the safety of my room, where I enjoy the warm, bitter sweet taste, and return to my writing. I don't feel like returning the cup right away. I feel such a strong desire to remember, or try to remember, that it inhibits me from completing any other task. I grab the pen with zeal, and scribble for some minutes before any legible words are written.

Two women are standing around a man who is lying on a hardwood floor,. The two women are crying uncontrollably. Older woman holds young girl's hand, as she cries,

"Dad is dead, isn't he?"

"He died from a heart attack," replies a man, dressed in a police uniform.

Sheila screams, and I fall to the floor in shock.

My heart begins to race, as the pencil falls onto the paper. Oh my God! The image of the young girl crying continues to haunt my memory, as I try to write some more, but feel overwhelmed and frightened. The name Sheila seems familiar, as I try to block out the memories, but am unwilling to stop thinking about the young girl.

"Sheila, who is she?," I wonder, as I try to close my eyes to fall into a sleep that I won't remember when I awake.

My mind will not stop inquiring. I sit up again. Unable to stop the flow of thoughts and images. I want them to stop now. I desperately grab the pencil to write, or do something that will slow the fury of questions and visions. I begin to write, but instead of words, my hand draws the image of the young girl in my mind. Symmetrical facial features, long hair that is dark brown, and light, freckled complexion. I stop drawing, and examine the picture for a long time. The outline of the face, and the name play over and over again in my head. The image suddenly becomes my internal torture, and I desperately try to fall asleep, but the sun that shines into my room, forces me to remain awake.

"Dad is dead, isn't he?"

Her voice is vivid, and tears fill my eyes. I scream, as the mixed emotions of joy, fear and frustration, rush into my consciousness for the first time in many months. I hear

voices outside my room, but recognize no one. My body feels cold, and I curl nervously underneath my blanket to get warm.

“I don’t know what she’s doing, but I’ll go check on her,” affirms a nurse to the busy, yet diligent Doctor Arthur, as they pass my room.

“Doctor Arthur!,” screams a woman, who I hear running down the hall.

“Doctor Arthur! Please help me! Please help me! She’s gonna inject me with poison!”

“Taresa, who is going to do that to you?,” he asks calmly.

The frightened woman’s voice fades. I assume he took her back to her room to calm her, and hopefully find out who would do that to her. I pick up the pencil and paper again, but my mind is blank. I sigh with relief, and decide to work on an old crossword puzzle that I started two days ago, until dinner is announced.

CHAPTER TWO

A loud bell ringing through the halls interrupts my writing. Medical personnel escort people to the cafeteria. I wait my turn to be escorted, for fear they will be angry and deprive me of my meal. I sit beside a woman who eats with her hands. I admire her tenacity to be different. They serve us bread, one potato, baked beans, rice and salted fish. I eat it hungrily, and notice the woman sitting beside me, looking at me. Why is she staring at me? I would ask but I fear it would be impolite.

“Melissa,” she says shyly.

“I never thought your work would make you come to this animal house.”

I drop my fork in shock and bewilderment. I use the delay of picking up my fork to look at her worn, tired looking face to help me recognize her. Obviously she knows who I am, but I feel reluctant to talk to her.

“I am sorry, but I don’t know you.”

She smiles a little and says,

“Melissa. Don’t you remember me? Joanna, your co-worker.”

I drink my tea and ignore her. She persists in talking to me despite turning my back on her.

“You don’t remember me? We worked together for years. Wow, we always said that our work schedule with our school for the disabled would eat us alive in the end. I don’t know how we did it with our children and everything else in our lives. Ah, what a shame

it happened to a good person like you. Well, at least I know I'm not the only one that had a nervous breakdown," she concludes, sipping her coffee and putting it down on the cheap, wooden table. Her tired, sad face is further emphasised by her deep, hollow eyes. She looks as if life has been sucked out of her, and all that is left of her is her outer body. Nodding my head politely, I say nothing and continue eating. She eats the rest of her meal without using utensils. I wonder why she looks so old and dead? I keep my eyes on my plate. I will never believe anything my fellow residents tell me. Most lack the required mental capabilities to tell the truth about themselves. Joanna, for example, probably has been subjected to so many drugs, she can't think clearly. It's sad. I look up at her again, and see a face once beautiful with light blue eyes, and a woman who once possessed her own will and intelligence. I think she knows what I'm thinking. She looks at me angrily.

"You don't believe me, do you Melissa?" I sit with my face resting on my chin. I don't know how to answer her. How can I believe her when I can't trust myself? I ponder this internal question for several seconds without coming to a conclusion. I have a story to tell, and am trying to remember the plot. Like everyone else in this place, she too has one, but wants to share it with me.

"No," I say cautiously.

"I believe you, but how do you know me?"

"Melissa, I'm used to games by the stupid nurses and doctors in here, but not by a resident! You know who I am, so please stop pretending like you don't know me.

You're ashamed of me. You know what? I'm ashamed of both of us! How did we get in this place? How did things become so unbearable that we ended up in this human pit of Hell?"

"I don't know," I answer quietly.

I understand her anger. Everyday I ask myself,

"how did I get so desperate and hopeless that I had to stay here?"

Shame fills my heart as I realize that I have been ignoring her and treating her as an inferior person. I too, am a resident, and I am also being treated as an inferior mental patient. I think that maybe she wants to talk to someone who is kind and has the desire to recover and escape. Maybe she is telling the truth about our past relationship. Only time will tell. I take my plate up to the counter so it can be washed.

"Joanna," I say, after returning to the dinner table.

"I'm not ashamed. I know how you feel."

"No you don't," she says with less anger, but visible enough for me to hear.

"You think I'm just another person who's lost her mind. Let me tell you something Melissa, you too have lost your sanity. You just couldn't take seeing those children in pain anymore, right? You couldn't deal with the pressure of everyday life, right?"

"I don't remember!" I yell.

“Of course you don’t remember. You don’t want to remember, and that’s why you’re in this madhouse.”

I tire of her assumptions, and signal for a guard to take me back to my room.

