

## **I've Looked Deep into the Darkness.**

By Jason Cootey

I own twelve copies of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. One is electronic so that I can easily search the text when writing papers. Another is a book-on-tape with narration by John-Boy of the "Waltons." The rest are hard bound, soft bound, paperback, trade paperback. I own some old ones from the 50s and the 60s. Of course, I own other books written by Conrad; some of the books are about him. I bought a book full of research essays just because writing this paragraph gave me the itch—Harold Bloom is the editor; in the spectrum of literary criticism, I suppose no collection is complete without something from Harold Bloom. I have a book with the letters of Conrad, his biography, research books, and the collected works printed in 1926. I bought the books and was disappointed to discover that the five-book set does not include Heart of Darkness. Naturally, I need to watch for something older than my 1952 edition. These are not purposeless purchases; my growing collection has more to do with the experience of reading the book than anything else. The impression Conrad's book leaves in me makes me question the people I meet, and the things I experience. In fact, the impress of darkness on my soul helped me identify an encounter with Kurtz in my own life.

In his book's editorial introduction, Harold Bloom argues that "Conrad's quest to carry impressionism into its heart of darkness in the human awareness that we are only a flux of sensations gazing outwards upon a flux of impressions" (3). This relationship between impressionism, sensations, and impressions might be the only way to counter arguments that Heart of Darkness contains unclear language that really doesn't describe anything at all. Bloom and others claim that the "obscurantism" (3) is the flaw of the

novel; however, that same obscurantism is what generates the dream-like quality of both the book and Marlow's narration. The power of the book is when the impressions from that dream sink into the mind and "throw a kind of light on everything about me—and into my thoughts" (Conrad 11). The kind of light is perhaps a moment of obscurantism; yet, the light is also a way to understand what happens when the dream hijacks the mind.

Conrad's book made my reading list for the first time in 1996 at the age of 21. I was a college freshman. I had just returned from two years of missionary service for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and had started school immediately. When time came for the class to read the novel my instructor cautioned me. She called out to me after class as I left the room and joined me in the hall. The other students in the class filed past us as we stood beside the doorway. The hallway was full of students moving between classes; there were some students who stood in large clusters that obstructed the current of the corridor. She told me that students who are very soon returned from missionary service often possess a strong value system; she was concerned that my values may be threatened by the book's message. The warm smile she gave me expressed her sincerity more than any of her words. I wondered why I warranted such sensitive preparations. I personally did not believe that I was so morally inflexible that I could not respect or enjoy a work of literature. The offense that I felt didn't show when I thanked her kindly for her concern, nor when I assured her that I would be careful, and not even when I watched her turn and walk away. The sincere smile was still fixed as she left me. She had said she just wanted me to know, so that I could be prepared. I was prepared; I was even challenged.

Heart of Darkness is the tale of Charlie Marlow—a seaman and a wanderer. Marlow describes how he captains a steamboat on the Congo river and tells of the search for the mysterious, legendary ivory-hunter Kurtz. Yet on the way to Kurtz, Marlow begins to understand just how the man gets his ivory, why he is so legendary in the company as a model ivory trader; Kurtz manipulates the godly influence he has over the local natives, raids the countryside, plunders villages, and kills anyone who withholds the ivory. Rather than morally separate himself from Kurtz, Marlow begins to actually understand the darkness of Kurtz. Marlow says, “Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even to explain—I am trying to account to myself for—for—Mr. Kurtz—for the shade of Mr. Kurtz” (50). The key feature of the book is Marlow’s struggle to fathom Kurtz’s savage depravity while he questions his own haunting identification with Kurtz’s methods. In the end, Marlow concludes that Kurtz is great because Kurtz acknowledges the darkness; Kurtz does not build up any pretenses to cover the inner truth. I agree with Charlie Marlow; Kurtz was a remarkable man.

I read the book in one sitting.

I moved around quite a bit as I read. The book held me fast; and whether on my bed or seated at my desk I could not free myself enough to stop. Two-thirds through the novel Marlow finds Kurtz at the central station amidst all the evidence of Kurtz’s darkness. While I read about the natives’ attack on the steamboat, how Kurtz is taken into custody, and how he ordered the attack on the steamboat, I paced my room because I could no longer sit. I was struck by the callous cruelty of not just Kurtz, but all the European men in the book; they covered their cruelty with purpose and notions of civilization. However, their pretenses were only excuses that were not sufficient to hide

their darkness: “it was as unreal as everything else—as the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work” (27). There missionary efforts to civilize Africa was just exploitation.

In all that night of reading I failed to see the threat to my delicate values; my teacher had been wrong about my moral inflexibility. I suppose other students returning from missionary service were offended because the security of morals is just one more pretense in the book. Those students, so soon home from church missions, must have refused to believe that pretenses like moral inflexibility dress up the truth. Kurtz’s last words before he dies, “the horror the horror” (60), are indeed a judgment on his life; however, the words are also an honest evaluation devoid of any pretense. Kurtz doesn’t make excuses for his actions. I didn’t reject the book; I didn’t want to be like the people Marlow identifies when he returns to Europe at the end of the story: “Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend” (70). I didn’t want to be like those other return-missionaries. Rather, I learned that greatness and evil are not synonymous with good and evil; Kurtz’s evil is capable of brilliance and greatness. I had learned to respect Kurtz as a remarkable man because he has the courage to define his actions as they are, and not as any feeble pretense can paint them.

