

Mother

Thomas Edmondson Whigham Jr.

As alienating and degrading as everyday experience could feel, it was substantially worse once the spark of defiance had died out, once the toughening sense of anger and disenfranchisement became fear, once that fear turned on loss, because this loss hurt deeper than the skin could thicken.

The world had taken something dear and beloved, her child, and the memories of him were fresh in her heart; the smile, the fact that she had held him and raised him, fed and clothed him, delighted in his growth, worried and loved and cared for him. With this loss came the recognition that life and this society were painfully beyond her control. It was not just the ever present assaults on dignity and identity that worked against her. It was also her emotional machinery. It could not sustain, nor

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endure, without even the merest scrap of nourishment and encouragement.

They said the tree could grow in Brooklyn, through the concrete, through the dirt and heavy traffic, but once the heart was broken it was a wonder it kept on beating for any reason but to ache. And yet that ache was the last solemnity, a refusal to surrender the love felt, a refusal to move on and accept it. It was so hard to grieve, and so unfair, and another reminder of the sick injustice of this place and time.

And it hurt so bad, to even think of this loss, and yet she rose each morning and walked, unsteady at times, into what had become her life. Strong and sick—at the same time.

She took some small comforts in the care and compassion expressed by those near to her. But in the quiet, private corners of her heart, she knew she was broken in a way that would never be fixed. It could maybe heal over, in time, through the reaching of acceptance and the grace of god, and god willing, one day it might. But it would never be whole. And it would never beat and glow and delight with the life of her son, not in this life. He was only in her memory now, and in her mind she wondered, and hoped and prayed, that these did not become poisoned also. The pain of dwelling there would be her companion in grief, but she also knew that she would never fully let that go. On his birthday. On the day he died. She would always remember.

And so what are we to do with this woman? What is our society to think of her? What are we to do with all of these masses, these people, each one a lifetime of stories, each one a volume of love and loss, mistakes and triumphs? How can we bear to endure that we all are aching, hurting, struggling, and yet we know each other little, if at all. And yet we can know we are all hurting and struggling and striving. Not as equals, and not equally. But what are we to make of this?

What are we, with all that is left undone, to do?

Naked Branches

Naomi Salz

■ *Naomi Salz is a fourth year medical student entering the field of Family Medicine after graduation. She enjoys photography, acrylic painting and jewelry making.*