I sit in darkness and think about my confrontation. Oh God, I’m so tired of talking to desperate people, who will do anything to get attention and help. How did she know my name? I’m sure she must have heard it before from one of the nurses when they scream at me for crying, as they inject me with drugs. She claims to be a social worker, and tells me that I worked with her. I’m certain this is false. Maybe I was a social worker. I remember helping people; the large table with the little boy scanning his hand over the pages of a book, but I have no memory of her working or socializing with me. I do feel pity for her, but nothing more. I will talk to her, but our relationship will be strictly acquaintance based. Exhausted, but determined to recover my identity and memories, I take out a piece of paper and try to write. My eyes begin to close, but I force them open. I relax, and begin to write whatever enters into my mind, as Doctor Arthur instructed. I pick up the pencil and paper to try writing some random memories. Whether false or real, I am not certain. I write random letters, draw circles, but nothing productive. I feel overwhelmed. Seeing that woman, who claims to know me, and the things she told me, cause my head to ache. I decide to stop trying to remember, and fall close my eyes to go to sleep.

Screams from a woman across the hall destroy my peaceful slumber. Bringing my mind back to this miserable reality.

“No! Please, don’t stab me with the needle!”

“Ma’am, you have to get your injection.”

“No!” the woman cries. She screams a few more times, hoping for the help that never comes and finally falls silent.

“Thank you Flora,” he says with vindictive pleasure.

My door suddenly bursts open as the anonymous doctor, who I call Doctor Sadist, enters my room.

“How are you feeling this fine evening?” he asks disinterestedly as he injects medication into me. Before I can answer or protest, he leaves the room. Tears burn my eyes and I feel numb. I fall back onto my pillow, suddenly without strength. I try to call for help; despite knowing no one will come. I want to cry, feel emotion, but the drugs deny me that release. I want to write, but have no mind to think. I know that if I sleep, the drugs will leave my body faster. Several hours later, a knock at my door awakens me. Frightened, I curl under my blanket, but the knocking persists and becomes too loud to ignore. Sleepy, yet able to use most of my mental and physical faculties now, I answer the persistent knocking. The figure looks blurry, but as I force my eyes to focus, I notice it is Doctor Arthur. I smile politely, and let him inside.

“Hello Melissa, how are you doing today? Did you get some rest?”

I am still guarded with him, but feel that his intentions are less harmful than the other doctors. I decide to talk to him. I feel I have nothing to lose by showing him my

writings,. I think he is the only person in this concrete jungle that genuinely cares about my recovery.

“I’m doing a lot better,” I lie.

“I feel refreshed and ready to write some more of whatever I can remember.”

His eyes narrow, and the dimples in his mouth fade into a frown of disappointment and pity. He continues to frown and says,

“I’m not going to force you, but you should tell me the truth. I see the hole in the blanket. I know the blanket is worn, but how did it happen? It wasn’t there yesterday.”

Frustration suddenly rushes over me.

“Let me ask you something, Doctor. If you couldn’t remember anything, accept your name, and were trying desperately to remember if you have a child, the death of your spouse, and everything else for that matter, wouldn’t you chew something, or lose your mind once in awhile?”

He smiles, and looks happy that I have the courage and anger to challenge him.

“I probably would. Is that why there is a hole in the blanket?”

“Yes,” I retort.

“Tell me what you remember. Tell me things that you haven’t written down.”

I muse over this request for several minutes. What if the memories I tell him are so horrible that he orders Nurse Kathy, Doctor Bradshaw, or one of the anonymous doctors or nurses to inject me with medication that will numb me and make me feel dead? I lower my head in deep thought, as he patiently hums a nameless tune. I am tired of the brutality by the other doctors and nurses. Tired of the screams that wake me in the night. I don't want to trust him completely, but know I have no choice. I want to be rescued from this jungle of madness, and he is my only helicopter to freedom and recovery. After making my decision, I look up at his face, which is looking at me with sympathy and compassion. I fixate on his eyes, so I can read what he is thinking. "I'm ready to talk to you."

Professionally, he opens his notebook to a blank sheet of paper.

"Why don't you tell me what you remember about the night your husband died?"

His voice is calm. Almost hypnotic, I continue looking into his eyes. They are deep, kind and honest looking. I relax and speak freely about my memories.

"There's a woman," I murmur.

"What's the woman's name?"

"I don't know, but she's standing beside my husband. . . I think his name is Richard, while he sleeps. I can't remember her clearly. She's wearing a long silver dress and her hair is tied back."

“You think your husband’s name was Richard?”

“Yes. Can you tell me if I’m right?”

“Looking at your records, and what I was told about you when the officer brought you here, you are correct. What else do you remember?”

“She is finishing a glass of wine. I think my husband, or Richard, finished his before her.”

“Where are you at this time?”

“I-I don’t know. I must have just returned from work. Oh my God!”

“What’s wrong Melissa?”

My muscles tense, and my heart begins to race. I feel the need to curl under my blanket and escape. I pull the blanket over my head and lie underneath it to forget and calm down.

“Melissa!” he shouts, pulling the blanket off of me.

“Tell me what you remember that is scaring you! I can help you, but you have to start facing your fears with me. If you don’t, you will never be able to earn back your memories and identity!”

He holds my hand, as I try to calm down from the memory. My breathing slows, and I tell him what I can remember.

“The police! They’re taking my husband away! My daughter, Sheila! Doctor, do you know Sheila? Do you know if she is my daughter, as she appears to me in my thoughts?”

“Yes, Melissa. She is your daughter. The reason I’m telling you this, is because you have remembered a great deal on your own, so you have earned that part of your identity back.”

He writes some more notes in his notebook and remains calm as he sits across from me.

“What about Sheila?,” he asks calmly. I sob and shake uncontrollably.

“She--she is my daughter. Oh my God! She is my daughter!”

He smiles with satisfaction, as he quickly writes some more illegible observations on the sheets of paper.

“Now, tell me Melissa. You have made a huge step forward, since I last saw you. Do you have any other memories of your life before you came to recover?”

“Yes.”

“What are they?”

“Sheila’s crying.”

“Do you have any idea why?”

“Yes, because the officer told us that her father is dead. Please Doctor Arthur!” I cry, as he stares blankly at me, and then at his notebook.

“Please let me go home! Please! I want to be with her! I want to see what she looks like, and how she is doing! The images of her will drive me mad, if I don’t see her soon, and help each other remember, and move on with our lives!”

