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A Heuristic Study of a Wounded Healer

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Running Head: A HEURISTIC STUDY OF A WOUNDED HEALER

A Heuristic Study of a Wounded Healer

by

Samantha McMullen

A research paper presented to the
FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
MARITAL AND FAMILY THERAPY
LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
MASTER OF ARTS

May, 2015

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Abstract

Art therapy and narrative therapy techniques are both used separately in treating sexual abuse, however they are not often used together. This heuristic study explores the experience of a wounded healer when using art within a narrative therapy process, specifically storytelling, to support healing from multigenerational incestuous abuse. This researcher used a science fiction story she is currently writing, to stimulate 8 reflections on the parallels in that story and in her personal trauma narrative, and then made adjoining art pieces about the reflections. The data was analyzed to find themes, such as protection, anger and fear. The art helped support the story by documenting the journey of wound healing. Both the art and text informed the creative synthesis, which exemplified this researcher's process of forming her identity as a wounded healer. The parallels found in the science fiction story helped reveal and enlighten this researcher's own trauma narrative and encourage self actualization. This study supports the use of art and storytelling with survivors of multigenerational incestuous abuse.

Disclaimer

This research paper is based on an independent heuristic study resulting from the researcher's review of the literature. This paper does not reflect the views of Loyola Marymount University, nor the Department of Marital and Family Therapy.

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to those who have made me feel heard. My supportive boyfriend, of 8 years, my friends, old and new, my therapist, and my family (crazy as you all are I still love you).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my research mentor, Paige Asawa, for patiently editing my horribly spelled early drafts of this paper and forgiving me for using the Mac word processor Pages, for though its name is very similar to her own, it is her arch nemesis. More seriously, I thank you Paige for supporting me in taking on this heuristic process, and for challenging me to look deeper into my self and embracing what I found there.

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Introduction

The Study Topic

This paper is a heuristic exploration of the experience of a wounded healer using narrative therapy and art therapy techniques. I am interested in how the art process, along with narrative techniques, can be used to heal those wounded healers who have experienced multigenerational interfamilial sexual abuse, such as myself. It is the desire of this researcher to inspire future research in the area of the wounded healer as a majority of therapists have experienced some sort of trauma in their history. Further research could provide a more in-depth exploration of countertransference and the identity of the wounded healer.

The Significance of the Study Topic

Research on wounded healers has increased since Jung coined the term over 50 years ago, and it continues to garner interest in the area of mental health. According to Barr 2006, wounded healers make up 73.9% of mental health professionals and are defined here as persons who have experienced a psychological or physical trauma and attribute this experience to their career choice. The multitude of personal experiences of wounded healers has not been well documented, which is astonishing considering the prevalence in the mental health field. In the growing wounded healer research, the main category of wounds is abuse, and in this paper the wounds explored are sexual abuse and incest, specifically multigenerational. Sexual abuse unfortunately, is a widespread issue and leads to serious psychological trauma, such as increase risk of suicidal thoughts, actions and self harm behaviors, depression and anxiety, and developing other PTSD symptoms such as flashbacks, and hyper-arousal.

This subject is important to me since I identify as a wounded healer who experienced multigenerational interfamilial sexual abuse at age 12. From my perspective it seemed my family

chose to ignore these patterns of abuse and so my only support at the time became my creative outlets: writing stories and making art. When I learned about art therapy in high school I realized that was what I had been doing all those years, and that I wanted to share the gift of art therapy with other child survivors as an art therapist. It was not till I started this research project that I learned that there was a name for what I considered myself: a wounded healer.

Considering that over 70% of mental health professionals identify as wounded healers, it is astonishing to me that I had not heard of this concept until so recently. It seems the field as a whole is extremely lacking on awareness of this issue, which speaks to the persistence of the stigma of mental illness, even within the mental health field itself. It is the intention of this project to inspire further research on the subject, and to encourage more professionals to share their stories of personal and clinical growth as wounded healers.

My heuristic research is unique to the subject as it utilizes science fiction storytelling and reflective art making to explore this wounded healer's experience. An anticipated finding from the study may be the use of metaphor as seen by the parallels in the science fiction story and this researcher's personal trauma narrative. These results may have importance as preliminary findings to a wider exploration since the research on the importance of storytelling with sexual abuse survivors is minimal.

Background of the Study Topic

This study covers the topic of the wounded healer and suggests that many mental health professionals have gone through a traumatic life experience that may have effected their choice

of career. Wounded healers make up 73.9% of mental health professionals (Barr, 2006). The psychological wounds that were reported all varied; however, the main categories consisted of abuse, the therapists own mental illness and the mental illness of others, bereavement, physical health problems of self and others, family life as both an adult and a child, and life threatening events (Barr, 2006).

This study focuses on interfamilial and other sexual abuse. Craighead (2001) estimated that 10-15% of the population have suffered from incest, and Courtois (1988) estimated that 20% of women have suffered from incest. The research on incest seems to be very outdated since the above statistics were the most recent this author could find. Enright and Freedman (1996) predicted that even if the abuser was not a member of the family (not incestuous), the family as a whole would still be effected by the abuse, and family therapy can help them deal with their altered life.

Sexual abuse is taboo, and thus it is likely the most underreported type of abuse in the US, with an estimate of 325,000 children being sexual exploited in the US alone (Pifalo, 2002). Multigenerational interfamilial sexual abuse refers to when sexual activity within family members happens in more than one generation. Pifalo (2002) vouched for the power of intervention as a preventative measure, stating that “there is evidence that sexually abused individuals may become abusers... Without early and effective treatment, the possibility of a cycle of abuse goes on” (p. 12).

Working with trauma like sexual abuse can take its toll on the therapist in the form of countertransference. Figley (2002) references Corey (1991) when he wrote that countertransference is defined as “...the process of seeing oneself in the client, of over identifying with the client, or of meeting needs through the client” (p. 1435).

Countertransference is related directly to feelings the therapist has with their family of origin relationships. As therapists we must be objective, however, we can never separate ourselves completely from the client. Churchill and Yarrow (2009) referenced Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) when stating that the effects of working with this population is very different from working with other populations as with this type of work the therapist must often deal with “emotionally disturbing images of horror and cruelty” (p. 275). Vicarious trauma, vicarious resilience, compassion fatigue, post traumatic growth and altruism born of suffering are all countertransference issues that the supervisor can help recognize and normalize for the therapist.

Narrative therapy, as formed by White and Epson (1990) is a theory that insists that everyone has a story, and that the stories we tell about ourselves are internalized. Narrative therapy is discussed here as being useful in treating sexual abuse survivors as it utilizes externalization of the problem, letter writing and witnessing to combat symptomology and mental illness. Interestingly, there was minimal research on using Narrative theory as treatment with sexual abuse, and very little to be found on incest specifically. Story telling has always been an essential part of human tradition. However, literature on using story telling for survivors of sexual abuse is extremely lacking, and only one article was found that pertained to the topic.

Another methodology recommended here for use with sexual abuse survivors is art therapy. Arnheim (1990) wrote that certain people become art therapists as “Sometimes a deep engagement in their own difficulties has led them to share in the problems of other people, and a strong desire to help and heal is the guiding impulse of their vocation” (p. 1). She proposed that perhaps these art therapists have found art to be helpful in their own lives, as it promotes caring and self exploration, and that is why they choose art therapy as a career. It is possible to infer

that many art therapists (though no specific research has been done yet) are wounded healers and come to the field for some of the reasons listed here by Arnheim.

Art therapy interventions have been used as treatment for sexually abused children and their care givers in an attempt to decrease various symptoms of posttraumatic stress and anxiety (Hagood, 1991; Pifalo, 2002; Pifalo, 2009; Pretorius, 2010). The art therapy literature strives to find helpful forms of treatment for this population of trauma survivors.

In the mental health field art therapists have a unique advantage in dealing with countertransference as they know that making art can help process not only their clients problems but their personal issues as well, including countertransference. Do art therapists take their own advice and use art to process? Brown (2008) explored this very question. All 45 participants in the study claimed that they “continue to make art while managing their careers, and find the art-making process vital to their professional affectivity and their personal well-being” (p. 207).

Carlson (1997) wrote on the benefits of using art therapy techniques with narrative therapy theory. The author states that both narrative and art therapy encompass the “ideas of recapturing hidden aspects of self-expression or lived experience, the principle of co-construction in understanding the therapeutic relationship, and the belief in the creative abilities of persons” (p. 275).

Introduction of Literature Review

It is such a simple, timeless notion that love—and compassion—changes the giver as much, or more than, the receiver. Our woundedness is our vulnerability, which is our key to opening the flow of healing to others, and back again to ourselves. We recognize both its power and its risks. (Stone, 2008, p. 49)

This literature review covers the topic of the wounded healer, which includes those healers who choose to work in the mental health profession because of their wounds. Wounded healers make up 73.9% of mental health workers, and the literature suggests working with trauma in itself involves intense countertransference, especially if the therapist has experienced similar trauma. Supervision and personal therapy are recommended to monitor this countertransference. Multigenerational incest and sexual abuse are discussed, as they are common “wounds” wounded healers have, and art therapy and narrative therapy theory techniques are explored as forms of treatment for those wounds. Narrative techniques are recommended due to how it helps trauma survivors re-author their lives and create a new unsaturated story, and art therapy is supported due to its ability to work nonverbally, and through the creative metaphor. By using narrative theory with art therapy techniques it is hoped that wounded healers, like this researcher, can gain insight and greater understanding about their identity as a wounded healer and thus be more equipped to provide treatment to clients that are trauma survivors like themselves.

General Psych Literature

Wounded Healer

Jung (1951) was the first to use the term “wounded healer” to describe psychotherapists in reference to their vulnerability. Jung (1961) believed that in order to be a good healer one must be able to feel deeply, to be present and vulnerable to the therapeutic process and even let oneself be “wounded by the patient, the deeper the better” (p.108). Stone (2008) explored the idea of the wounded healer as it is rooted in Eastern philosophy. Buddhism, Stone explains, is a specific tradition that believes suffering to be a necessary part of mankind. Stone states that human suffering “gives rise to the compassion with which we ultimately are able to forgive ourselves and others, and that frees us from suffering” (p. 46).

In a review of the literature by Zerubavel and Wright (2012) wounded healers are not just someone who has gone through psychological pain but a symbol of resilience. Since wounded healers use their acquired knowledge to serve their client’s and assist in their recovery, Zerubavel and Wright predict that wounded healers will continue to offer much to the field as a whole, as long as the stigma of mental illness does not interfere with it’s progress (Zerubavel and Wright, 2012).

The Wounded Healer Experience.