Marlow points out that a fragile barrier of artificial restraint is all that separates anyone from the darkness within. The pretense of civilization simply conceals the monstrous savagery that constitutes the core of everyone. Marlow stripped away the redeeming values of civilization, as well as all the world’s anchors, to show that any one

person is only as great as how they confront the darkness. I try to be honest about what I see in the darkness, irrespective of the garish ways that people try to code the savagery. So I sat in my room after I completed Conrad's Heart of Darkness. A kind of light was thrown about me; I could see the pretenses in the expectations of a return-missionary. I saw the message of the book in my commitment to school. The fakeness of people began to annoy me, as is the case with Marlow at the end of the novel. That is why everything reminds me of Heart of Darkness.

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Two and a half years before July 19, 2004, when Lori Hacking was reported missing in Salt Lake City, I worked with Mark at the University of Utah Neuropsychiatric Institute—an intensive outpatient psychiatric hospital. I worked at the facility from August of 2001 until April of 2002. My second BA is in psychology, and seeing how my BA in English literature couldn't conjure up a full-time job for me, I decided on a job at a psychiatric hospital. Mark and I worked together as psychiatric technicians. I knew him before he was arrested for the murder of Lori Hacking on August 2, 2004; I knew him even earlier, before he started pretending that he was still matriculated at the University of Utah. Mark's trial was set for April 18, 2005. However, he plead guilty at the pretrial on the 15th: "I intentionally shot Lori Hacking in the head with a .22 rifle" ("Mark Hacking Pleads"). I still remember two years ago he was my colleague. I might have traveled the Congo to meet him, just as Marlow met Kurtz.

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I had read Heart of Darkness again as a sophomore, in yet another course. That is when I started my collection. I started to memorize a large quantity of lines from the text.

Many of the lines I knew by heart were from Marlow's eloquent descriptions of Kurtz's extra mortal greatness, as well as the evaluations of Kurtz's actions. I read the book repeatedly; I could quote my favorite lines. I was a junior when the third college course that focused on Marlow's "inconclusive experience" ended tragically for me. I spoke up often in class because I was so impressed with Kurtz's mysterious faculty for articulation and perception, and so excited to share how thoroughly I understood his "last opportunity for pronouncement" (69) at the doors of death: "The Horror, The Horror." I quoted the text rather than turn to the pages. I energetically voiced my insight into the depth of Marlow's experience. The professor made concerted efforts to shame me in class. By the time I got to the fourth course, in my senior year, I was not willing to threaten another professor's authority. I wasn't willing the first time either; but I had no idea what affect my excitement would create. The fourth time I studied Heart of Darkness I never raised my hand. I sat in the back of the room too. I tried to remove myself from those class discussions as much as possible without actually skipping class. I was tortured by the silence because there were so many things my classmates didn't see.

Don't misunderstand me; I know all about the decapitated heads that decorate Kurtz's front yard picket fence (57). I know about the nightly rituals where African natives offer sacrifices up to him (50). I know about the postscript near the conclusion of the article Kurtz writes for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs: "Exterminate the brutes" (51). I know about how he keeps a young lady in Europe, his "intended" (49), available as a backup while he lets the tribes marry him to a native girl. I know that he exploits the innocence of natives, let them believe he is a God (50), and leads them to war against other tribes so that he can ship ivory to Europe (56). I

know he kills for ivory (56). I know! I also know about issues with the book itself; I cringe when I read the racism in Conrad's prose. I don't need Chinua Achebe's 1975 lecture on racism in Heart of Darkness (Achebe 254); Marlow speaks of the native who works the boiler on the steamboat: "to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs" (38). I know the Africans in Conrad's book are described as nonhuman. But can't you see the value of Kurtz's insight and vision? He knows too; and he does not hide from the inner truth in his life. I do not embrace, celebrate, or become one with my darkness like Kurtz; however, I know about my darkness.

I drug my little brother Ryan down to my room once. I cannot even remember why anymore. I do remember that he wouldn't tell me what I wanted to know. So I tried to interrogate him like in the movies. But the insufferable brat tried to call my bluff, so I kicked him in the head just like I had threatened. He was too busy crying to tell me what I wanted. There are all kinds of excuses and pretenses I can use to cover up my callous cruelty. Maybe I can say that Ryan and I were young. I can blame the psychic influence of Hollywood on my mind. Perhaps I can validate the kick by recounting all the crazy violence he directed against me. I could lie about my motives and suggest that the kick was an accident; after all, I only wanted to pretend to kick him. However, when I look at the world with Marlow's eyes I cannot avoid the truest, most ugly reason: I really wanted to kick that jerk in the head.