I cry so hard and loud, that my ribs begin to ache. He reaches across from where he is sitting and squeezes my hand in a sympathetic gesture of humanity that is unusual for people who work at this facility.

“It’s all right Melissa. It’s all right. Melissa, you’re doing very well. All of these memories are frightening and sad. I understand. You are making a lot of progress.”

He hands me a tissue, and I begin to calm down. I wipe my eyes, and feel some relief. Relief that for once, someone is trying to understand my pain; and although I know that he will not let me go home yet, I know it will be soon, because I am earning my reward of freedom.

“All right Melissa, that’s enough for today. You are doing very well. I know this is very difficult and frightening for you, but the more you remember, the faster your recovery will be in the future. I’ll be back tomorrow morning, all right?”

“Yes. I’ll try to remember more details,” I assure him, with strength and determination returning to my voice.

“I can’t believe he was murdered! Who would want to kill him and why? I also want to try to remember that woman’s name and why she was standing over my husband, watching as he was dying.”

“In time Melissa,” he reassures me.

“In time. Try to write more memories down for tomorrow. You’re doing very well.”

He pats me on the shoulder and then leaves.

After he leaves, I grab a pen and clear my mind. I try to open myself to my subconscious and write everything down. I address my writing to Doctor Arthur, because I trust his intentions. I begin writing as I remember.

After they pronounced my husband dead, the police questioned me. I begin to scream, and then fall to the floor.

The pen makes heavy impressions on the paper, as I write. Oh my God! After I fainted, this is where I live; in a concrete jungle. I ponder the loss of my humanity, but feel I am slowly regaining it back. Like Doctor Arthur said,

“I have to earn my freedom from my suffering”.

He is earning my respect. He is intelligent, yet professional. Sincere, but not affectionate, I know my will and his help are the ticket to my sanity and freedom. I close

my eyes and think about sleep. I toss and turn, but sleep alludes me. I decide to continue writing.

I must have been attractive, but not beautiful, with my short, black hair slicked to one side. It is greasy, but at one time, it must have looked decent. Educated, but not over qualified. Seeing children crying, while others sing and read books.

No longer do I carve the letters into the paper with desperation. I feel a sense of solace, as I continue my quest to remember.

Men, women and children enter a small, rundown building. HFP, is what the sign reads. Woman is writing their names in a computer. Other men and women dressed in plain shirts and pants greet the people. Each man, woman and child is escorted to a computer or the small room with books inside.

“Oh my God, what does this mean?”

I wonder, but have no answers to quiet my thoughts. I remember Joanna mentioned helping people, especially children. I never believed writing thoughts could help, but I am now more determined to continue this recovery by writing whatever enters into my mind down on anything, including napkins. I don't care what I use. All I care is that my memories will come back to me, and I can leave to be with my daughter, and others who I will probably never remember unless I see them in person. Maybe crazy Joanna wasn't lying. It is odd that she knew my name, and looked at me as if she recognized me from somewhere. Maybe she was telling me the truth. Maybe she was a social worker who worked with me.

“What is the significance of the building that has HFP on the door? Did we work in this building together?”

I ask myself this question over and over again.

My head hurts now. I will show Doctor Arthur my writings, and ask him if she was a social worker. If it is true, I won't tell him anything else. If she worked with me, she will be able to help me recover, so I can reunite with my daughter and try to give my husband the justice I think he deserves. I have been confronted with many memories and a person who claims to have known me before I was forced to live in this place. I clear my mind, pull the torn blanket around my chest and fall asleep.

I hate eating breakfast in the cafeteria. The reason is because I always see Nurse Kathy laughing cheerfully with the other nurses. For the past few days, I haven't been eating breakfast, because of this ridiculous sight. She laughs while we cry. She lives, while most of us want to die. I want to make her feel the way most of us feel. Live with the suffering she inflicts on so many of us. I can't stand her eating in the same room as me, so I leave. I see Doctor Arthur walking down the hall towards Joanna's room.

“I'll be with you in an hour,” he assures me, as he enters her room.

Through the door I can see her sobbing dejectedly against her pillow. I don't know why she is crying. I imagine her tears stem from the reason behind her residence in this mockery of hell. I want to talk to her. I want to know the truth about our past

relationship, or if there was one. I want to know why she is in this place of madness and despair. I'm going to ask Doctor Arthur if she indeed was a social worker, when he comes to see me. Waiting in my room for him to come, I think about Joanna. I hear Doctor Arthur knocking at my door. He said he would be coming an hour later, so I don't ask who is at the door. He enters and sits in his usual spot across from me.

"I've had a difficult morning, so please tell me you remember something else."
He looks so serious and exhausted. I want to ask him about Joanna, but not yet.

"I remember some things, of which I have no idea what they mean."

"All right," he says relieved, "did you write them down?"

"Yes." I pull the sheets of paper out to show him. He looks at each one, and looks as bewildered as I.

"What do you think the children crying, the building with computers and books inside mean?"

"Well, that's what I want to ask you, Doctor Arthur. Who is Joanna?" I wait for an answer. His eyes shift from me to his notepad. I can tell he is wondering whether or not to answer my question, but I don't see why he shouldn't. He is always asking me questions, so it is his turn to answer a few. I can tell he is thinking. Wondering how to answer my question.

"It's not rocket science!," I snap.

“I just want to know who she is, because I had a dream about her last night.”

I know it’s a lie, but who cares. One thing I have learned is the way to freedom and survival is to stretch the truth occasionally. I like the good doctor, but the idea of seeing my daughter and breathing fresh air is more appealing. My daughter needs me. She also deserves to see justice for the person who killed her father.

“Melissa, I would tell you if I could, but I can’t discuss other patients with you. It’s against medical practice, and I could lose my license if she learns that I breached her confidence.”

Knowing that I have his interest, I remain understanding and professional.

“No, Doctor Arthur, she introduced herself to me at dinner last night. Her name is Joanna. She knew my name before I told her. During the dream last night, she told me that we were social workers. What I want to know is if this dream holds any validity?”

He looks stunned. He is silent for two minutes. Probably wondering if I am being honest about the dream. I make sure my facial expression doesn’t betray me. I continue looking directly at him, as he struggles to find the right question or answer. Probably, he is also struggling whether or not to tell me the truth about her. He looks confused and torn. Torn between the right thing and his legal obligation to keep her confidence.