Lemelin (2006) wrote about his personal experience of male sexual abuse and how that has affected his identity as a wounded healer. He believed that to be a wounded healer, one must work hard “to neither internalize one’s rage nor project it onto others” (p. 344). He wrote about the challenges of processing one’s own wounds, and the constant self-reflection required to continue to heal them. In regards to the idea that these wounds could harm clients, Lemelin

surmised that wounded healers have the rare gift of knowing the preciousness of innocence, stating that “If we have a fault, it’s that we either fear it or worship it too much” (p. 347).

In MacCulloch and Shattell (2009), Shattell wrote about her identity as a wounded healer, and a consumer of mental health services, who now work as a psychiatric nurse. She theorizes that wounded people such as herself are drawn towards places of work that promise the wholeness and hope that they personally need. She explains that as wounded healers working in the field of health care, there is an obligation to take care of our own wounds, lest they affect their clinical work (MacCulloch & Shattell, 2009). Mander (2004) also warns that the therapist “cannot take the patients further than they have come themselves” (p. 162). Miller (1990) wrote that it was important for helpers to have had and explored their own traumas before trying to help their clients do the same, explaining that Wounded healers “know from their own experience the healing power of these feelings” (p. 316).

Richard (2012) describes her experience as a wounded healer and how that identity has affected her work as a therapist. Her article challenges wounded healers to do more than just survive in the workplace. She explains that she came to the field of therapy to heal herself, and to give to her clients the support and understanding that she did not get (Richard, 2012). Mander (2004) also found that many future therapists say they are motivated to work in the helping field because they want to give what they did not receive in their early years. Richard suggested that a bilateral healing process is possible for both client and wounded healer. Stone (2008) stated that in his interactions with clients, he often felt “a heightened awareness of my own wounds— and a deeper compassion for my own challenges in truly accepting myself as I am. Inevitably I walk away wondering who has been the mirror for whom?” (p. 47).

Therapist Countertransference

From Lemelin (2006), Shattell (2009) and Richard (2012) the countertransference issues that wounded healers must deal with seemed apparent. Though all therapists have countertransference, it is possible that wounded healers specifically experience challenges when dealing with countertransference due to their past traumatic experiences. Cain (2000) addressed this very issue by exploring the countertransference experiences of wounded healers in a qualitative study using interview questions with ten psychotherapists of various ages who each had a history of psychiatric hospitalization and now worked in that very field.

From the interviews in Cain (2000) it was understood that the participants had countertransference experiences such as; “a) concerns about hospitalization of clients, b) comparison of therapist with client, c) identification with clients, and d) over identification with clients” (p. 24). Only five of the ten participants felt like they had over identified with clients to the point where they lost perspective on the clients’ therapeutic process. Despite their countertransference issues, the participants agreed that their wounding experiences had helped them become more self-aware and successful clinicians capable of truly empathizing with their clients.

All participants in Cain (2000) also reported suffering from the extreme stigma of mental illness. Cain explained that wounded healer’s unique perceptions gained from their first-hand experience made them extremely necessary to the mental health field as a whole. “As long as [consumer/professionals] are forced to remain silent, the field is really held back, not just in terms of treatment, but even in terms of understanding illness” (Cain, 2000, p. 27).

Martin’s (2011) heuristic research explored how 17 therapist’s personal “life crises” affected their work as clinicians. Martin himself identified his personal crisis as having a depressive breakdown. His methodology was phenomenological qualitative and he admits this

research is unique especially since the actual interviews were done 5 years before the paper was written.

Unlike Cain (2000) and Barr (2006), Martin (2011) interviewed the participants twice, in order to better understand their stories. Martin referred to his participants as co-researchers, and instead of categorizing the themes of their stories like Cain and Barr, he responded to them in a heuristic process. From the few stories listed in the article, the life crises his co-researchers spoke of were those of traumatic deaths such as the murder of a sister, the loss of a newborn child, and the severe substance abuse of a son. The co-researchers seemed to all agree that their life crises affected their work as clinicians, but that their experiences made them more successful therapists because of their wounds (Martin, 2011).

Barnett (2007) proposed that therapists who had unmet needs as children may choose only short term work in a way to avoid those fears when working with their clients. Those who prolong therapy and the client's dependence on them may be attempting to heal these very insecurities. She named this as a strong maternal identification, and pointed out that it may have a negative impact on the healthy separation that leads to growth in relationships. She also believed these early years of uncertainty may make therapists overly controlling of therapy and make them unwilling to merely sit with the client's feelings. Regarding wounded healers, she stated that, "Empathy alone is insufficient" (Barnett, 2007, p. 260).

Pearlman and Mac Ian (1995) examined vicarious traumatization in 188 self-identified trauma therapists. As is the pattern in this research, there were more female participants than males. The results of this study showed that the novice therapists experienced the most psychological difficulties. Those that identified as survivor therapists (wounded healers) showed less distress than others. The authors suggested that this is possible because survivor therapists

may "...contribute to their own healing as they share in their clients' growth and change" (p. 563). This study confirmed the results of Elliot and Guy's (1993) and Follete, Polusny and Milbeck (1994) showing that psychological functioning did not seem to be impaired despite having more trauma in their backgrounds than the general population.

Prevalence of Wounded Healers.

Why do people become therapists? Are wounded people more likely to become psychotherapists? Barr (2006) addressed these very questions in the largest study yet on wounded healers that used online questionnaires that were both quantitative and qualitative; to find whether psychological wounds were what inspired people to become therapists. Psychological wounds were defined as "the effect of one or more traumatic events that had significant emotional impact on you" (p. 1). She found that of the 253 participants who responded to the email, 73.9% believed their wounding experience(s) led them to a career in counseling or psychotherapy. Though no significant differences were found in regards to ethnicity, age and theoretical approach of the wounded healer, it was found that women are significantly more likely to report this than males. The psychological wounds that were reported all varied; however, the main categories consisted of abuse, the therapists own mental illness and the mental illness of others, bereavement, physical health problems of self and others, family life as both an adult and a child, and life threatening events (Barr, 2006).

Another study by Adams and Riggs (2008) reported one third of the 129 trainee therapists they studied had experienced personal trauma. In 1995, Schauben and Frazier reported that of their study of female mental health workers, 70% of the psychologists and 83% of the counselors reported personal victimization that consisted of either, rape, attempted rape, incest, sexual abuse, sexual harassment or other sexual assault. Interestingly, Schauben and Frazier reported

that symptomatology was not related to the mental health workers having a history of personal trauma. This 1995 study suggests that personal trauma in itself should not negatively affect the mental health worker's work with sexually abused clients.

Barnett (2007) interviewed nine experienced psychoanalytic and psychodynamic psychotherapists in order to learn about their personal and professional histories and how that affected their career choice as a psychotherapist. The results of the interviews showed that all nine participants reported losses in their early lives.

Elliot and Guy (1993) reported that of 340 female mental health professionals and 2,623 professional women working in other fields, the female mental health professionals (consisting of licensed clinical social workers, psychiatric nurse practitioners who were certified to give psychotherapy, psychologists and psychiatrists) reported significantly higher rates of trauma, including sexual molestation, psychiatric hospitalization of a parent, alcoholism of a parent, physical abuse and family dysfunction, than the women working in other fields.

Following Elliot and Guy's (1993) research, Follete, Polusny and Milbeck (1994) surveyed 558 mental health professionals and law enforcement professionals and found that 29.8% of the therapists reported some sort of childhood trauma and only 19.6% of the officers did. Consistent with Barr's (2011) study, females of both groups reported trauma more than males. From this study the authors conclude that "having a personal trauma history does not appear to negatively impact the therapist's response to trauma work" (p. 281).

Mander (2004) wrote from the perspective of an interviewer selecting candidates for training about the qualities, both positive and negative, that make a wounded healer. She explains that she looks at the future therapist, searching for the patient inside them. Mander asserts that by graduation the therapist trainees she has worked with are capable of understanding

their identities as wounded healers, acknowledging the sometimes unconscious pull that brought them to this field, and thus are able to treat their own wounds and those of their clients.

Common Childhood Personality Traits in Wounded Healers.

Of the nine participants in Barnett (2007) a theme of common childhood personality traits appeared that included being introverted, solitary, feeling anxious and lacking confidence that was hidden by acting like the class clown and trying to make others laugh. The interviewees reported feeling especially sensitive to other's needs. Barnett described the commonalities of the interviewees reporting that they were often the confidante, though they were not listened too. Perhaps this role, she suggests, led them to that of the professional listener, a psychotherapist. The early childhoods of the interviewees were also filled with shame, parental disapproval and limitations, early trauma, family poverty, family illness and secrets (Barnett, 2007). Citing Brown (2005) Barnett proposed that those with traumatic childhoods often join the field of psychotherapy in order to metaphorically put their broken families back together again.

Advocating for Personal Therapy.

Walter (2004) wrote on therapists working with abuse survivors as survivors themselves. The author warned that this in itself should not present any problems in treatment, however; "much depends on the degree of resolution of their own traumatic experiences and the support currently available to them" (p. 187). Barnett (2007) explained that the most important thing about being a wounded healer is how one has dealt with their own wounds. Because of this, Barnett advocated for personal therapy for therapists, explaining that it is necessary for an effective therapeutic process. In her professional experience she found that most future psychotherapists though they brand themselves as strong people, are hiding (whether consciously

or unconsciously), “a troubled personal history” (p. 258). Kaslow and Schulman (1987) also recommend self-care in the form of personal therapy for therapists.

Interestingly, in Elliot and Guy’s (1993) study of past trauma, the female mental health professionals reported less psychological impairments than other professional women such as anxiety, dissociation, sleep impairments, depression and problems in interpersonal relationships than the other professional women. Elliot and Guy considered that this difference was due to the fact that 78% of the mental health professionals had received therapeutic treatment as adults. This data further supported the idea that therapists, especially wounded healers, should advocate for their own personal therapy throughout their careers.

Supervision of Wounded Healers.

A great asset when training to become a psychotherapist is supervision. However, when it comes to wounded healers, supervision has its limits. Wheeler (2007) addressed the supervisor’s responsibility when supervising a wounded healer. Though Wheeler acknowledged that supervisors are not meant to provide therapy to their supervisees, she emphasized that in the ways that their wounded-ness affects the therapeutic relationship, the supervisor must be knowledgeable. She wrote that no matter how much processing a wounded healer has done in therapy, those personal experiences still exist and thus can affect their client’s treatment.

Jung (1951) stated:

No analysis is capable of banishing all unconsciousness forever. The analyst must go on learning endlessly, and never forget that each new case brings new problems to light and this gives rise to unconscious assumptions that have never before been constellated. (p.