I see darkness in me and everywhere about me. Marlow said his adventure on the Congo "throw[s] a kind of light on everything about me" (11). He said he still bares the shade of Kurtz. I like to think that I do too. So when I say that random things remind me

of the Heart of Darkness, I cannot be more serious. I am reminded. I am affected. I admit my affectedness. I see that “kind of light” every day and let Marlow’s dream reduce my life to scenes from the novel.

My wife, Karen, loves her new friend Amy. Karen desperately wants me to make friends with Amy’s husband—Joseph. I cannot match that level of friendship, where the intoxication of kindred spiritedness is like pollen in the spring air. Karen thinks that Amy is so special that she wants me to benefit from that special friendship through Joseph.

We had dinner. Joseph and I sat in the living room staring at each other, our children running about and pulling all the toys out of the kid’s room. Joseph’s girls were showing off their belongings, and my girls were showing off their belongings too. We sat there silently trying to figure out how we were supposed meet the fantastic expectations of our wives. Karen and Amy were so excited that Joseph and I were together—bonding—that they couldn’t even sit down. The evening was pleasant, and Joseph and I warmed up to each other. Well ... we talked about school. Once home, Karen wanted to know what I thought of Joseph.

“Joseph reminds me of the Heart of Darkness.”

Poor Karen. She is used to this kind of insight. Of course, the parallel is so obvious. Joseph is balding, but has a beard. The engineer that helps Marlow reassemble the steamboat is also balding, with a beard. Marlow suspects that as the hairs fall from the engineer’s head, they gather at the engineer’s chin. The engineer’s beard is so long that he handcrafts a kind of sack that hooks around his ears with which he can protect his beard as he works on the equipment. Joseph’s baldhead inspires thoughts about pretense

and darkness. I don't think Karen was very impressed. She laughed though; even if the laugh was a mixture of shock and annoyance.

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On the second of August Salt Lake City's KSL news broadcasted, "The man who reported his wife missing two weeks ago, tonight faces aggravated murder charges in her disappearance and death. Salt Lake City police chief Rick Dinse says there's enough evidence to charge Mark Hacking with murder in the death of his missing pregnant wife" ("Mark Hacking Arrested"). Lori Hacking was reported missing by her husband on July 19, 2004. He apparently contacted the police 30 minutes after he purchased a new mattress ("Mark Hacking Arrested"). Investigators suspect Mark tried to replace a blood-soaked mattress found in a dumpster. Lori's body had apparently been disposed in another dumpster, her body was not found until October 1, 2004 in the Salt Lake landfill. That same day, KSL news reported:

The remains were heavily decomposed. Police were able to recover most of the remains, which should expedite their ability to confirm the identity of the individual. Remains were not held intact, but they believe they have a full body. Police say it looks like a petite body, from what they can tell ("Dental Records").

The forensics lab took nineteen days to verify Lori Hacking's identity by autopsy. As the story developed from a missing woman to autopsy results, I often imagined what kind of thinking and depravity would be needed to kill Karen on our own bed. I would have to dispose of our mattress. I tried to put myself beside a dumpster in some darkened corner of the city as I heaved my wife's body up into the dumpster. The image of numbed

heartlessness still makes me wonder at the depths of darkness in Mark's mind. Yet thanks to Conrad's Heart of Darkness, and my likely unhealthy obsession with the novel, I question whether numbed heartlessness is really so specific to Mark.

There is a smaller drama in the case of Lori and Mark, closer to the beginning of the case. In the sixteen days between when Mark reported Lori's failure to return from a morning run in July and when he was taken into custody in August, an elaborate matrix of deceit was unwound. He was matriculated at the University of Utah until 2002, but he continued to inform his family that he was progressing towards graduation (Campbell). He printed his own report cards, bought books every semester, wandered the campus, printed graduation invitations (though he was sick the day of commencement), spent hundreds of dollars sending out applications to multiple medical schools, and flew to various states to non-existent medical school interviews. They had started the steps to purchase a home in the state to which they would move for his medical school education. (I sometimes find myself reassuring Karen that I really am a Utah State University graduate student.) There are some people who speculate that the day Lori found out about the lies was the same day Mark reported her missing. Needless to say, Mark's credibility eroded rapidly. Mark pleaded guilty on April 15, 2005.

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When I started at the psychiatric hospital I had come from a student reference-assistant job at the University of Utah's Marriott library and program studies in English literature. The hospital job was easy to get. I had a friend. My first week on the job involved orientation and training. I was not to be allowed near the lock down units until after I certified. The orientation was the first two days of the week and the training was

the last three. I had no idea what the patient population was like in the psychiatric hospital and knew that all my library experience would not help me much.

The orientation room had no windows. The folding chairs lined the three walls that faced the dry eraser board. The wall with the board was the same wall with the door. The chairs were almost all full of people talking together. The voices were low enough that I could sort out isolated conversations. The common topic was job responsibilities: “What job were you hired for?” I remember my surprise when I learned that I would orient and train along with the nurses and office HUC’s, because for some reason I thought orderly work was only for orderlies.