“Melissa,” he says slowly, without looking at me.

“If I tell you, I need you to promise me that you will not tell her who told you.”

“Doctor Arthur, I don’t want to know the details about why she is in here, just if she was a social worker?”

He is relieved.

“Yes she was.”

“Did we work together?” I ask, desperate to find out more about her.

“Melissa, I’m going out on a limb for you. The limb is about to break, unless you find out the rest for yourself. You can, and will remember, but you have to try. I can’t release you until you recover, so it is up to you. Tell me, what do you think HFP means? You have those letters in your writings. Do you think you worked with Joanna at this building called HFP?”

“I don’t know,” I answer truthfully.

“I’ll come back and see you tomorrow. Continue trying to remember. You’re making excellent progress.”

He squeezes my hand good naturedly, and leaves. I feel excited. Joanna isn’t lying about her career as a social worker. I think she may be telling the truth about working with me.

“Where did she work with me, and what happened to make her come here?”

All of these questions I want to be answered. Maybe she can help me find justice for my husband and reunite with my daughter. I am now certain that Joanna will be able

to answer some of my questions. I want more than ever to befriend her. Oh, I am so sure that she is the help I need. Doctor Arthur obviously confirmed she was a social worker; she knew me before I said anything. Maybe she is the key to my past and future.

As I sit in my room quietly thinking about dinner, the bell finally rings. Once again, medical personnel escort me to the cafeteria. The institution fears one of us will have the intelligence or will to escape. After I find a seat, I look for Joanna. Disappointed I can't find her, I move the fork and knife off the plate, not wanting to eat. I wait for several minutes; hoping she will come. Finally, I see her. She is wearing a long, black skirt and a white blouse. She smiles a little when she sees me, and takes a seat beside me.

“Joanna, what was wrong this morning?,” I ask her without a polite introduction. I feel this way, she will know I am concerned and want to talk to her.

“It was nothing really,” she assures me with a dishonest tone.

“Joanna, I know you were telling me the truth yesterday. I'm in this place, not because of my work, but because someone murdered my husband, Richard. I was brought here several months ago, because I went into shock when the policeman told my daughter and I he was murdered.”

“How is Sheila?,” she interrupts me.

She does know me. She confirms the memory of my daughter's name. I am desperate for her help.

“I don’t know. I don’t know! Please, you have to help me!” I cry. Thank God there are no nurses or doctors in the room at this moment. Otherwise, I would have to stop my emotions from spilling out.

“I can’t stay here another month or week! Please, you know how horrible it is to live with these monsters that call themselves Nurses and Doctors. Please, I beg of you to help me! The only person I can trust in this zoo is Doctor Arthur. He told me to earn my freedom by writing down my thoughts. I have been doing so, and remember some things, but I need your help to speed up my recovery so I can reunite with Shelian and give my husband the justice he deserves!”

She takes my hand and holds it for a moment.

“I’ll do what I can to help, but I can’t promise your freedom.”

“I understand, and I won’t blame you if they don’t set me free. I should also apologize for ignoring you the other day,” I announce, as we continue to eat our fish and salad.

“I understand why you were ignoring me. You thought I was just another desperate soul trying to escape the misery of this place by making up some ridiculous story about working with you as a social worker.”

She squeezes my arm to assure me of her forgiveness, and I relax. We finish eating, and accept our tea and coffee. I put some sugar in my tea and stir it vigorously, not knowing what to say.

“Joanna,” I say, breaking the silence.

“What really made you come this place?”

“I told you earlier,” she says impatiently.

“No, Joanna, listen, if you worked as a social worker, you would have been used to seeing tragedy with the families you tried to help. I don’t remember much, but I am certain of this fact. What made you lose your sanity?”

She sits silently; her right hand gripping her coffee cup tightly, as if to relieve her stress and anxiety.

“I don’t know,” she says with an ominous tone.

“How do you know Sheila?”

“My son went to the same school as her. They used to play together. The two of them, until. . . .” She stops in mid sentence and tears fall down her face. I watch her helpless expression and don’t know what to do or say. Oh God, I must have been an awful social worker. I can’t even help a crying woman! She is not hysterical, but she is unable to speak. Her handshakes, and I hold it to try and comfort her. Her coffee is cold, because she can’t drink. Her wrinkles are more visible, as her tears fall down her cheeks.

“Joanna,” I say. A nurse comes to take her away.

“No!” I shout defiantly.

“She’s all right. We’re talking. I’m helping her! Understand?”

I have never seen this nurse before. She walks away with a look of bewilderment. She is probably a temporary nurse, like many others who walk these halls and rooms. I don’t know why she is allowed to come in this cafeteria. I have heard that Nurses and Doctors are forbidden to enter the cafeteria during dinner hour. The reason for this policy is unknown. Nurse Kathy doesn’t seem to mind prancing around our eating area during breakfast, however. Oh well, exceptions for the whole is policy as well. I stop thinking about trivial policies and comfort Joanna.

“Joanna, what happened? Please tell me. I promise I won’t say anything to Doctor Arthur or anyone else. You have to tell someone. You know, the one thing that Doctor Arthur said that is right, is the only way to free yourself and recover is to earn your recovery. I know he’s right. Since I’ve been writing things down, I have been remembering things. The memories frighten and confuse me, because they’re so fast and vivid, but it’s helping me. Please, let me help you. We’ll help each other. You can probably help me more than I can help you, because you remember your past. I’m regaining my memories and my identity with help from myself, and maybe even you!”

She looks at me, and wipes the tears from her eyes. Her face is still red with tear residue, but she regains her composure.

“My son, Jerry,” she says finally. She sips the cold coffee and swallows hard.

“What about Jerry?”

“One year ago he found a lump on his stomach. He ignored it at first, but it just kept getting more noticeable, so he went to the doctor. Several tests were done, and he was diagnosed with Cancer. He went for surgery, because they said they could remove it. Several weeks after the surgery, he went back to the doctor for a follow-up visit, they found it had grown back. . .”

Her tears were understandable. I often wonder what I would do if Shelian took sick and dies, while I’m in this place pretending to recover and playing their silly games. I pray that I never fully understand.

“Joanna,” I say, as she softly cries, while other patients stare. They too, probably understand mental anguish, but don’t want to ask what is wrong.