116)

Wheeler also explained that the career of a therapist is one that comes with constant new challenges that they must be prepared to endure. Etherington (2009) posited that the supervisor can help the therapist identify any “unprocessed life experiences, which they can then take to therapy” (p. 184). Whether it was their psychological wound that brought them to this field, as suggested by Barr (2006), or something else, either way it will not be their last wound.

Wheeler (2007) asserted that the supervisory relationship must be one of openness, and the supervisee should not view their wounded-ness as a fault, but instead view the space as one of further learning. As mentioned in Cain (2000), countertransference can cause problems in the therapeutic relationship unless it is addressed, and supervision is a containing place for processing those feelings.

Incest

Craighead (2001) estimated that 10-15% of the population has suffered from incest, and Courtois (1988) estimated that 20% of women have suffered from incest. The research on incest seems to be very outdated since the above statistics were the most recent this author could find. Even RAINN’s (Rape Abuse and Incest National Network) website did not have current statistics about incest. This lack of information about incest is very unfortunate, since the research that has been done on incest shows the negative effects it can have and proves that it is still a prevalent issue.

Characteristics of perpetrators.

Brand and Alexander (2003) found that of the 101 women that participated in their study, their perpetrators consisted of biological and step fathers at 75.5%, and brothers, grandfathers, mothers and others permanently living in the home made up the remaining 24.5%. This is consistent with Enright and Freedman (1996) who reported that perpetrators of the incest

were 50% of the time the natural father, 16% their brother, 12% their grandfather, 8% the stepfather, and the remaining 8% of the time an uncle. Cohen and Phelps (1985) found that incest perpetrators are more often successful business professionals and the most common incestuous relationships are with natural father and daughter, stepfather and stepdaughter, then grandfathers, uncles, brothers and sisters.

Arvidsson, Ingevaldson, Larsson and Tidefors (2010) studied 45 adolescents who had sexually offended in an attempt to explore the characteristics of those that committed sibling incest and those that were non-sibling offenders. They cited Barbaree and Marshall (2006) when stating the 20% of sexual assaults are committed by juveniles. They also referenced Miranda and Corcoran (2000) and suggested that “adolescents who sexually offend are likely to choose their first victim from within their family” (p. 350). It was found that the sibling offender group reported a higher degree of familial dysfunction and a higher rate of past victimization, than the non sibling offenders. The authors suggested that perhaps there is a strong relationship between being victimized or abused physically, sexually or psychologically, and becoming a sibling incest offender.

Treatment of Incest

Enright and Freedman (1996) used forgiveness as an intervention goal with 12 women ages 24-54 years old that had experienced incest. The incestuous acts involved fondling, oral-genital contact and intercourse. This is consistent with Brand and Alexander (2003), who found that 67.3% of the participants experienced physically intrusive abuse such as oral, vaginal or anal intercourse, and 22.8% experienced fondling.

In Enright and Freedman each participant met once a week for an individual session for an average of 14.3 months. This experiment used a yoked and randomized control and

experimental group in its design. After the experiment participants went through the forgiveness process model, it was found that their depression and anxiety had decreased and their hope and forgiveness had improved.

Thompson (2009) proposed using group therapy as a model for working with adult female victims of sibling incest. Through reviewing the literature and research she concluded that the more one knows the better when trying to understand the abuse and its effect on the victim. Thompson noted that group therapy would be a good modality for this population as it gives incest survivors the opportunity of sharing their experience and insight with others who have had similar life experiences. Brand and Alexander (2003) found that incest survivors who reported using avoidance to cope had higher levels of distress and depression as adults. Those who used distancing coping reported better adult functioning.

Mohl (2010) believed that a family approach was the most effective form of treatment when dealing with child abuse. He predicted that even if the abuser was not a member of the family (not incestuous), the family as a whole would still be effected by the abuse, and therapy can help them process the abuse and its effect on their lives.

Recidivism.

Bradford, Firestone, Kingston and Wexler (2008) examined recidivism among incestuous convicted males. They found that sexual recidivists scored higher on psychopathy scales than non-recidivists. The results of the study indicated that of the interfamilial child molesters, 9.8% were later convicted of sexual assault, 20% of violent offenses and 27.5% of criminal offenses. Like in Enright and Freedman (1996), the perpetrators were all males in this study and were either father, step father, uncles, cousins, surrogate or biological grandfathers, to the victim.

Bradford, Firestone, Kingston and Wexler (2008) suggested that the rates of recidivism are relatively high among incest offenders.

Multigenerational Abuse

Multigenerational incest. Multigenerational incest refers to when sexual activity within family members happens in more than one generation. This happens when incest patterns continue, creating a cycle of abuse. Many articles (Hagood, 1991; Pifalo, 2002) expressed the hope that with treatment these cycles can end. Hagood (1991) stated “successful treatment of the mother will minimize the recycling of child sexual abuse into the next generation” (p. 17). Pifalo (2002) also vouched for the power of intervention, stating that “there is evidence that sexually abused individuals may become abusers... Without early and effective treatment, the possibility of a cycle of abuse goes on” (p. 12).

Treatment. In Garciandia and Samper (2013) the two private practitioners shared a case study of a family with multigenerational patterns of incest. The purpose of their article was “to show how painful events in a family’s present and past can evolve and develop into new understandings when a family is listened to in a safe environment” (p. 53). Through therapy, the family was able to process the incest that had brought them to therapy as well as the incest in their past, and take concrete steps towards stopping the incest cycle. This case study was a hopeful example of what self-awareness and education can do to stop the cycle of incest.

Haskins (2003) wrote in a literature review and case study about the importance of a family systems approach when dealing with incest. By exploring the family dynamics, the incest was found to be multigenerational. The author proposed that the mother’s abuse by her father was not resolved, and her anger towards men as “perverts,” was projected on to her son. Her son became a self-fulfilling prophesy as he took his anger out on his sister for being the favorite child

in the way his mother expected him too, through sexual abuse. Through individual, subsystem (couples therapy) and family therapy, the family was able to heal its various hurts and be united after 18 months of therapy.

In Hagood (1991) and Pifalo (2009) the goal was to work with the caregivers of the incestuously abused child and learn to see the signs of incest, and how to prevent it from happening again. The children in Pretorius (2010) and Pifalo (2002) also learned through directives about inappropriate versus appropriate touch. All four researchers did this as a form of psychoeducation and in the hope of preventing further interfamilial sexual abuse to occur (Hagood, 1991; Pifalo, 2002; Pifalo, 2009; Pretorius, 2010).

Multigenerational sexual abuse. Sexual abuse relates to any unwanted physical, emotional and sexual attention. When pertaining to children, Etherington (2000) defines it as “a form of *chronic* trauma, in which the abuser over-stimulates the child’s bodily senses of fear, sexual arousal and helplessness and the child is overwhelmed” (p. 379). Sexual abuse is not limited to children, and unfortunately happens to both genders and people of all ages and races. When a family has multiple members from different generations who have been sexually abused, they are considered here to have multigenerational patterns of sexual abuse. Beszterczey and Lisak (2007) studied the cycle of violence in 37 death row inmates and found that 22 of the 37 subjects reported being sexually abused, along with being physically abused and neglected. From this study the authors concluded that it was not just sexual abuse that led these men to violence, but severe and often multigenerational patterns of abuse that plagued their families.

Treatment. Baker (2001) used a qualitative analysis and interviewed 9 women who had been sexually abused as children, and whose children had also been abused. Participants were all

white women aged 35 to 49 who identified as being low to middle class and were recruited non-randomly as it was important that they were already in therapy, thus able to have support if the interview process became triggering for them. The interviews themselves did not require the women to discuss the abuse of their children in detail, instead it focused on “the ways the women reflected on their emotions, thoughts, and experiences, and how they constructed meaning from those experiences” (p. 52). The study found that there was some evidence that using cognitive developmental models with sexual abuse can “inspire patience, provide new ways of conversing with clients which facilitate treatment, and make available to clinicians a differentiated lens through which to see progress and recovery” (p. 59).

Countertransference with Trauma

Figley (2002) referenced Corey (1991) when he wrote that countertransference is defined as “...the process of seeing oneself in the client, of over identifying with the client, or of meeting needs through the client” (p. 1435). Countertransference is related directly to feelings the therapist has with their family of origin relationships. As therapists we must be objective, however, we can never separate ourselves completely from the client. Without countertransference there would be no therapeutic process or relationship.

Churchill and Yarrow (2009) used qualitative methods to study therapeutic needs of male survivors of sexual trauma. They did this by using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis to analyze data gathered from 32 postal questionnaires done by counselors and psychologists who work for the NHS Trust Department. It is important to note that 22 of those who responded were female and only 7 were male (the remaining three declined to state gender). From the questionnaires, six categories were found including countertransference .

Churchill and Yarrow noted it was interesting that though supervision was brought up as a support system for the therapist working with sexual abuse victims and countertransference, advocating for personal therapy was rarely mentioned. The authors reference Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) when stating that the effects of working with this population is very different from working with other populations as with this type of work the therapist must often deal with “emotionally disturbing images of horror and cruelty” (p. 275).

Walker (2004) wrote on the differences between countertransference and traumatic countertransference. Many authors call traumatic countertransference by a different name, such as compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress or victimization. However, Walker came to the conclusion that these experiences are all different from countertransference alone as they leave lasting strain and can impair functioning permanently, possibly causing burn out. Walker explained traumatic countertransference as the countertransference which “are unrecognized, unspoken, and defended against and... produce feelings in the therapist that are deeply discordant with their sense of self, or are deeply unacceptable or shocking” (p. 179).

Supervision. The importance of supervision has been discussed already in this literature review, however in this section specific countertransference issues that arise in therapy are discussed and thus supervision will continue be considered and broken down further as it pertains to countertransference. Etherington (2000) asserted that supervision should be focused on the therapeutic relationship, not just the client, since therapy does not happen in a vacuum. Vicarious trauma, vicarious resilience, compassion fatigue, post traumatic growth and altruism born of suffering are all countertransference issues that the supervisor can help recognize and normalize for the therapist. Etherington stated that “Negative feelings that are not addressed in supervision may accumulate over time and counsellors may become tired, stressed and less able

to be with the client in helpful ways” (p. 382). The supervisor can model limit setting, and reminds therapists that “boundaries are needed not only to protect clients but also to protect themselves” (p. 387). Etherington continued her work in 2009 and came to similar conclusions of the importance of identifying countertransference in supervision and its effect on the therapeutic relationship.

Vicarious trauma. Hernández, Gangsei, and Engstrom (2010) defined vicarious trauma as “the cumulative effect of working with traumatized clients: interference with the therapist’s feelings, cognitive schemas, memories, self-esteem, and/or sense of safety” (p. 69).