With the exception of one man, everyone in the orientation room was a new hire. I had started to hear about takedowns and hostile patients. Different people in the room had bits of information that only deepened the confidential mysteries concealed one floor above us. No one really seemed to know what actually happened behind the magnetically sealed doors of the lock down units. Nervous whispers. Uncomfortable laughter. The one seasoned man in the room had been talking casually with an administrator, but when the administrator left the room the seasoned man spoke.

“There was a code white on the adolescent unit last night. The kids had barricaded themselves in the common room. It took hours to get that situation under control.”

Those were the first words I heard from Mark. He had said them while we sat together. I had chosen the seat next to him on random chance, but I was already glad I did. I realized that I had a psychology degree, a stable mind, a desire to serve the patients, and I didn’t have to be scared of the patients. I wanted to confront a hostile patient, and see if I was made of the same kind of stuff as the hardened psychiatric technician seated

at my side. Mark's legs were stretched out in front of him, and he had slouched so low in the chair that I thought his tailbone might be all that supported him on the edge of the seat. Yet he looked so cool and confident. I had wondered when I would finally be like that, so desensitized by hostility. Desensitization is the last psychic space left for health care workers anywhere. I laughed at the most horrible things, not because I was soulless, but rather because the only other alternative was to cry. However, as I sat in that orientation room I had never faced any patients or any horrors. I had been so anxious about code whites that I respected Mark for his apparent nerve.

Mark attended orientation as one of the orientation staff; he was to be our trainer in the upcoming days. We had training and certifications scheduled for the next two days, and I looked forward to any hints about work on the psychiatric units that Mark could pass on to me.

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Nonviolent Crisis Intervention was a standard certification at the University of Utah Neuropsychiatric Institute. All employees needed to be familiar with the de-escalation techniques necessary to maintain the safety of the psychiatric units. Suicide attempts, drug detoxification, psychotic episodes, medication stabilization, and abuse are all reasons for intensive lockdown treatment. Most patients come in on a stretcher or escorted by officers. Some patients go through the intake department on the first floor. However, admission does not mean automatic cure; the patients still pose a threat to themselves and every other at-risk patient on the unit. Nonviolent Crisis Intervention focuses on verbal de-escalation skills in order to give patients healthy alternatives to inappropriate behaviors. But patients never get admitted to intensive lock down units

because they are open to healthy alternatives. They don't typically want to discuss the value of those alternatives either. Most patients are actually offended that they must be on the unit in the first place; there is nothing wrong with them after all. When verbal de-escalation fails, Nonviolent Crisis Intervention certifies personnel with the necessary restraint techniques that minimize harm and injury. However, my main priority was to de-escalate situations without the use of force no matter how suddenly the situation arose.

There was a yell and a crash from the male rooms of the adolescent unit. I was stationed in the hall. The lock down hallway was only 15-25 yards long with five rooms that lined each side of the hall. The male rooms were the first cluster of rooms after the dayroom; the female rooms were just a few steps more down the hall. The assignment of the rooms was designed to avoid the problem of males passing by female rooms on the way to the common room. In addition, psychiatric technicians stationed in the hall were responsible to maintain the invisible barrier so that girls didn't dally in transit and boys didn't detour out of their way. In addition, the hall post was important for the safety of any high risk patients isolating themselves in their bedrooms. So when I heard the yell and the crash I was immediately darkening the doorway of the boy's room.

Federal laws, minority laws, and confidentiality laws guard the boy's identity; yet, this boy saw me at his doorway and threatened me with my life, "Go away. I'll fucking kill you." I was used to that. I gave a nod to a colleague and the adolescent unit was on alert. The therapist with the kids in the dayroom came up with another therapy game to keep the kids distracted longer. The inner magnetic doors were shut to seal off the rooms from the nursing station. The head nurse called a code white.

Despite popular opinion, and Hollywood portrayals of massive orderlies bulging through their white uniforms, UNI (our phallic appellation for the facility) does not have a team of recon marines ready to repel through the tiles of the ceiling at a moment's notice. There is only the psychiatric technicians—like I once was. If verbal de-escalation fails between a staff member and an escalating patient, then the head nurse phones the hospital operator to announce a “code white.” The code white is an alert that summons available personnel from around the building. The theory is that with more people present for a take down, the risk of injury reduces with every additional person. Psychiatric Technicians (a gangly bunch of psychology students with a notable absence of raw muscle) from around the hospital gather for the last moments of parley.

Nonviolent Crisis Intervention techniques are very useful for those moments of parley, or non threatening discussions about healthy alternatives; the techniques are also helpful to safely restrain the patient from further self-harming behaviors. The code white often ends with a take down, as a dozen psych techs swarm the patient, and kindly procure safe transportation to the isolation room (the patient face down, hanging like a coffin between pallbearers, screaming a mantra “Someone kill me Someone please kill me” or “I want my mom I want my mom I want my mom” or “you fucking homos don't touch me or I'll fucking kill you put me down you fags I'll kill you”).

I went into a male patient's room alone; after the psych techs had gathered for a take down. The patient would have escalated if he knew there were a dozen or more psych techs in the hall outside his room, so only Mark stood by the doorway. Mark would make the signal if the boy melted down on me.