“When I see Sheila, or talk to her again, I promise you, that I will let you speak with her.”

“Thank you, Melissa,” she says, blowing her nose with a napkin.

“Jerry and her were good friends. When they started ninth grade, they lost touch, but if I can talk to her again, it might help me remember positive times with my son.”

We finish our tea and coffee. Joanna becomes calm again. Her face begins to spread into a smile, because she knows she can help an old friend. The help she is giving me, they cannot prevent.

“Meet me here again tomorrow and we’ll eat dinner together so we can talk about everything,” she whispers so no one can hear.

“Doctor Arthur has very good intentions, but I believe that your recovery will hasten when you leave this place. I’m going to give you the name of your husband and everything, so you can tell him you remember and he will release you to the civilized world.”

“I think I remember my husband’s name; is it Richard?”

“Yes, and you already know your daughter’s name. Don’t make it sound like it’s been rehearsed or collaborated; just talk to him like usual. Write everything down I tell you, but not verbatim. Write it in sentences that are short and random. I’m sure you know how to manipulate him.”

“I don’t want to, but I have to do this for my sanity. I want to see Sheila. Want to feel the breeze on my face. Once I see Sheila’s face, I believe it will be a lot easier to know what happened to Richard and regain my identity.”

She hugs me quickly, and two, muscular guards take us to our rooms.

I am now back in the dull, empty room with no one to talk to me. I feel lonely, but hope it won’t be forever. I wish Joanna and I could share a room. If we could share a room, it wouldn’t be very long before I could amaze Doctor Arthur with my rapid recovery. Unfortunately, evil people are not always stupid. Each room is designed for the purpose of isolation: a hard chair, a single bed and a nightstand. I believe this arrangement is to insure no communication between the patients, until dinner hour. Dinner hour is my favourite time of the day. It is how I survive the stifling loneliness and despair. Oh, I must not think about loneliness, despair, and my passionate desire to

escape. I am certain that Joanna will help me. I will be free as soon as I convince Doctor Arthur I remember my past. I am going to concentrate on my recovery. Nothing negative. If I continue to have negative thoughts about this place, I fear I will die here for my punishment for not trying to get better. I want to read a book to relax my mind, so I can fall to sleep, but I have none. I wonder who has one? I think for a moment, and walk to the next room.

“Flora,” I whisper. Her door is ajar, and she lets me in to show me her choice of books. I don’t know her very well, but feel sorry for her, because of the numerous injections she receives from the nurses and doctors. I hear her screaming twice each day. She is very kind, and seems to be well versed in world literature.

“This one you might be interested in reading,” she informs me with enthusiasm.
“We bought it when we were in Venezuela in 1994.”

“Thank you very much. I promise to return it as soon as I am done.”

She smiles kindly.

“No problem,” she says.

“Flora, what do you mean when you say we were in Venezuela?”

“My son and I went for a travel adventure. I used to write for a travel magazine, so it was also work related.”

Thanking her, I leave her room. I can tell she wants me to leave, because she is becoming agitated, and looks like she wants to cry, or scream. I feel sorry for her. I wonder where her son is now, and why she is another victim trapped in this place. I return to my room and open the book. It has been so long, that I am afraid to turn the pages, for fear they will tear. The smell of the paper makes me feel happy. I know now, that I am slowly regaining my dignity and identity. Yes, as I turn each page of the book, I read and remember a time in my life when I would read to Shelian. A time when I was happy, and Richard was alive. I am tired of reading, and my eyes get heavy with sleep. I close the book and fall into a peaceful sleep. The most peaceful rest I can remember having in a long time.

I wake feeling hungry. I want to go to eat breakfast, but am afraid that Nurse Kathy will greet us with her pretty smile. I can't see her first thing in the morning. I'm not mentally equipped to deal with that ridiculous sight as I am trying to wake up. I am so hungry, that I don't care. As long as she leaves me alone, I won't have my allergic reaction; forcing me to slap her, or worse. I walk into the cafeteria door and look to see if she is present. She is not. Thank God. I sit down at the middle table. I am served two eggs, tea and dry bread. Although I hate the food, I eat it to quench my hunger. As I sit eating, I remember eating baked beans, rice, tea and some kind of flavoured bread for breakfast. Oh, how miserable this food makes me feel. As far as I'm concerned, we eat like dogs in this place. The more I remember, the more I want to leave. I will do anything now. Lie, cheat, anything to leave this human trap. I look desperately around the room for Joanna, and to my delight, she finally arrives. Cautiously, I look around the room to see if any nurses or doctors are lurking. None are in the room. Only two

muscular guards, who leave after showing Joanna to her seat, I look at her, and she sits down beside me with a smile.

“Hi Melissa,” she says cheerfully. We embrace, and eat our breakfast together. “You’re not used to eating this small portion,” she informs me.

“No. I was thinking about that before you came. I remember eating a big breakfast every morning.”

“Yes, we used to tease you at the HFP.”

Shocked that she would mention those letters, I drop my knife and fork on the table.

“What’s wrong, Melissa?”

“Nothing. It’s just that I wrote those letters in my writings for Doctor Arthur. He asked me what they meant, and I told him that I didn’t know. What is the HFP?”

She turns to me and explains.

“Three years ago, there was a case concerning a boy who complained to this classroom teacher about his father’s drinking problem. Fortunately, the teacher was a former social worker, so she called us at HFP. When he arrived, his father was screaming at him, and he was crying. You spoke to the father, and helped him become sober for his son. They would come twice each week. The son would read the books and get help with his homework, and the father would go on the computer to find employment. The last I

heard, they were both doing very well. I should also tell you that HFP means Help for the People, which was the organization we worked at for four years. They're still around, I think. I've been in this place for so long, that I'm surprised I don't have amnesia." She laughs kindly, and I am trying to absorb the information she has given me. I am paralysed to my chair. The children crying, the neglectful parents with the thin, angry boy; the building with the sign HFP, all makes sense now. "Joanna, please tell me more about HFP.

"Well, it means Help for People, and some of the programs that we worked on were education related. Each person is helped, and receives constant help until the problem is completely resolved." She smiles and sips her coffee, and I feel the burden of confusion lifting off of my shoulders. We drink our tea and coffee, and she turns to me and says,

"You say Richard was murdered, and you can't remember how?"