Etherington wrote that she first experienced vicarious traumatization when working on research that involved listening to stories of men who had been sexually abused (Etherington, 1995). She postulated that this happened as she had no support system set in place for supervision as the research merely consisted of listening to the stories and not providing therapy to the interviewees. Vicarious traumatization can make the therapist feel overwhelmed and fearful, can lead to an existential crisis, and cause the therapist to not take care of themselves as they can even feel the vary PTSD symptoms they are trying to help their clients with. These overwhelming feelings can be hard for a therapist to admit to, as they may feel that they must be the strong professional. Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) concurred that working with trauma is specifically hard for therapists, and attested to the risk of vicarious traumatization.

Adams and Riggs (2008) did an exploratory study of defense styles in 129 therapist trainees and found that a self-sacrificing defense style (which half the sample reported) put them at high risk for becoming vicariously traumatized. They reported that an adaptive defense style served those with past trauma better, as well as those without personal trauma, against vicarious traumatization.

Schauben and Frazier (1995) found that female mental health workers who had a case load dominated by sexual abuse survivors were more likely to report symptoms of PTSD, suffer from disrupted beliefs, and self-report feeling vicariously traumatized. This research supports Etherington's (2000) recommendation of balancing the caseload of the therapist and supervisor so as the majority are not cases of sexual abuse. Schauben and Frazier suggested that "Just as PTSD is a normal response to victimization, so may vicarious trauma be a normal response to trauma counseling" (p. 63).

Vicarious resilience. Hernández, Gangsei, and Engstrom (2010) explained vicarious resilience as the way the therapist can be transformed positively by hearing and witnessing the trauma and survivor stories their patients bring them. Referencing their own work in 2007 and 2008, the researchers explained how "These studies found that the majority of the therapists interviewed in the United States and Colombia were able to identify positive effects within themselves from interaction with clients who had overcome adversity in their own lives" (p. 72).

Witnessing these transformations caused therapists to reflect on human beings' capacity to heal; reassess their own problems; reaffirm the value of therapy; discover the power of community healing; regain hope; better understand and value the spiritual dimensions that come with healing; and increase public awareness by speaking out. Hernández, Gangsei, and Engstrom (2010) remind us that "effective psychotherapies identify and nurture clients' strengths, promote personal control, and foster authentic relationships" (p. 70). Through this process, resilience grows.

Compassion fatigue. Figley (2002) described compassion fatigue as a complex form of burnout and countertransference specific to psychotherapists. In Figley's multi-factor model for compassion fatigue, empathy, emotional investment and the emotional costs of caring are

identified. Symptoms of compassion fatigue are isolation and helplessness. The eleven variables that make up the model are as follows: empathic ability, empathic concern, exposure to the client, empathic response, compassion stress, disengagement, prolonged exposure, traumatic recollections, and life disruptions. The tools he laid in place for combating compassion fatigue were psycho-education on the concept and symptoms themselves, desensitization to traumatic material, the right amount of exposure, and having a social support system. By being aware of the symptoms of compassion fatigue it was hoped that if it is diagnosed early so the interventions Figley laid out can be applied.

Post traumatic growth. Hernández, Gangsei, and Engstrom (2010) believed that it was possible for trauma survivors to grow and be “transformed positively by their experiences of trauma” (p. 70). Staub and Vollhardt (2008) wrote that it is not the traumatic experience that predicts whether there will be post traumatic growth, but how the survivor interprets and internalizes these events. The concept that personal struggles can lead to growth is supported by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004). They explained growth as “an increased appreciation for life in general, more meaningful interpersonal relationships, an increased sense of personal strength, changed priorities, and a richer existential and spiritual life” (p. 1). Interestingly, they proposed that trauma survivors do not set out purposely to gain post traumatic growth, instead this growth is merely a byproduct of their journey for survival.

Altruism born of suffering. Hernández, Gangsei, and Engstrom (2010) stated that “Altruism born of suffering addresses the processes by which individuals move from survivorship to an activist quest to help others” (p. 71) Staub and Vollhardt (2008) wrote extensively on this concept, explaining how it involves a person going through something painful, and instead of dwelling with the pain, moving past it and focusing on helping others

through such pain as well. The authors reference Lifton (1967, 2003), who named this a survivor mission. Altruism born of suffering seems to be what fuels wounded healers forward and draws many of them to the field of mental health.

Reciprocity. Hernández, Gangsei, and Engstrom (2010) explain that “Reciprocity opens up the possibility of appreciating, attending to, and making meaning out of the process whereby therapists themselves may heal, learn, and change with clients” (p. 74). Perhaps this process is what guides wounded healers.

Over identification. As mentioned in Cain (2000) over identification with a client can cause negative countertransference issues. One participant explained this experience by saying, “Had I known that I was in a sense working with myself” (p.25). Etherington (2000) stated that therapists may feel an over identification with the client, where they feel like a victim, overcome by the client’s seemingly helpless situation or feelings of rage. The therapist may also identify as “the rescuer,” and feel like they are the only ones who understand the client, and thus they are the only ones who can help them. Etherington referenced Herman (1992) when stating that this may lead to therapist feeling omnipotent and grandiose. It is also possible to over-identify with the abuser as well: “Feeling responsible can be understood as a way of denying helplessness; ‘if I am responsible then I am not helpless—indeed that makes me powerful’” (p. 384). Etherington also stresses that these countertransferences can play out in the supervision setting as well, in a parallel process.

Training. Hernández, Gangsei, and Engstrom (2010) recommend a training session done over the course of five hours where the concepts of vicarious resilience and the other previously mentioned topics are addressed and related to personal culture in many conversations and reflections that four to eight therapists can have with the supervisor/trainer. Through this training

it is hoped that countertransference will be processed as to not negatively effect the therapeutic process.

Etherington recommends using a narrative approach through her experience counseling sexual abuse supervisors and supervising others that do to. She explains that “First we need to become witnesses to such stories, and to witness them we need to sit with them and accept them as they are—not needing to drag the client out of the chaos to relieve ourselves of the fear of being ‘out of control’” (p. 385). Through this process of witnessing the client’s story, and that of the therapists countertransference, the supervisor is able to better understand the therapeutic process and better guide the therapist and through the therapist the client, to empowerment and self-discovery.

Narrative Therapy Theory General Psych Literature

Narrative therapy, as formed by White and Epson (1990) is a theory that insists that everyone has a story, and that the stories we tell about ourselves are internalized. Narrative therapy theory uses externalization of the problem, letter writing and witnessing to combat symptomology and mental illness. Interestingly, there was minimal research on using Narrative theory with sexual abuse, and very little to be found on incest specifically.

Narrative Therapy with Sexual Abuse

Treatment. Miller, Cardona and Hardin (2006) used Narrative and Internal Family Systems theories to create three interventions to use with adult clients who have suffered from child sexual abuse. These authors believed Narrative theory to be useful in treating sexual abuse because “It provides not only a map for exploring the individual current stories of clients and ways that they can live out their preferred stories, but also allows for the exploration of the impact of larger systems on the client” (p. 12). Internal Family Systems theory (Schwartz, 1995) proposes the idea that just as we are part of an outer family system, we also consist of a system in ourselves that contains many different parts of ourselves that are led by what Schwartz calls “the core self.” He explains that trauma can cause polarization of these parts that lead to system malfunctions, and thus symptomology. Together these theories focus on the internal and external stories and systems that make up a person.

Interventions. The first intervention Miller, Cardona and Hardin (2006) present involved having a sexually abused client identify the parts of herself that were causing her problems. She was then able to externalize the biggest part of her as Anger, and eventually reframe Anger as her protector who warned her when trouble was coming. The second intervention involved acknowledging oppressed internal parts and those dominant societal stories that were hurting a

couple's marriage. The third intervention involved "deconstructing the doormat effect" (p. 22), by first assessing polarized parts, telling a different story, and lastly "Assessing previous polarized parts and reinforcing the new narrative" (p. 24). These last interventions let a client, who felt like the sexual abuse she experienced was her fault, create a new story and gain a sense of self-worth and motivation.

Unique outcomes. Unique outcomes, as defined by White and Epsen (1990) "can be identified through a historical review of the persons' influence in relation to the problem. Here persons can be encouraged to recall 'facts' or events that contradict the problem's effects in their lives and in their relationships" (p. 56). These unique outcomes can help create new meanings in the re-authored story.

Draucker (1998) proposed narrative as a treatment approach for women who had experienced multiple traumas in the form of sexual abuse and violence in their intimate relationships. The narrative concept of unique outcomes came up organically while Draucker was working on a larger project (Draucker, 2003). She listed five examples of unique outcomes such as confronting a rapist and a sexually inappropriate psychiatrist, and regaining control by the abuse survivors furthering their education and speaking publicly about their domestic violence.

The author concludes by saying that:

A therapy that challenges sociopolitical conditions that contribute to violence, highlights women's personal insurrections against these conditions, and supports the re-authoring of their life stories should be considered as a potentially useful approach for women who have been victimized throughout their lives. (p. 168)

Draucker (2003) continued her work on unique outcomes, and identified categories from the sexual abuse stories of 27 women and 17 men. The six categories from the women's

narratives were “rebellion, breaking free, resurgence, refuge, determination, confidant,” and three categories from the men’s narratives were “reawakening, buddy and normal guy, champion” (p. 7). From these unique outcome narratives Draucker concluded that “Unique outcomes stories seem to have the power to open possibilities for the re-authoring of life stories” (p. 16).

Lorentzen, Nilsen and Traeen (2008) wrote about a survivor of sexual abuse who spoke of a unique outcome in her story: “I experienced another assault, where a man tried to rape me, but I took control and said, ‘I am not interested in this, and neither are you. This will have consequences’” (p. 171).

Case study. Merscham (2000) presented a case study that used narrative therapy with a 22 year old female college student. The client, Summer, experienced incest and sexual abuse at infancy to age 6, and in high school was raped and recently violently beat by a man in a bar fight. She came to therapy with a trauma filled, problem saturated story. Merscham encouraged her to create a new strength based story. An intervention was used where Summer was directed to create a list of things she didn’t want in her new story and things she wanted to keep. To her surprise the good outweighed the bad on her list. Summer externalized her problem of feeling overwhelmed by her trauma and PTSD symptoms in a many armed, slimy monster she named Asshole. The therapist used the narrative technique of letter writing to support Summer and encouraged Summer to enlist her family and friends in supporting the creation of her new strength passed story. The author reported that Summer “appreciated the externalization of her trauma experiences and felt that battling the “asshole” and his accompanying challenges was less overwhelming than trying to separately battle each individual trauma memory” (p. 286).