The lights were off, so that only natural light filtered in through the Plexiglas window. The room seemed so dark. The bed was disheveled. His clothes had been thrown around the room. A chair was overturned. He stood in the corner by the window at the back of the room. I could hear him breathing; his respiration was heightened by psychiatric medications. The silhouette of his torso expanded and contracted; his exhales sounded like a rake on concrete. Not only had he lost 30 IQ points because he had been huffing carbon monoxide from a paper bag, but I also knew that the medications turned cognitive processes into very confused moments of profound frustration and anger. I would not be able to rely on the boy to hold his end of our conversation. He could not be expected to see through the thick fog over his mind sufficiently to understand the consequences of assaulting staff. He wouldn't understand healthy alternatives. I would have to guide him and prompt him, without threatening his tenuous sense of independence (a sense long since crushed in the 24 hour lock down unit), to make a positive choice—any positive choice.

“You seem really upset today. Is there something bugging you?”

“I want to see my mom.” He yelled the words like a threat. He was poised for an attack. I wondered if he would throw something or rush me if I didn't conjure him mother up at that moment. He was a very violent boy. He went to isolation at least twice a day for assaulting staff, peers, or hospital property. If he had skills to communicate emotion before the huffing, he lost them with the 30 IQ points. I was glad that Mark was watching so attentively. I would need him to get all the techs into the room before the boy could attack me.

“I saw you with her yesterday. Is she coming again today?”

“YOU ASSHOLE! I’LL KILL YOU! LET ME SEE MY MOM!” His fists balled up as he screamed.

“I want you to see her. Maybe we should call her and find out if she is coming today?”

“.....”

I wait for a response. Silence is the strongest prompt I have at times.

“Ya.” I can see his body loosen a little.

After some time I walked out of the room with the boy. The patient made an enormously brave choice to de-escalate himself, and his psychologist would praise him when the boy got out of voluntary isolation. He chose isolation so he could calm down before calling his mother. The inner magnetic doors reopened after the boy entered isolation. I took my post at an observation window so I could watch him. The dayroom opened up and the therapist directed the teens back to their rooms. They knew someone was in isolation because I was standing at the door; however, they were never in a position to see if things had gone bad.

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My Nonviolent Crisis Intervention certification has Mark Hacking’s signature. Of course, the signature predates the murder allegations by four years. Yet four years later I still have the certification card, and I think back on the Mark I once knew. He was a good trainer. He was a supportive colleague. I could count on him. My memories of Mark are all rather pleasant, but the memories are not what trouble me. The absence of suspicion from those who knew him so much better than me disturbs me the most. Mark’s brother Lance said, “If you wanted someone to be a gentle, loving husband, that was the Mark

that we know, that is the Mark that we see every day. I love him and I don't have any doubts about him" ("Hacking Family"). These words were spoken three days after the disappearance. Even in the face of Mark's university matriculation deceptions, the family retained their solidarity with their kind-loving brother/son.

Charlie Marlow understands Mark Hacking's pretense. Those closest to Kurtz adore him too. In fact, Kurtz gives no sign of his darkness until Marlow takes the steamboat to pick the man up from the inner station. (. . . or until Mark calls the police to report his missing wife.) But Marlow also details the way that other Europeans along the Congo cover their darkness. There is the accountant who ignores the death of an agent in his office because he must keep accurate records (22). There is also the central station's brick maker who spends his time dominating the other men of the camp and doing secretarial work for the station manager because "there was a physical impossibility" (30). Marlow's narrative carefully peels back the artificial restraint of the Europeans as well. Everyone Marlow meets has that same savagery within:

Yes, it was ugly enough, but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend

I cannot help but think of the savagery within myself. Like Mark and Kurtz, the same absence of suspicion figures into my own life. I love my wife and she has no doubts about me. Hard working and faithful husband are ways she might describe me. Yet what assurance are those pretenses? I worked with Mark and had no more cause to suspect him

of shooting his wife in the head with a rifle than Karen now has to suspect me. When some random coworker from your past shows up in the news as a killer I would like to see you deal with that without questioning the absence of suspicion in anyone else you know. Or yourself.

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Orientation ended only two days before, and this was the last day of Nonviolent Crisis Intervention training. Mark planned to certify me that afternoon. The training room was a simple conference room where all the tables had been cleared away. The open space was sufficient to give the group of trainees plenty of room to practice defense techniques, safe take down techniques, and safe restraint protocols. Mark stood before us all; he was talking about the useful defense technique when a patient bites.

“If a client bites you, feed the bite.” Mark said.

He demonstrated how to feed the bite with his wrist and his own mouth. He looked as if his one objective was to stuff his throat full of his own body parts. Though Mark looked rather silly standing with his own wrist in his mouth, in front of a row of thirty trainees, the demonstration was still effective. Mark went on to explain that the patient cannot bite down as effectively with a wrist jammed back against the jaw’s temporomandibular joint—a kind of wedge. However, he confessed that he had another technique that was more effective.

“It hurts more, but I guarantee the patient will let go.”