"I remember the police telling Shelian and I he was murdered, and then I woke up in this place."

She puzzles over this statement and says,

"you know Richard was very ill. I remember when you found out that he had a serious heart condition. You cried like some of the children we used to help."

“Joanna, I know he had a glass of wine before he died, and they tell me that he had twice the amount of his heart medication in his stomach. The police say he was murdered, but by whom, I’m not sure.”

“I don’t know either, my friend. You say he overdosed on pills with a glass of wine?”

“I’m saying they think someone murdered him by forcing him to overdose.”

“My God, they think they know everything,” she says with disdain in her voice.

“I think they are just trying to help,” I explain.

“I’m sure they are, but how do they know it wasn’t suicide? I remember you telling me, in confidence, that he only had six months or a year to live. Maybe he decided to quicken his death, because of his condition. When you see Shelian, she might be able to help you remember more details about his death.”

“Yes,” I sigh, waiting for the day when that will happen.

“Until then, you have to outwit these people, including Doctor Arthur. Melissa, remember to write everything down I tell you in the same fashion that you have been doing these past few days,” she reminds me. “I’m seeing him this afternoon. I’m going to ask him if I can call Shelian, so I can hear her voice. Joanna, do you know my phone-number? I’m afraid I can’t even begin to try remembering that on my own.”

“I’ll give it to you now, but I can’t write it down. If they find the piece of paper, they might punish me. Please try to remember the number.”

“Oh, Joanna, I will never forget my phone-number. Once you know you have a child, you vow to never forget anything again.”

She whispers the numbers into my ear, and I repeat it three times to myself. A muscular man escorts us to our rooms and we part ways, knowing my freedom is going to happen sooner than I could have ever dreamed. Thanks to Joanna.

I don’t feel like writing everything she told me down at this moment. I am overwhelmed with the idea that Richard might have committed suicide. I want to know why the authorities believe it was murder, not suicide? What evidence points away from suicide? People who commit suicide do so in a variety of ways; some overdose on alcohol and pills, as they say Richard had done. I know, however, that the evidence of one overdosing on pills and alcohol does not mean he or she was murdered. I puzzle over this question for so long that my head begins to ache. I am more determined than ever before to leave. I am sure that I will be able to recover fully once I see Shelian, and then we can grieve together and find the actual cause of Richard’s death, and my Amnesia. Keeping Joanna’s instructions regarding the writing style in mind, I write everything down she told me to impress Doctor Arthur. I am hoping that once he sees my writings, and realizes that I am recovering fine, he will release me, and the next part of my life can begin. Feeling hopeful and encouraged by Joanna’s information and supportive words, I pick up my pencil and paper and begin to write quickly. I am certain we worked together on other cases at the HFP, so I devise one that sounds plausible.

I do this, because I feel bad for not making the effort to remember the HFP on my own.

Child was crying, because mother and father are fighting all of the time. Spoke with parents and sent them for counselling, and employment training at the HFP. Ate dinner with the parents and child and discussed how to change family communication and dynamics. Helped find mother employment as a secretary through the HFP, so the financial burden wouldn't be so heavy for the father. I was a social worker. Name of my daughter is Shelian. Still wonder if Richard, my husband's death was indeed a murder or suicide. Shelian seems kind, and I think she is eighteen or nineteen. I'm not certain of her age. How can one know the exact age of someone who they are just beginning to remember. Afraid he will use that last sentence as an excuse to make me stay, I erase it, and stop before I write something else I will regret. As I learn about my past through my writings and help from Joanna, I begin to feel confident and powerful against the staff in this place. I decide to show Doctor Arthur and tell him that I want to call my daughter. I hear his familiar rap on my door and answer. He enters with a look of delight.

“What do you remember for me today, Melissa?”

Excitedly, I show him my writings. He reads them slowly: examining the style and the details of each memory. He smiles and says,

“you seem to be certain that your daughter's name is Shelian, and your husband's name was Richard. I'm assuming you thought about this long and hard?”

“Oh yes. I'm sure. I can see her face, hear her voice, and hear the police officer's voice telling us Richard, her father, is dead.” He flips through each page. I have given him my previous writings to emphasize my progress. I know how to play the game of psychological monopoly as well.

“What about the woman in the long, silver dress. Do you remember anything else about her?” I decide to be honest. I am certain he won’t believe this lie.

“No. I still don’t know why she was standing over Richard, watching him die. I don’t even know her name.”

He nods, and continues reading. I am confident he will let me go home. Joanna and I have planned everything. My writings are as they were before, and I don’t tell him lies that would make me become incredulous. I smile as I watch his facial expression and body movements.

“You asked Joanna what HFP means?”

“Yes,” I answer shortly. Looking at his face to make sure his expression is not changing. His mouth remains smiling. His eyes are wide and happy.

“Oh God, please make this happen,” I pray in my head.

He finishes reading through my writings, and looks at me.

“Melissa, you are making immense progress. I must say, I’m happy for you. You still have a long way to go, but you are showing excellent progress. You have recaptured some of your key memories in your life, but you still have to work on remembering who murdered your husband, Richard.” I smile until my cheeks hurt. I feel my heart pumping faster, but not in fear. I feel like jumping off of the bed and shout,

“I’m free”, but I refrain from doing so, because every action is crucial at this point. I have to engage him a little to show him I am capable of remembering outside of these walls.

“I’m not sure if he was murdered,” I say confidently. He is fascinated. The wrinkles in his mouth deepen, and his cheeks brighten.

“Why do you think this way, Melissa?”

“I am not certain. Maybe he was murdered, but one can’t say another person was murdered by an overdose of medication and alcohol, unless they have more evidence. Even if there was a woman standing over Richard watching him die, it doesn’t prove murder. All it proves is that whoever she was, she panicked and didn’t know how to help a dying person. I don’t know who she is, or why she watched Richard die. What I do know is that I am ready to talk to my daughter, Sheila. She needs me, and I need her. Doctor Arthur, if I can talk to her, I am sure I will be able to recover my memories, and find out everything surrounding the death of my husband, Richard.”

He looks concerned, but understanding.

“Do you think you’re ready?”

“Yes. I want to call her. Now that I know her name, I feel ready, and I want to call her.”