Narrative theory with incest.

Lorentzen, Nilsen and Traeen (2008) interviewed seven women and one man about how their incestuous abuse ended, using a narrative approach. The subjects were receiving current support for their trauma and reported minor to major psychological symptoms. In looking over the eight interviewees stories of how their abuse ended, several themes emerged in the type of termination such as the active agent (who was able to say “no” and stop the abuse themselves), a “sort of” termination (where memories were murky about how exactly it ended), third party termination (those who are either too young or powerless to stop the abuse themselves) and no story of termination (in this case the perpetrator died). The authors reported that just because the interviewee’s physical abuse had ended, their emotional pain had not. Two things are named as roadblocks to ending incestuous sexual abuse, the “Lack of support from family and friends, and having feelings of powerlessness” (p. 170).

This research (Lorentzen, Nilsen & Traeen, 2008) served merely as a pilot study, but from these few interviews it can be seen how important to the survivor’s story the narrative of the end of their abuse is. The authors suggested that the therapist can “explore alternate reasons for why the client was prohibited from doing anything, if that is the case” (p. 172). By witnessing the abuse survivor’s story, the therapist can become the support that they did not get at the time, the ears that did not hear them and the arms that did not fight for them.

Case study. Harker (1997) wrote about a client named Dean who had experienced incestuous sexual abuse in his childhood, and like Summer (Merscham, 2000), was feeling weighed down by his problem saturated story. Harker first focused on deconstructing his abuse story, by asking normalizing and externalizing questions. The theme of he-man masculinity came up often for Dean, as he struggled to fuse society’s view of men as strong and powerful, to his internal experience of fear, and helplessness that stemmed from his abuse. Next they

deconstructed sexual identity, and then reconstructed a life of worth where Dean was able to express how proud he was of his accomplishments and unique outcomes. “Dean began to talk about his life as something that *he* had made, despite everything, and how he was beginning to like the way it was turning out” (p. 210). This case study illustrated the value of the empowerment that narrative therapy can give to survivors of sexual abuse and incest.

Storytelling

Storytelling has always been an essential part of human tradition. It is the way we pass down our history, beliefs and traditions. Literature on using story telling for survivors of sexual abuse is extremely lacking, and only one article was found that pertained to the topic. Herman (1997) did a case study where she helped a four year old girl who had been incestuously abused use the metaphor of the fairytale Aladdin to tell of her trauma. “Because of her heightened sensitivity to the covert sexual themes in children’s fairytales, she was able to use their content to indirectly confront terrifying material and find an allegory for her experience” (p. 444). The client found the truth of her abuse so terrifying and anxiety provoking that she was unable to talk about it without role playing through her favorite fairytale. This story gave her a voice she did not have in her real life.

Art Therapy Literature

Art Therapy and Wounded Healers

Arnheim (1990) wrote that certain people become art therapists because “Sometimes a deep engagement in their own difficulties has led them to share in the problems of other people, and a strong desire to help and heal is the guiding impulse of their vocation” (p. 1). She proposed that perhaps these art therapists have found art to be helpful in their own lives, as it promotes caring and self-exploration and that is why they choose art therapy as a career. Arnheim also posited that “Some artists also have had the personal experience of obtaining rescue from mental trouble through the exercise of their profession. This makes them willing and indeed eager to make this resource available to others similarly plagued by personal difficulties” (p. 1). Since this literature review has so far shown that many therapists come to the field due to their own wounds (Barr, 2006; Lemelin, 2006; Shatell, 2009; Cain, 2000; Martin, 2011; Zerubavel & Wright, 2012; Richard, 2012; Wheeler, 2007; Stone, 2008; Mander, 2004; Barnett, 2007; Elliot & Guy, 1993; Follette, Polusny & Milbeck, 1994; Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995), it is possible to infer that many art therapists (though no specific research has been done yet) come to the field for some of the reasons listed above by Arnheim.

Art Therapy and Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is taboo, and thus it is likely the most underreported type of abuse in the US, with an estimate of 325,000 children being sexual exploited in the US alone (Pifalo, 2002). Art therapy interventions have been used as treatment for sexually abused children and their care givers in an attempt to decrease various symptoms of posttraumatic stress and anxiety (Hagood, 1991; Pifalo, 2002; Pifalo, 2009; Pretorius, 2010). The art therapy literature strove to find helpful forms of treatment for this population of trauma survivors.

Pifalo (2007) advocated that art therapy be used as non-verbal way of communicating that can reach a child on a level that words alone cannot. Since traumatic memory is very visual, art therapy is applied easily. Pifalo stated that art therapy facilitates coping skills, aids affect, speeds affective processing, highlights support as well as assisting in mapping the trauma narrative.

Clements (1996) advocated for the use of art therapy with abused children, specifically those that have been sexually abused. She explained that the artwork can help with the disclosure of the abuse and with processing the actual trauma. In regards to the disclosure, she agreed with Malchoidi (1991) who named nine characteristics common in abused children's drawings. These are 1. sexual connotations in the artwork, 2. neglecting to draw the bottom part of the body, 3. disorganization and distortion of body parts, 4. encapsulation, 5. the use of the color red and complementary colors, 6. heart shapes, 7. artistic regression, 8. the use of circles and wedges and self-deprecation. Through case examples by Clements these characteristics are explained and proposed as indications of abuse, along with behavioral and or familial signs. By using the art children can “talk” about the abuse, without having to use the words that many times their perpetrators have explicitly forbidden. Art therapy then becomes a safe space for the child to disclose the alleged abuse at their own pace, revealing through their art and their descriptions of it, as much as they feel comfortable with.

Meekums (1999) suggests that arts therapies can be useful for treating survivors of childhood sexual abuse because of:

- Their ability to unearth unconscious material.
- Their containing and distancing properties, when planned and used with this in mind.
- The potential for generating an image, which can be faced, witnessed and appraised.

- The sense that the creation “speaks for” the survivor, either without the need for the usual use of language and discourse or facilitating this. (p. 257)

Treatment.

Clements (1996) also supported the idea of art therapy as a beneficial form of treatment for the sexually abused population. She explained that as well as helping children express traumatic memories in a visual, nonverbal way, art therapy also gave them control over the conversation as their art, and their response to it, guided the conversation. When treating sexually abused children Clements warns therapists to not be outwardly shocked or disgusted by the painful images the children may make, but to create an accepting environment. She recommended using the metaphor in the art, whether it is a character or a story, as in her experience that is the way children automatically tend to communicate. This author also highlighted the importance of boundaries in cases of sexually abused children, and explained that the art can be a perfect place for working on those boundaries. The art can literally be contained, in a frame or within the boundary of the page. Another relevant issue is that of control. Victims of sexual abuse are used to not being in control, and a therapist that can use control in a healthy way is a great model for these survivors.

Working with the child. Pifalo (2002), Powell and Faherty (1990) and Pretorius (2010) all studied group art therapy with sexually abused girls. Powell and Faherty (1990) explained that “The combination of the creative arts therapies and group process promotes positive, empowering, and dramatically corrective resolutions in the treatment of sexually abused girls” (p. 47). Participants in all three studies were latency age girls.

Goals. The goal of Pretorius (2010) was to reduce depression, anxiety, sexual trauma and low self-esteem. Similar to Pretorius (2010), Pifalo (2002) aimed to prove that art therapy

interventions reduce these same symptoms and enhance potential for positive outcomes in sexually abused children. The goal of Powell and Faherty (1990) was to develop a treatment plan aimed at the specific needs of this population such as creating a safe environment and processing their feelings about the sexual abuse they experienced.

Research. The articles that focused on working with children had similar treatment lengths. In Pifalo (2002) the participants met for an hour and a half once a week, for ten weeks. In Pretorius (2010) the length of treatment was slightly shorter, ending after only eight weeks. Powell and Faherty (1990) created a 20 session group process that met once a week for an hour and a half. Both Pifalo (2002) and Pretorius (2010) used trauma checklists to test whether the intervention was affective or not. Pifalo used pre and post testing using Briere's Trauma Symptom Child Checklist. Pretorius used the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (TSCC) and Human Figure Drawing (HFD).

Results. Pretorius (2010) and Pifalo (2002) concluded that their interventions were both proactive in relieving symptoms of anxiety. Pretorius also helped decrease depressive symptoms, while Pifalo stated that they decreased symptomology on all scales but only had statistically significant scores on reducing post-traumatic stress, dissociation and anxiety. Pretorius showed their results by comparing the experimental groups' checklists with the control groups'. Pifalo used pre and post testing to show their results. Both groups of results suggested that the programs were successful, but they do not relieve all the symptoms they set out to resolve (Pifalo, 2002; Pretorius, 2010). Powell and Faherty (1990) did not use a measure to test their 20 session treatment plan but the authors felt it was a successful treatment, especially compared to the 12 week treatment plan they had originally tested which they found to have been not enough time for the participants to process their trauma thoroughly.

Pifalo (2006) did a four year follow up of their 2002 study using an 8 week group for sexually abused children and adolescents using art therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. They again used the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children as their measure. The results showed reduced scores in “Anxiety, Depression, Anger, PTSD, Dissociation, Dissociation-Overt, Sexual Concerns, and Sexual Preoccupation” (p. 184). Since these are considered abuse related symptoms, specifically PTSD, this reduction is significant and suggests that art therapy CBT groups are beneficial when working with this population.

Working with the adult survivors of child sexual abuse.

Goals. Glaister (1996), though not an art therapist, recommended using self-portrait as a way to monitor changes in self of adult survivors of child sexual abuse. The audience the article was written for is nurses, however, the technique outlined is one relevant to art therapy. The goal of the self-portraits was for the client to gain insight, and increase self-awareness. Anderson (1998) proposed group for female adult survivors of child sexual abuse with the goal “to use art as a tool to facilitate movement from internal to external expression, from silence to voice, from disconnection to connection, and from disempowerment to empowerment” (p. 29). Brooke (1995) also used art therapy in a group format for sexual abuse survivors. The goal of the group was to improve self-esteem.

Research. Glaister (1996) presented four clinical illustrations that used the self-portrait technique. All participants were female and ages ranged from 28 to 38. Treatment lasted from five months to three years. Anderson (1998) had 8 women of diverse backgrounds in each group they met for two hours a week for eight weeks. Brooke (1995) had 2 hour weekly sessions for eight weeks. The participants were six white middle class females whose ages ranged from 26 to 40. Unlike Glaister and Anderson, Brooke used a control group of 5 women of similar ages and

who were also middle class whites. Brooke also used the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) as a pre and posttest for both groups.