He instructed us all to put the tip of our index fingers against the base of the nose, at the nostrils, where the bone ends and the cartilage begins. He told us to apply pressure

to the stub of bone, and rub vigorously. We all laughed together, all thirty of us, at the surprise of the pain.

But I didn't laugh when she bit me.

The adolescent unit isolation room was not very big. One person alone can feel the empty space, and bare walls, close around them. But there were a dozen of us in the room. There were four walls, with a solid door. One wall had a one way, Plexiglas, observation window. The floor was concrete with a vinyl mattress (for easy scrub down) and six rings built into the floor around the mattress. The girl was wailing, swearing, and threatening that if we bruised her again she would call her father because he was a lawyer. But she was so malnourished that her bed gave her bruises when she slept. She wanted to starve herself to death and was not going to let a psychiatric lock down unit stop her. She was frail bones, wrapped with thin, cold skin. Her shallow cheeks were pale. The girl would die despite all the interventions of staff, psychiatric technicians, and doctors without nourishment. On doctor's orders we had to put her in full body restraint so that she wouldn't pull out the IV and feeding tube again.

Tori had the bucket full of the restraints. Nancy, the med nurse, had the syringe of Ativan. Once we had her restrained Nancy could inject the sedative. Lindsey had control of the girl's legs. Yet Lindsey couldn't apply restraints until he had someone to control the girl's mule kicks. Lindsey was doing his job, so no one was kicked, but her legs needed restraint. I had her right hand, so she couldn't hit herself, me, or anyone else. Peter was starting to put the first of the restraints on her left wrist, but he couldn't both control the thrashing arm, and apply the restraint. The girl started banging her face

against the cement floor. We had placed her on the mat in the first place, but after all her kicking and jerking she had managed to get her face over the edge of the padding. We shifted her, and reset her over the mattress. She continued to hammer her face against the vinyl and her nose started to bleed. I pushed her head down onto her cheek, and against the mattress, to stop her head banging. There was no time to think about what I looked like when I pushed the side of her face into the mattress. Yet, if not for me, her brain would bounce around inside her skull with each time her nose struck the mattress.

I got into this job for people like her. I left for the same reason. To listen to her wails as she laid in five point restraint (the fifth restraint was often put around her waist when she continued to try and beat herself against the floor despite the restraints) was as difficult as watching her ghostly figure pass down the hall. This girl was in an epic struggle to die and I was there to understand her along the way. If my effort to understand changed nothing at all for her, then I could still make her live even if that meant I had to hold her head down against a mat until the help from other units showed up.

Mark, and the adult unit techs, had just arrived. I was so glad to see them because we needed the extra hands. There was only so much so few of us could do without actually causing her pain ourselves. We were simply holding her until more help arrived. Mark led some of them to help Lindsey on the legs. A tech I didn't recognize came to help with the hands. The mystery tech put his hand on the girl's head, so I could use both hands on the girl's wrist restraints. Yet Peter still needed help controlling her left hand while he set the restraint. She was screaming with fright and fighting desperately to keep her arm free of Peter's restraint. After setting her first restraint, I moved to help him. I did

not pay attention to where my arm was in relation to her face. She clamped down on my forearm.

“I’m feeding the bite!” I shouted as everyone gave me helpful nonviolent crisis intervention tips.

The girl’s jaws were locked firmly. She looked at me fiercely, and I couldn’t tell if she smiled—my arm was in the way. I continued to feed the bite, but couldn’t pull my arm out because she would clamp down again.

Mark pushed his way in and reminded me of his nose trick. I felt around for the sensitive tip of bone and pushed. She growled in anger, but didn’t let go. Thankfully I was still feeding the bite; though she would not release my arm, she could not bite harder or break skin. I tried the nose trick again with more pressure. She screamed with a wild snarl as she let go and spat. Well, she tried to spit. She had tried that on one of her first take downs at UNI, so Tori was already prepared, and threw a small hand towel over the girl’s head.

My apparent callousness in the commission of such nonviolence against a little, emaciated adolescent female may seem monstrous. However, the staff laughed about that kind of stuff. Well . . .that might seem monstrous too. What do you expect us to do—cry? Protest? I was verbally assaulted every day of the entire full time week at UNI. Physical defense was a daily constant because I could plan on being attacked at least once per shift. If I didn’t do my fifteen-minute check on each patient the kid who microwaved his gerbil and wanted to grow up to be a serial killer would rape the sexually manic girl because the voices insisted he should. Then the kid who thought he was Jesus because

some moron slipped LSD into his drink at a party would walk over to the sweating pair in his underwear and forgive the girl for getting violated.

No wonder Kurtz whispered “the horror the horror” into the darkness. The laughter of hospital personal was one of those pretenses. Without some kind of shield I would not be able to serve the patients at all. I would give in to the human drama and help the girl pull out her IV and feeding tubes. You would disconnect yourself too. You would desensitize yourself as fast as possible and then you would laugh with Mark and me in the break room. When you have to take down a suicidal boy because he threatened to cut himself with a crayon you have to go home pleased at a job well done, or admit yourself to the adult unit. The laughter is a survival tool for the people who care too much. Yet, perhaps the laughter is a pretense that hides the callous cruelty.