He obliges and takes me to a phone in the staff office. I brush past Nurse Kathy and Doctor Bradshaw, and dial the phone-number that I once knew. The ringing is loud

and frightening. I feel nervous. What does her voice sound like? What will she say? Does she think I abandoned her on purpose? I hear a young voice answer. Instinctively, I suppose, I know it is my daughter.

“Hello Sheila. How are you?”

She says nothing for what seems like minutes, and then bursts into tears.

“Mom, is it really you? How are you? When are you coming home?”

My eyes don't fill with tears. My heart fills with defiance and determination.

“I'm coming home today. Do you have any way of picking me up?”

I watch Nurse Kathy and Doctor Bradshaw, and know they are going to punish me after I finish my call.

“I have a boyfriend,” she informs me. I feel a sudden burst of pride, but I know I cannot show my emotions. I fear that if I show any tears of joy, they will seize on that opportunity and take it away. I tell her I'm proud of her, and I will see her in one hour. She agrees and tells me that her boyfriend, James, will pick me up.

“Do you know where I am?” I ask her.

“Yes, the officer told me that you had to be sent to the Health First institution to get better and recover from the shock of dad's death. I know the address, so he'll be waiting for you at the front door.” I bid her farewell, and the conversation ends. I run

out of the room with Nurse Kathy, Doctor Bradshaw and Doctor Arthur following behind me.

“Melissa!” shouts Nurse Kathy, “we haven’t signed your release forms, so you are not permitted to leave!”

“Oh lady, please don’t try to control me. It looks pitiful and stupid, because your voice isn’t authoritative enough, and you’re probably the same age as my daughter.” I laugh at her, as she looks at her feet and then at Doctor Bradshaw, who has a look of disbelief on his face.

“You are still not fit to live a normal life,” she explains with childish defiance.

“Nurse Kathy, I used to be a Social worker. I dealt with situations that would make you run crying to your mom. I lost everything: my identity, my memories and my sanity. Once again, I am regaining it all back. I have earned it all, thanks to Doctor Arthur. Doctor Arthur, please let me go home to be with my daughter! She needs me, and I need her! If you are human, which I know you are Doctor Arthur, you will instruct them to send me home!”

I look at his serious, yet kind face, and I know he is pondering my request.

“Melissa, you are progressing very well. If we let you go home, you must agree to visit me once a week for an evaluation. I feel that you have recovered very well in this environment. Now your daughter and other peers in the community can help you achieve a full recovery.”

He takes my hand, and we walk past Nurse Kathy and Doctor Bradshaw, who stare in disbelief and anger at his decision to set me free. He signs me out at the front desk, and the secretary congratulates me and wishes me well in my future endeavours.

“I’ll make up a full report and submit it to the officer who sent you here, as long as you stand by our agreement. Remember Melissa, the agreement is that you come for a weekly evaluation. I want to see you do well and achieve a full recovery, so you can move past this nightmare in your life.”

“I understand, Doctor Arthur,” I assure him. He signs me out, and I wait for the elevator to take me to the lobby, and to my freedom.

The door opens, and I walk out of the confined elevator. One young man stands, staring at the plain, white wall, while another person opens the outside door. Allowing the air to blow inside, and onto my face, which probably looks tired, sick, and pale. I open my mouth to beg for more air, but can say nothing. The young man, who seems to be having a conversation with his internal self, walks over to the door, opens it, and walks outside. One minute later, he returns, and obliviously grants me my wish to feel the warm breeze from outside. As I stand, waiting for my daughter’s friend to take me to her, I can hear the sound of life outside. Causciously, I walk to the glass door, and open the door ajar. The warm, fresh air, gives me hope, and affirms my desire to never return. Afraid of some of the noises that I once took for granted, I quickly close the door, and remain standing, staring at people in formal attire, and children walking past the looming building of horrors. I feel frozen, disoriented, and intimidated. My mind races, as I wonder if I made the right decision earlier, when I begged, and cried out loud to be

free. I turn away from the door, but know that I can't turn back my decision. If I could do so, and be guaranteed dignity, and minimal psychological, and emotional torment, I would, but I am certain that life doesn't work that way. If life were to be a time capsul, there would be many people, who would reverse their sins, including murders of friends, family, and those, who make us do things that we soon regret. If life could be played, and watched like a video, I would rewind it to Richard's death. Edit the footage to either allow him to live, or to see who it was that killed him, or if he did the deed himself. Although I am certain that life is a cycle, it can only be repeated in death. The door swings open, and I jump, as a young man asks me if I am Sheila's mother. His eyes are kind, and assuring, as I stammer to answer.

“Yes, I am.”

I wait patiently, feeling the warm breeze blowing against my skin. I hesitate, afraid of the noisy cars, trucks and beeping horns, after being isolated for so long.

“It's all right. My car is outside.”

Taking my hand, he helps me inside the car, and we drive away to freedom.

Relieved that I am once again confined to a small space, I sit in the back seat, and we drive away.

“I'm Sheila's boyfriend, James,” he introduces himself. Breaking the nervous silence, as we ride to the house I once called my home.

“I'm her mother, Melissa,” I say joyfully.

“How is she?”

“She is doing very well. She is attending her first year at Waterton University.”

We ride the rest of the way in silence. I still feel nervous. The small confined space of the car makes me feel safe.

I watch as we pull into a small driveway. I think he knows I am nervous. He helps me out of the car, and escorts me inside the house I once knew.

I stand in the doorway and admire its quaint size. Cautiously, I walk into the living room and notice pictures of a little girl, wearing a long, white dress hanging on the wall. I spot a large, wooden cabinet beside the wall with the picture. I nervously open it to see what is inside. Handcrafted decorations of all kinds stare me in the face. Who bought these for me, and where were they made? I don't want to ask my daughter right now, because I haven't even seen her. For the first time in so long, I feel refreshed, and relieved. I know that she and I will be reunited, and we can try to answer the questions surrounding Richard's death.

She descends down the stairs, from what I think is her bedroom to greet me. I momentarily pull away, not knowing what to say or do. She waits patiently in front of me, as I look at her young features.

“Oh God Sheila, you're just as I remembered when I wrote my memories down for my psychiatrist.” She smiles and we embrace. We sit together, drinking coffee. Silence fills the room, as I try to think about what to say to her. How do I tell her about my life in that mockery of Hell? She turns to me and asks me,

“Do you remember anything about dad’s death?”