Results. Glaister (1996) found that the self-portraits were a good indicator of progress. One of the participants were able to gain confidence as seen by her portraits progressing in realism and detail, while another participants showed their changing views of self through the art. The other two participant's self-portraits showed the difficulty they had accepting self and changing their self-concept. The author closed by encouraging more creative ways, like this example, to help adult survivors of sexual abuse recover.

Anderson (1998) suggested that their work with women in the group art therapy format “acknowledged the non-verbal impact of violence and abuse and gives voice to that which has been unspeakable” (p. 35). Through the group process the women were able to relate and share their growth and insight with each other, as they learned more about themselves through their art. Brooke (1995) found that their treatment group reported an increase in self-esteem compared to the control group, specifically in social and general self-esteem categories. The author also stated that “Through art, group members found a way to communicate their feelings and later freely verbalized them. Trust also improved to the point that friendships continued after the conclusion of the group” (p. 454).

Working with adult male survivors of child sexual abuse. In this literature the author did not narrow her search to articles about females, and yet only one article was found for this section on male survivors of sexual abuse. This lack of information about treatment of male survivors of sexual abuse is what led to Baljon's (2011) case study on “how art therapy can contribute to posttraumatic transformation and to a redefinition of masculinity” (p. 151). The author stated that sexual abuse of males has been grossly underreported but now it is predicted

that 10% of men have suffered some type of sexual abuse. The fact that sexual abuse is underreported as a whole speaks to the stigma and fear that come from the topic. Sexual abuse is even more taboo when it comes to male victims, for many reasons relating to societal views of masculinity. “For girls, the abuse emphasizes that they are women and therefore objects. For boys, it emphasizes that they are objects and therefore not men” (p. 155). Masculinity, by definition, does not allow room for sexual abuse, so how can men report their abuse when it represents a failure to their sex? Baljon explains that “For men who have suffered sexual abuse in their youth, masculinity is at stake by the very nature of the trauma” (p. 151).

Case study. Baljon (2011) proposed using group therapy for men who had been sexually abused as children. He illustrates using art therapy as a non-threatening approach in a case study of a fifty year old man who had experienced severe sexual abuse as a child. He was currently having problems dealing with his angry feelings, as to him they represented an evil he did not want to be associated with. At the beginning of the group the client needed a lot of time to get started and then once he was finished making art “he felt an immediate need to destroy it” (p. 160). Through support from the group and individual meeting he was able to form from clay a representation of his ego, which after one year of treatment he was able to color. At the end of treatment he also explained how important it was to him that his art work “no longer needed to be demolished” (p. 161). In summation the author stated that “The therapeutic relationship with therapists and fellow clients in a group creates a safe place for the development of new emotion schemes around primary adaptive anger and new ways of connecting with others” (p. 162).

Art Therapy and Incest

Treatment.

Working with the child. Pacific (1992) said that art for the incest survivor is “integral to survival itself... it exposes the inner self and breathes life into the artist’s soul, heretofore cauterized by pain” (p. 27). Cohen and Phelps (1985) agreed and explained that “In the lives of children, incest is the most insidious violation of trust. It teaches children distrust at the most elementary, deep-seated level” (p. 265). Cohen and Phelps found that 85% of the incest survivors they had access to were female, and the remaining 15% were male.

Incest markers in children’s artwork. Cohen and Phelps (1985) aimed to find whether children’s artwork revealed incest markers and to see if it was possible to objectively score the incest markers. The three drawings they collected were a House-Tree-Person (HTP), a portrait of their family doing something together, and a free drawing. The drawing features they choose to rate were a red house, whether the house had only one window or if one window was different from others, if there was a phallic tree or phallic chimney, if the face was colored in, if the person was enclosed or hidden, if it had obvious violent content, if there was an absence of color, if the HTP was missing a house, if the child was missing in the family drawing, or if there was an absence of drawing in the family drawing. It was found that though a greater number of these features were found in interfamilial sexual abuse victim’s art versus the control group (which consisted of emotionally disturbed non-abused children); the findings were not clinically significant. In the second part of the study they added additional features to the list such as absence of window, absence of family member, house drawn with shade of red, rainbows, hearts, “love,” chimney and smoke, body image (whether it is complete and appropriate or not), cognitive level of development and psychosexual level of development. When rating scores were again reliable Cohen and Phelps suggested that “the coding system itself needs further development” (p. 282).

Goals. Peake (1987) wrote a case study about an 8 year old boy named David who was in foster care after being taken away from his incestuously abusive father and neglecting mother. The goal of their art therapy sessions were to deal with his reoccurring nightmares initially, however other symptoms such as anxiety, acting out behavior and enuresis soon appeared as well.

Saltzman, Matic and Marsden (2013) used art therapy with children and adolescents who had sexually abused. The two case illustrations referenced here both involved interfamilial sexual abuse. Darrel was a 14 year old boy who was sexually abused by his older brother, and forced to also witness his older brother sexually abuse his younger brother. After adapting well in his foster care placement his foster mother died suddenly and Darrel became withdrawn. The goal in his case was to address his “social interest and courage” (p. 232). Maya was a 13 year old girl who had been sexually assaulted at knife point by a stranger as well as being sexually abused by her step father from age five to eleven. Maya was nonverbal and so art therapy was recommended for her. Maya had learned that the world was unsafe, the goal of her treatment was to decrease PTSD symptoms and change her phenomenological framework so there would be room for healthy relationships with others.

Results. Peake's (1987) case study ended when David was finally adopted into a supportive and loving family. David's enuresis had stopped by that time and there is no mention to his nightmares. In his last drawing he portrayed three dolphins, which Peake interpreted as possibly representing himself and his new adopted parents, and as a hopeful, playful and intelligent family he could finally be a part of. By completing the joint drawing in Saltzman, Matic and Marsden (2013) Darrel showed he was courageous and capable of trusting another person again. Maya's seemingly small move to interact and make art with her group member

showed the beginnings of her ability to connect positively with others. In the interactive art piece she was able to display courage, and gain a sense of accomplishment.

Working with the adult survivors of incest. Sweig (2000) stated that a “Women’s inability to ‘speak the unspeakable’ has left them untreated regarding the traumatic events of their childhood and burdened with intense feelings of betrayal and mistrust that impair present-day relationships” (p. 255).

Goals. Huss, Elhozayel and Marcus (2012) formed their study with the goal of showing “how art work within a group context can be used to simultaneously confront defenses, change interactive behaviors, and create social change” (p.401). Lefevre (2004) presented a case study where the goal for the client was exploring the dynamics of her childhood interfamilial sexual abuse and using art “in order to maximize the possibilities for the client’s expression, communication, growth and containment” (p. 137). Anderson (1995) used group clay work with adult incest survivors and “The major treatment goal was to create a safe place where clients could trust enough to allow the re-experiencing of some of the terror and rage of the sexual abuse experience” (p. 416). Lev-Wiesel (1998) used an instructive drawing technique with a goal of encouraging the adult survivors to talk about their interfamilial sexual abuse.

Sweig (2000) has ran a psycho-educational art therapy group for female adult survivors of sexual abuse (specifically incest) for 16 years. The goal of the group has been to let women heal women, by “helping women understand the impact of abuse on their lives and empowering them to alter their victim identity” (p. 255). The focus of the group is not on telling the abuse story (individual therapy is recommended for that), but “on the impact that sexual abuse has on participants’ lives” (p. 256).

Research. Huss, Elhozayel and Marcus (2012) used qualitative case studies to gather their research. The art therapy group consisted of 4 women from the ages of 20 to 50, who participated in weekly sessions that were an hour and a half long for one year. The perpetrators were older brothers and father figures. Lefevre (2004) met with her client, a young 17 year old white woman, for two years in individual therapy. This client's perpetrator was her father, who at the start of therapy had been sentenced to 12 years in prison for rape. Anderson's (1995) study on group clay work lasted 9 weeks and the 5 female participants were between the ages of 18 and 50. The perpetrators in this study were not named as telling the incest story was not a main goal of treatment. Lev-Wiesel (1998) presented a case study of a 36 year old woman who had been raped by her father as a child and when confronting her mother about the abuse had been ignored. The client presented with depression and "a strange unresolved fear of entering the bathroom" (p. 258). Sweig (2000) has led a 12 week art therapy group consisting of 90 minute sessions for 16 years. Members are limited to eight adult women at least 18 years of age. Over the years the group has grown and evolved, the current treatment plan will be the focus here.

Results. The four group members in Huss, Elhozayel and Marcus (2012) facilitated their own insight process as they analyzed and commented on the work of other members, instead of the art therapist and social worker that led the group. Themes that came up through the art were "the graphic depiction of defenses within the art work" (p. 409), growth recognized by the visual changes in the art, and the "third common theme is that the women used the group as the central interpretive noise" (p. 409). "The implications of this study are that individual insight based interventions may be less effective for incest survivors in confronting defenses than therapy within a group of fellow sufferers" (p. 409). Again, the idea of group therapy for treating abuse is supported, as well as using art as an intervention.

The results of the art in Lefevre (2004) was that it created a space, a pause in the client's constant dialogue, and in that pause the client began "to become less self-conscious that her artwork had to be "good" and the focus was able to move to the level of self-expression and communication" (p. 150). Without the art modality it is possible Lefevre would not have been able to progress as much as she did with the client.

Anderson (1995) did three and six month follow-up questionnaires that were filled out by each participant's individual therapist. The results were that "all reported that the short-term art therapy clay group was significant or very significant in the life of their clients" (p. 424). The client's themselves were also polled at three and six months after and reported "continuing positive progress and ongoing positive feelings about themselves as a result of participation in the art therapy group" (p. 425).

Lev-Wiesel's (1998) directed art drawing encouraged the client in the case study to successfully speak about her trauma, including confronting her parents about the abuse in a session where she emphasized the difficulty of forgiving their crime. The author also felt that "Working as a co-therapist seems to strengthen the victim with a sense of reassurance about his/her ability to confront any difficulty, with or without help" (p. 261). At the end of treatment the client explained her current wish to help other sexual abused women "who are trapped in this hell" (p. 261).

The client used this metaphor for the therapeutic process that had changed her:

I had an attic full of junk which I was afraid to look into; you (the therapist) have helped me to clean it out, put everything in order, throw out what was inessential, and step down again. I am not afraid of going into the attic anymore. (p. 261)

Sweig (2000) wrote of the results of the group experience that “It is very moving to experience women, most of whom are in their late 30s to late 50s, finding their voices and speaking out after decades of silence around their feelings about what happened to them in childhood” (p. 263). In this group that has been going on for 16 years the “Women can, and do, shift from “I am bad” to “something bad happened to me,” thus altering their prior total identification with their abuse” (p. 263). This transformation is vital in the process of recovering from childhood sexual abuse.