\* \* \* \* \*

I haven't worked at UNI for a long time.

So when I stared in awe and horror at the August 2, 2004 newspaper, two and a half years had passed since I last saw Mark. The police department's profile picture of Mark featured on the front page. He looked like any other numb face—dark around the eyes and stumps of hair on a baldhead—in any police lineup around the country. That frozen moment of recognition seemed so still and silent in my mind. Sixteen days of a missing woman and this was the first time I had seen the husband's face. Oh I had heard his name, but I hadn't seen or thought about Mark, and actually never really knew his last name. He was always Mark; and there are thousands of Mark's. That face was someone I knew though, and I struggled to resurrect the memories of acquaintances and friends. The

nonviolent crisis intervention training, the girl, the nose trick, eight months of nightly code whites at UNI, and Mark Hacking all surfaced from the deep waters of memory.

The big cheeks and small eyes gave Mark away to me. There was something about that squint that I had seen before. I had seen that squint on lunch break and laughing behind the nurse's station. With that squint he looked up at me after he signed my nonviolent crisis intervention certification. That was the squint on his face when he reassured me that he was there to back me up. I trusted that face.

\* \* \* \* \*

The first night after removing a bed-ridden Kurtz from his station, Marlow discovers that Kurtz is no longer onboard the steamboat. Marlow leaves the boat and quickly discovers Kurtz's trail through the grasses. Kurtz is so sick that he must crawl back to the jungle and his loyal African natives. Marlow heads Kurtz off. He stands between Kurtz and the bomb fire of the tribe further off in the woods. Marlow says of that moment:

but when actually confronting him I seemed to come to my senses, I saw the danger in its right proportion. . . We were within thirty yards from the nearest fire. A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow. . . 'if he makes a row we are lost,' I thought to myself. (64-65)

Marlow manages to say the right things, and Kurtz returns to the steamboat. However Marlow goes on to express how impossible is an appeal to such a supernatural being of impenetrable darkness. There is nothing in the pretense of civilization that can appeal to Kurtz's frank savagery and therefore nothing insures that Kurtz will not set the natives on

the steamboat again. Marlow writes that he must trust Kurtz to insure the safety of the steamboat's crew.

Of course, I did not think about Kurtz and fire pits when I worked with Mark. He was a nice colleague with whom I had fun at work. Yet, as I think back on the trust I placed in Mark I feel a great deal of discomfort. To what did I trust? What possible restraint can I expect from a man potentially capable of the murder of his own wife on their bed? Mark confessed in a court of law that he shot Lori in the back of the head while she slept. I'm not the only one who trusted Mark though. The absence of suspicion got the better of a lot of people he knew very well. Obviously Lori trusted him quite a bit when she fell asleep, but Mark's father, Douglas Hacking, had a lot of trust even three days after Mark reported Lori as missing. Douglas Hacking said, "I confronted my son yesterday morning, I looked him in the eye, and I said 'I need you to tell me if you had anything to do with Lori's disappearance.' I have to tell you that he looked me in the eye, and he said, 'No'" ("Hacking Denies").

Lori's family wiped Mark's name from Lori's tombstone in December of 2004. Lori's mother explained the family's decision: "We just felt that Mark obviously didn't want her anymore" ("Hacking' denies"). I suspect the family no longer trusted Mark like before the arrest. Yet all this terrific hindsight serves no real purpose because everyone trusted Mark's at-face-value when the absence of trust would have made the greatest difference for Lori.

The boy had lost 30 IQ points, had a hostile affect, and had a history of daily violence on the unit. I remember the confidence I felt in my colleagues as I entered that room. I knew that if I failed I could trust Mark to get everyone into the room. Whether or

not Mark will murder his wife two and a half years after he watched me walk into the violent boy's room is rather meaningless, except for the notion haunts me. Perhaps at that time Mark had no idea about his darkness. Only later did he maybe confront his darkness, and cover it up with layers of pretense and deception. But he must have gone mad with the savagery in his soul.

Marlow's narration provides a lot of detail about how the shade of Kurtz haunts him. The shade haunts me too. I once attended the parental delinquishment case of a father in which I was the witness representing the state of Utah. I didn't work for UNI anymore; I worked as a caseworker for the Utah Division of Child and Family Services. The father failed to show for the trial and refused to make contact with his attorney. The judge ruled on the lack of natural parental interest in the child and severed every single one of the man's parental rights. As the judge reviewed all her findings against the man—taking a good twenty minutes of time—I thought about my own daughter and how I loved her so much; I also thought about Kurtz. I nearly cried as I listened to the product of my casework and testimony. That was way too much counter-transference; however, I was reminded of Heart of Darkness. Marlow indicates the most disconcerting aspect of his memory of Kurtz:

Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery. The utter savagery had closed round him. . .But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself and, by Heavens I tell you, it had gone mad . . . No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. (10, 65)

Inside Marlow, inside me for that matter, is utter savagery. Both Mark and Kurtz look inside and their soul goes mad. I sat there in that trial, testified against a father like myself, and contemplated my relationship with my own infant daughter.