I put my cup down on the glass table and say nervously:

“I remember a glass of wine, a woman wearing a long, silver dress watching everything unfold, and the police officer telling us he died. I also remember the officer returned to the house several days later to inform us that your father was murdered with an overdose of his heart medication, Simvastatin.”

We finish our cups of coffee in nervous silence, and then she speaks with a tone of conviction:

“I think it was a suicide. Whoever killed Dad knew.”

I look at her face to search for answers. We both search for answers to questions that linger despite our reunion. Did Richard commit suicide, as Joanna believes? Did someone close to him murder him, as Sheila believes? Sheila and I both search for answers to silence the cry we share. The cry for me is the desire to remember. The cry for Sheila is to find the truth behind her father’s death. We will continue to search. I continue to write in order to silence the cry to remember.

Closing the story, I lower my head in deep thought. The front door opens and Sandra walk in with a burger and pop that she bought at Steve’s Burger House. She sits beside me at the table and begins eating.

“Yum, it’s actually not that bad this time.”

I say nothing. I feel tired, yet motivated to write this assignment. I think of Melissa, and even if she is a fictional character, her circumstances are reality for many people.

“What’s wrong?,” she asks. Sipping her Pepsi drink.

“I just read this really cool story. We had to read it for my Cognitive impairment class, and to be honest, I thought it was gonna be academic and boring, but it was anything but boring.”

She puts down her burger, and turns to me with a look of interest in what I just said.

“What was the story about?”

“It was about a woman who suffered from Fugue state amnesia, and how she forces herself to recover.”

“Hold on, you’ve lost me completely. What’s Fugue state Amnesia? I know what amnesia is from that movie, oh, I can’t remember the name of it, but what is Fugue state amnesia?”

“It’s when a person is unable to remember their past, but they can remember current events.”

“Oh. Yes, but isn’t that like Alzheimer’s disease, or some form of memory losing disorder?”

“No, because with diseases like Alzheimer’s, the person continues to lose their memory and there is no hope of recovery. Amnesia, especially Fugue state amnesia, the person has a chance to recover with extensive talk therapy and focusing techniques.”

“Oh. Well, you’re smarter than me, so I believe you.”

“Sandra, don’t be silly. How have your assignments been going?”

“Well, not too badly, actually.”

“Well, I’m just going to write this assignment, because it isn’t that big, and then I’ll get something to eat at that place where you bought your dinner.”

I walk into my bedroom, close the door, and begin writing my article on dealing with Fugue state amnesia.

Dealing with Fugue state Amnesia

By Michelle Greenberg

Amnesia is a well known psychological disorder in the general public, and in the psychology profession. Movies have portrayed Amnesia to be a form of memory, and

identity loss, but this disorder has many types. If one wishes to understand Amnesia, it is important to realize that not all Amnesia victims lose their identity, and memory of their past. Some will only lose their memory for twenty-four hours, in which case, it is called Global Transient Amnesia. Others suffer from dissociative amnesia, where a traumatic event causes the person to block the hurtful memory. The person can however, remember general information, but will be unable to remember the traumatic event that caused the onset of this disorder. Another form of Amnesia that is more serious Fugue state. This occurs when the person is unable to remember his or her past identity, or events. The person is able, however, to process new information, and with a rigorous schedule of psychiatric sessions, the person has a chance in recovering the memories from his or her past. Psychiatrists have used a variety of methods to help Amnesia victims recover from all of these various forms.

The form that will be examined at present is the most serious: Fugue state amnesia. The psychiatric community has developed many methods to deal with this disabling disorder, but it is important, however, to utilize as many different methodologies in order to assure the victim will have a full and healthy recovery.

The methods that were, and are currently in use is talk therapy. This form of psychiatric care consists of the patient confiding in the therapist. The therapist then provides the patient with advice, and might even use some humanistic techniques, such as giving the patient a cup of coffee to make him or her feel comfortable; and after the patient is comfortable and has discussed his or her feelings, the therapist might advise the patient to write thoughts and ideas down on paper. The combination of talk therapy, and

humanistic techniques must be combined in order to relax the patient, so he or she can feel comfortable to share their recovered memories with the therapist.

This method of therapy is slow, and the patient will some times have lapses of memory loss, but if the therapist insures the confidential discussions are known to the patient, and the therapist's attempt to use the humanistic approach to help people relax, recovery will be faster, so the patient can deal with the trauma that caused the Fugue state amnesia.

If the therapist is unable to combine

These two techniques, it will be more difficult for the patient to recover, and function in society. Moreover, it is important for the patient to trust and respect the therapist, so a working relationship can develop to insure a full recovery from his or her Fugue state Amnesia.

I edit it several times, put it into my binder and leave to buy a hamburger at Steve's Burger House. As I walk down the quiet street and see people driving in cars and children talking, laughing and playing together, I feel an overwhelming sense of admiration and sympathy for those who suffer from memory loss. I can't imagine, nor do I want to even fathom the realization that a person's past has been erased from their mind. The vulnerability, anger and frustration that one must have towards others and themselves, as they struggle to have dignity, and regain their identity and past memories. I enter the restaurant, purchase my burger, fries and a bottle of orange juice, and eat it with some appreciation. I am not appreciative of the greasy meat or the fries and drink. What I do appreciate is that I have a better understanding of others who are suffering in

circumstances that most of us neglect, or don't wish to address or comprehend. If I ever befriend a person with this disorder, or any other memory inhibiting condition, I feel that I can help them better, because of my compassion, and newly developed respect for their achievements and desire to live and thrive in this world. I don't think pity is what people who suffer from memory loss need. What they do need, however, is patience, support from others, and to be surrounded by friends and family who love and wish to learn from them, as they themselves learn from their peers and others. In other words, their cry to remember is not to be stopped by the tissue of pity; rather, their cry to remember can be stopped, or softened by replacing frustration, anger and bitterness with hope, and emotional support from everyone around them. After finishing my meal, I walk back to the apartment, close the door to my bedroom and fall to sleep to prepare for the next morning of tasks that everyone must learn and achieve, while helping others who have difficulty and cry to be assisted and taught.