Working with the Caretaker. In the art therapy literature about incest it is noteworthy that many focus on treating the caregiver, normally a non-offending parent, as well as the abuse survivor themselves. Since incest is interfamilial sexual abuse, it makes sense that the caregivers are brought into treatment, because disclosure of sexual abuse can cause a huge upset in the family system, as the caregiver tries to understand the abuse, what this means for their family, and their guilt over the abuse itself.

Goals. The goal of Hagood (1991) was to stop the cycle of incest by educating and by promoting the psychological wellbeing of the caregivers, ensuring the healing of the child. Pifalo (2009) also aimed to address emotional distress and optimize the caregivers’ abilities to support their children. Backos and Pagon (1999) created an art therapy group for adolescent girls who had been sexually assaulted via rape and incest. This group was meant to support both the parents and the survivors themselves similar to Hagood (1991) and Pifalo (2009). In Backos and Pagon (1999) the parents met without their daughters for two weeks and adolescents met without their parents for eight weeks. This design was aimed at giving the adolescents (aged 13 to 17) connections to others who had been sexually abused, and to help them understand that they are

not alone in the journey of recovery. It also assisted the parents, named as co-survivors, to converse with other parents and share coping skills.

Hagood (1991) and Pifalo (2009) also used art therapy in a group treatment model for caretakers of children who had been incestuously abused. “The importance of psychotherapy for mothers... cannot be overemphasized. Improvement in the mother’s psychological wellbeing may well alter the family system in the direction of healthier functioning in all members” (Hagood, 1991, p.17). Hagood had female clients participate in their group art therapy program. The number of participants varied between five and twelve participants. Their ages varied, as did their socioeconomic statuses but the specifics are not listed (Hagood, 1991). Pifalo continued her work with sexual abuse from 2002, but in 2009 worked with adult women after disclosure of sexual abuse in their families had been made. Like in Hagood (1991) group membership varied, this time from ten to twelve participants. Their ages ranged from 22-61 years of age (Pifalo, 2009). All groups had only female participants.

Research. Hagood (1991) used a preexisting verbal therapy group but introduced art therapy for the sake of this study. Pifalo (2009) used satisfaction questionnaires on the 5 goals of the therapy. Unlike Pifalo, Hagood and Backos and Pagon (1999) did not use any sort of test to prove its success. Neither Pifalo nor Hagood listed how long their intervention ran for.

Results. Hagood (1991) and Backos and Pagon (1999) demonstrated how art therapy helps with no statistical evidence, only with the description of the experience itself. The advantages of art therapy that were noted from the experience are “(a) more members were drawn into group process, (b) encouragement from peers can take place, (c) a sometimes playful atmosphere can be created. Art Therapy encourages expression of deep feelings with group members viewing and sharing art work. Art work is a visual experience of the issues” (Hagood,

1991, p. 26). Pifalo (2009) found the maps to be positive in helping the participants reach the five therapeutic goals via the 90% satisfaction rating that was scored from the questionnaires.

Art Therapy and Countertransference

In the mental health field art therapists have a unique advantage in dealing with countertransference as they know that making art can help process not only their clients' problems but their personal issues as well, including countertransference. Do art therapists take their own advice and use art to process? Brown (2008) explored this very question. All 45 participants in the study claimed that they "continue to make art while managing their careers, and find the art-making process vital to their professional affectivity and their personal well-being" (p. 207). This author requested more research be done on what happens when art therapists stop making art, and how that effects their clinical work.

Wadeson (2003) encouraged art therapists to continue to make art and gave examples of the art being utilized to process things like grief over dying children, racial prejudice, dehumanization and over identification with clients. By using art the art therapist explored themes and symbols as well as media choice when processing their countertransference. Some art therapists used art spontaneously when needed after a tough session or disturbing incident, while others created an art making procedure to assist them. Wadeson (1987) did just that in her art making process that involves one spontaneous image, that leads to another, then another and another. "The gift of art expression we bring our clients can serve us well to ventilate our feelings and to obtain clarity about this mysterious process we call art therapy" (Wadeson, 2003, p. 217).

Art Interventions. Klein (1973) studied staff countertransference in a psychiatric hospital by having them work in two groups based on two patients that they voted were the most

difficult to deal with. Each group was asked to “attempt to convey graphically your impressions, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward this patient. Try to be open, honest and expressive. Use any or all of the media and materials available” (p. 248). Given a variety of art materials, the groups managed to express their many countertransference issues with the clients. Interestingly it was found “that staff groups typically tend to express previously concealed angry feelings towards patients” (p. 252). This anger could be very dangerous left unchecked, and by doing this art intervention the staff were able to acknowledge these conscious and unconscious attitudes and work through them therapeutically.

Belfiore (1994) used art therapy interventions on a group of nurses and doctors who did home care for the terminally ill and were at high risk for burnout. Over 20 sessions the group process “showed the function of imagery in making inner and emotional life accessible to consciousness and in providing participants with more viable modes of relating to others, to the life/work experience as well as to oneself” (p. 126).

Sexual abuse. Wadeson (2003) wrote specifically about using art in countertransference when working with sexual abuse survivors. Referencing her work in Wadeson (2000), she gives the example of an art therapist named Jeni who used the quilt making process to explore her counter transferences and secondary PTSD from working with sexually abused clients. Through the meticulous process of designing, cutting, organizing, decorating and finally sewing the individual squares Jennifer was able to gain insight about the therapeutic process and her internal experience of the client. “This process gave Jeni the time, structure, and process to assemble pieces of her experience with women who had survived sexual abuse” (Wadeson, 2003, p. 216).

Narrative Therapy and Art Therapy Literature

Treatment

Carlson (1997) wrote on the benefits of using art therapy techniques with narrative therapy theory. The author states that both narrative and art therapy encompass the “ideas of recapturing hidden aspects of self-expression or lived experience, the principle of co-construction in understanding the therapeutic relationship, and the belief in the creative abilities of persons” (p. 275). The article gives case studies for four principles that show how the art can be used for narrative means in clinical practice. The first principle is bringing forth dominant stories. White and Epston (1990) believed that client’s stories say a lot about them. Carlson used self-portraits in a case study with a 14 year old girl named Misty. Through the self-portrait the client acknowledged her battle with anger and was able to use the portrait in a family session so her family members were able to discuss how anger effected them as well. “As clients draw who they think they are, the therapist will get a good sense of the story of their identity” (p. 277).

The second principle in Carlson (1997) is the externalization of the problem. The same client’s self-portrait represented an internalization of the problem (she drew anger in her half of her face) and this led to externalization. The client was able to discuss anger’s effect on her, and ways she actually had control over her anger. This was actually an example of unique outcomes, which is the third principle. In narrative theory letters are often used to support unique outcomes (White & Epsen, 1990). Carlson directed Misty to do several follow up self-portraits that showed the change in her relationship with anger. Doing a review of these self-portraits (in which anger was getting smaller and she was hitting stronger) helped the client see how much progress she had made, and discuss how she did. The fourth principle was performance before an audience. Carlson wrote that “It appears that art provides a way for clients to rehearse their stories and their

new relationship to the problem” (p. 280). Misty did this by showing her progression of self-portraits to her family and “through her drawings, she was able to tell her story about her new identity and the changes she had made” (p. 282). Through this process, the family dynamics also changed as they were affected by the changes Misty had taken and her new role of empowerment. It is possible the family could have made this progress without the art, and narrative theory alone; however it can be supposed that art played a major role in speeding up the process.

Conclusion

This literature review suggests that many mental health professionals have gone through a traumatic life experience that may have effected their choice of career (Barr, 2006). This percentage of healers are referred to as “Wounded healers.” Because of their personal experiences, many may be effected by more countertransference than other mental health professionals. Supervision and personal therapy are named as ways this countertransference can be processed professionally.

Sexual abuse and incest are explored in this literature as traumatic experiences that often lead to increased risk of mental illness. Narrative therapy is explored as a treatment modality for sexual abuse as it gives adult and child survivors a voice, and a way to see that they are more than their trauma. Art Therapy is also recommended by the literature to treat this population since it involves non-verbal communication which may be easier for those who have been sexual abused and feel like they cannot talk about what happened to them, either because their perpetrators specifically told them not to or because they merely do not have words for the shame they may feel. Narrative theory and art therapy are recommended to be used together so as to utilize both modalities.

I personally identify as a wounded healer as I come from a family of multigenerational patterns of sexual abuse, specifically incest, and this experience impacted my career choice to become an Art Therapist. This review supports the idea that interfamilial sexual abuse can become multigenerational if the pattern is not stopped. This was true for my family, and the pattern will end with me. I have used art therapy theory and narrative therapy techniques, which this review suggests are beneficial in treatment of sexual abuse, in my own wound healing.

Research Approach

This study used qualitative research. Bloomgarden and Netzer (1998) believed that “Qualitative models emphasize the clinician’s involvement in the process and have the potential to reflect on the use of art in therapy more accurately than quantitative analysis” (p. 51). Because this paper explored the phenomenon of the wounded healer, rather than aiming to quantify the subject, a heuristic research method was used. “The key element that defines heuristic inquiry is the use of self-awareness to engage intensely in an experience so as to discover new, in-depth meaning about it. Heuristics incorporate creative process and self-examination into formal inquiry” (Kapitan, 2010, p. 144). Since there is limited research on the subject of wounded healers, let alone on the wounded healing experience, this author felt like a heuristic approach could lead to creative insight on the subject and inspire future research. Through heuristic research, “not only is knowledge extended but the self of the researcher is illuminated” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11). It is through this illumination that this author aimed to explore her personal experience of being a wounded healer who had experienced interfamilial sexual abuse, with the help of narrative therapy theory and the art therapy process.

Methods

This section of the research includes the definition of terms that have been used in this study, the Design of the study, and covers the Sampling, Gathering and Analysis of the data.

Definition of Terms

Wounded healer: Barr (2006) stated that “the wounded healer is a concept relating to counsellors and psychotherapists (‘healers’) who have been ‘psychologically wounded’ in some way, where, to some extent, the wounds lead to career choice” (p. 1).

Psychological wounds: Barr (2006) described psychological wounds as “the effect of one or more traumatic events that had significant emotional impact on you” (p. 1).

Incest: Sexual abuse that occurs in the family of either blood relations or those related by marriage. Normally perpetuated by an adult to a minor, however this paper also includes research on sibling incest (Thompson, 2009; *Arvidsson, Ingevaldson, Larsson and Tidefors (2010)*).