I wondered at what the absence of fatherly connection would look like with me. I looked past all my pretenses at the frank possibility in each of the findings the judge ticked off. There had been so many times where I let my unpreparedness for fatherhood temporarily convince me that I didn't want my child. I would think of ways I could be free of the responsibility and then immediately come to my senses. My senses: yet another pretense. Whether or not I am strong enough to resist the madness really isn't the point. The point is there is something to resist. When I go through the ordeal of looking deep within myself I see the potential for heads on pikes, and my wife in the landfill. So what is my restraint? Why don't I go mad with the utter savagery? The answer to that question is the scariest part of everything I am trying to tell you.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was in church on August 22, 2004 preparing to teach Gospel Doctrine: an adult sunday school class. I still like to teach at church. In fact, I make a habit of approaching the Bishop and requesting a teaching assignment. I go into the scriptures in true english-literature-scholar style. Words and text are explicative whether or not the author is divine. The more intricate the web of interpretation and cross-textual references the more excitement I feel. Those who attend my sunday school classes speak openly of how much they enjoy my scriptural approach. While I prepared for my lesson that afternoon there was a People magazine article that lingered in the back of my mind. I had read the article six days previous.

I actually didn't think much about the article in those six days. However, I woke up that Sunday morning, opened up the lesson manual, and a specific passage from the magazine invaded my mind. The People article stunned me and made me look into myself at my own savagery. In fact this was the moment where Kurtz, Mark, savagery, and me all came together. Since the 2nd of August I was horrified that I knew Mark; but I wasn't actually reminded of Heart of Darkness until that Sunday morning. The People article detailed Mark's own church activity:

At his Mormon congregation, where he sometimes taught Sunday school, Mark charmed kids and parents alike with his sunny disposition and evident faith. 'When he taught class, you could tell he knew a lot about gospel doctrine,' says one congregant. 'He was real insightful and enthusiastic too.' (Campbell)

Marlow and I are not mad, but we have the honesty to see that there is nothing that securely separates us from either Kurtz or Mark. Mark taught Sunday school, impressed those in attendance, and left an impression of deep commitment to God. Talk about the pretense of artificial restraint. Forgive my arrogance, but I do all those Sunday-school-teacher things too. If I question the flimsy pretense that hides Mark's savagery, then I must question my own flimsy pretenses. What is my restraint? What stops me from shooting Karen in the back of the head and dumping her body in the dumpster?

Nothing!

Teaching Sunday school reminds me of Heart of Darkness and teaches me about the potential absence of my own restraint. After Marlow returns to Europe he meets a journalist acquaintance of the deceased Kurtz in the street. The acquaintance describes

Kurtz's genius as a public speaker: "how the man could talk! He electrified large meetings. He had faith—don't you see?—he had the faith." Apparently Mark and I electrified the Sunday school classes. We could talk; we were eloquent. We had the faith—don't you see?

"But you're not like that Jason." Karen said as I prepared for the Sunday school lesson. I heard Mark echoing Kurtz's whisper in the air about me: "The Horror The Horror." Karen's red hair and curls trembled as her head shook vigorously. I think she was angry that I would dare consider identification with Mark. She thought I was bad enough identifying with the fictional Kurtz. We stood alone in the classroom as I wrote scripture references on the chalkboard. I had told her about how Mark was such a nice, spiritual man who taught Sunday school. People trusted and respected him. He taught them about God and challenged them to develop their prayerful relationship with Heaven. Then he shot his wife in the back of the head with a .22 rifle while she slept. Karen was insistent that I was different and I wanted to believe her. I bet Lori Hacking would have been insistent too. "Jason, you don't just one day become a killer. You have to really be different inside." Am I so different inside—deep down with the savagery and darkness? Deep inside is where my soul can go mad with the desire for "abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions" (70). I'm not convinced that I'm very different inside.

The first time I read Heart of Darkness again after the tragedy of Lori Hacking in August 2004, I made a discovery. One passage stood out like never before; I had never actually noticed the significance of Marlow's observation. I listened to the tape narrated by Richard Thomas—John-Boy Walton—as I unpacked boxes after our recent move. The passage focuses on how Kurtz, as well as Mark Hacking, is vulnerable to the darkness:

there was something wanting in him—some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last—only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude—and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. (57)

I listened to the words and then rewound the tape to listen again. I don't even know where I put down the moving box I carried. Mark hovered like a phantom in my mind; I was struck with a new level of insight into Kurtz's last words: "the horror the horror." There is some kind of restraint that is not in him; and the freedom of the wilderness exploits him with a vengeance before he finally sees his weakness.

I say that nothing separates me from Mark Hacking because I'm not sure whether I know my weakness. For all I know, beyond my thin layer of pretenses I am as naked to savagery as Kurtz. I don't think that Marlow knew his deficiency either. That is why Marlow and I agree that Kurtz's final words are a victory. Kurtz knew at last, and he spoke in judgment on the savagery of his life. I wonder if Mark will discover his deficiency before his own "last opportunity of pronouncement" (69). However, I hope that I can find mine before the wilderness exploits my own lack of restraint.

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