Sexual abuse: Sexual abuse relates to any unwanted physical, emotional and sexual attention. When pertaining to children, Etherington (2000) defines it as “a form of chronic trauma, in which the abuser over-stimulates the child’s bodily senses of fear, sexual arousal and helplessness and the child is overwhelmed” (p. 379). Sexual abuse is not limited to children, and unfortunately happens to both genders and people of all ages and races.

Multigenerational sexual abuse: When a family has multiple members from different generations who have been sexually abused, they are considered here to have multigenerational patterns of sexual abuse.

Countertransference: Figley (2002) references Corey (1991) when he wrote that countertransference is defined as “...the process of seeing oneself in the client, of over

identifying with the client, or of meeting needs through the client” (p. 1435).

Countertransference is related directly to feelings the therapist has with their family of origin relationships. As mentioned in Cain (2000), countertransference can cause problems in the therapeutic relationship unless it is addressed.

Vicarious trauma: Hernández, Gangsei, and Engstrom (2010) defined vicarious trauma as “the cumulative effect of working with traumatized clients: interference with the therapist’s feelings, cognitive schemas, memories, self-esteem, and/or sense of safety” (p. 69).

Unique outcomes: Unique outcomes, as defined by White and Epton (1990) “can be identified through a historical review of the persons’ influence in relation to the problem. Here persons can be encouraged to recall ‘facts’ or events that contradict the problem’s effects in their lives and in their relationships” (p. 56). These unique outcomes can help create new meanings in the re-authored story.

Storytelling: Storytelling has always been an essential part of human tradition. It is the way we pass down our history, beliefs and tradition, and involved either telling about our experiences or thoughts in a verbal, visual or written way.

Heuristic research: “The key element that defines heuristic inquiry is the use of self-awareness to engage intensely in an experience so as to discover new, in-depth meaning about it. Heuristics incorporate creative process and self-examination into formal inquiry” (Kapitan, 2010, p. 144).

Design of the Study

Sampling. As is usual in heuristic research, I am the sole subject and researcher of this study. In this research I explore my own identity as a wounded healer and my experience of interfamilial sexual abuse at the age of 12. The results of this study are too small to generalize,

but it is hoped they inspire other wounded healers to tell their story of pain and healing, which will further contribute to the mental health field as a whole by further banishing the stigma of mental illness from within our ranks.

Gathering of Data. In my initial engagement with the topic I wrote the literature review section of this research project, and decided on my protocol. My protocol involved participating in seven weekly sessions of self reflection that were broken down in three parts:

1. For the first part of my protocol I worked on a science fiction story I started writing upon my acceptance to this graduate program that explored my identity as a wounded healer. This writing/editing process was limited to one hour and occurred during the evening hours of seven nonconsecutive weeks.
2. After writing the story on my laptop, this author wrote in a dedicated journal for 15 minutes about the story and the realizations I had made about the parallels and metaphors it contained about my life and trauma narrative.
3. The third part of my protocol involved creating a work of art about the process of discovering these realizations using water color pencils, sharpies, chalk and plasticine. I narrowed the art supplies down to these specific options for the purpose of providing myself with containment.

At the end of this process I predicted I would have 7 journal entries and 7 pieces of art. Both working on my literature review and participating in this protocol were done simultaneously and became my immersion process as I learned about previous research done on what I had experienced, and learned about my own healing process at the same time.

After completing my last protocol which I dubbed “decompressions,” and turning in my third revision of the literature review, I began my incubation process. For this process I took a

week off from every aspect of my research project and celebrated my birthday weekend with a childhood friend and then visited my family for five days over the Thanksgiving holiday. After returning to school I checked in with my research team, then spent the rest of winter break completing my incubation process.

Analysis of Data. Once I was reunited with the art I invited my research team to look at my art in order to assist me in finding themes. I also analyzed my art myself and looked for codes used in both analyses. My journal entries were also analyzed using in-text analysis and 7 themes were found among both sources of data.

Results

Presentation of Data

The data was compiled during a three month period that resulted in 7 sessions of data collection (named decompressions). Approximately once a week, I participated in a three part protocol which involved working on a science fiction story I am writing for one hour, journaling for 15 minutes about that process and the parallels between the story and my life that I recognize, then making an art piece about those parallels. The following is a summary of the current plot of the science fiction story, a presentation of the art works created and quotes from the journaling process.

Summary: The story is set in a futuristic world on the brink of war where time travel and space travel are both normal affairs. The main character is a 24 year old woman named Sigh who works as a time traveling therapist, who instead of giving talk therapy, removes her clients (human and alien) from the societies to which they are deemed “abnormal” and transports them to other worlds or other times in which they could live peacefully, creating their own type of normal. Sigh wears a fully self-sufficient space suit that her father made her which runs only on positive emotions, and will shut down if Sigh experiences negative emotions such as anger and sadness. The love interest is a male named Robin who has severe trauma and suffered from an evolved form of dissociation that causes him to float up/fly out of triggering situations. While exploring the universe with him, Sigh learns that her father is not as saint like as he seems, and that he actually abused both her and her mother, and Sigh’s suit helmet has been blocking her memories of this trauma via nodes connecting to her brain. Sigh also learns that her father is responsible for Robin’s trauma as well, and she goes back in time to prevent the trauma from happening. Because Robin was never traumatized, in this new version of reality Sigh never met

him, but she remembers the other version of reality and still loves him. Sigh creates a new space suit that turns negative emotions into fuel and power. Sigh then makes contact with her mother and confronts her about abandoning Sigh as a child. Earth is threatened by an alien force, and Sigh must figure out how to save the world, and herself.

Decompression 1

My first decompression was on 9/23/14 and I worked on my science fiction story from 9:10pm to 10:10pm. I didn't know how the story was going to end, so I starting by editing the beginning of the story. I recognized that the character Sigh, put in an adult sized space suit, was unable to be treated as a child by her father, not able to be picked up and comforted. I noticed that I don't remember being comforted by my father as a child either. The character doesn't have many



Figure 1.

memories of childhood due to her memories being blocked by her father's invention. "The concept of being able to block memories has been fascinating to me since age 12 when I was sexually abused." I wrote that perhaps I don't remember much about my parents as a child because I was such an imaginative child, and perhaps my brain only stored the more "exiting memories" of my childhood. It was this idea that made me draw this response piece, my childhood safe space, a willow tree that grew in my backyard, inside Sigh's helmet.

Decompression 2

On 10/4/14 I wrote from 9:10-10:10 (coincidentally the same time as decompression 1). This excerpt explains the parallels I noticed while journaling; “I edited the climax of the story, where Sigh learns the truth about her father, and the real reason she was put in a suit. It really stood out to me how I made the father so self-aware, so full of regret. All the things he says, the apologies, the explanations, all are things I wish I would have gotten. All I wanted for so long was an answer. Why? Why did my great grandfather sexually abuse me, why did he think that was ok?”

The journal entry ending in noticing that I, like the main character in my story, am a time traveler, because I can go back and rewrite my story whenever I need to. So I drew Sigh driving my car, a 66 mustang, which is kind of like a time machine for me since she is a vintage relic from another time.



Figure 2.

Unofficial Journal Entry

On 10/8/14 I did not participate in the decompression process; however I recognized some things about my mother that I felt compelled to write down in my journal. “She was not there when I turned to her for protection as a child, but only because she was too busy protecting herself; she had no extra care to give. This is exactly what happens in my sci-fi story. Her mother leaves after she and her daughter are both traumatized by the same man (my mother and I were both incestuously abused by the same man) and so her mother checks out, not capable of protecting anyone, barely protecting herself.” This recognition of my mother, and the characters' mother's fear, made me wonder about how to end the mother's part of the story. I tossed around with having her get vicarious revenge through the story, but decided that, “I want her to be aware of why she is angry all the time. It's not us she is mad at, it's him.” It was also in this entry that I acknowledged that what happened to me and my mother was incestuous abuse. I had never named that before in this process or in my life.

Decompression 3

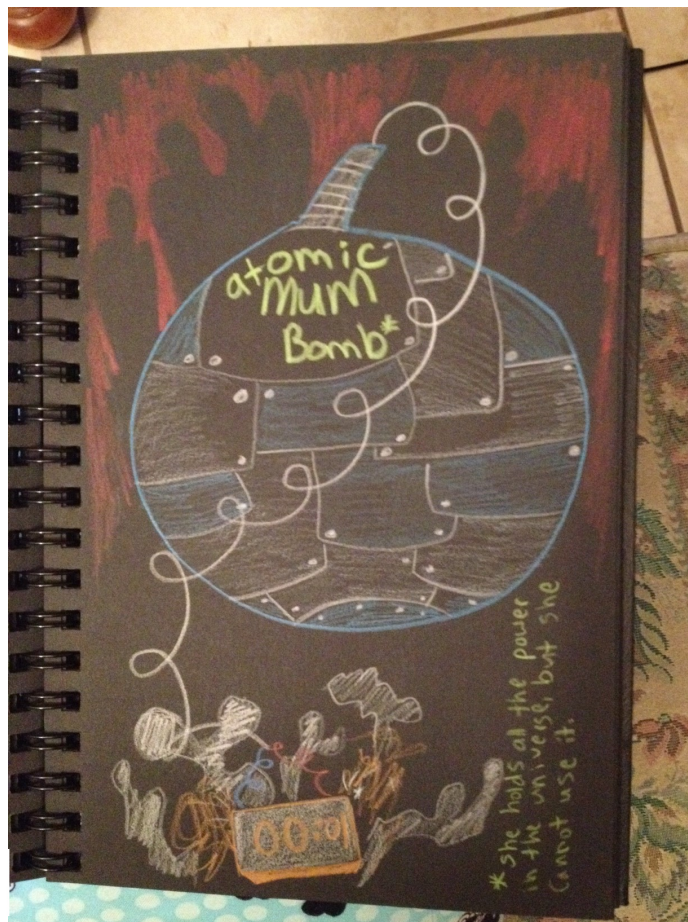
I wrote from 8:10-9:10 on 10/15 where I worked on the mother-daughter confrontation scene. An excerpt from my journal explains my process; “I took out (deleted) all I had written about dramatic excuses for the mum's behavior. Instead I left it simple: fear. Fear stopped her from taking a stand, and anger over that fear made her cold. This is my current theory on my own mother. I think it's interesting that I tried to give sci-fi mom an elaborate excuse (to why she couldn't protect her daughter), when really she already had a good one. Like my real mum.” At the end of my journal entry I come up with the idea that her mother could try to use the anger-compassion converter that Singh invented, to try to destroy the alien threat. However, I wrote that it would not work for her, because she isn't really angry like I had written

in the last two journal entries, she was really afraid. “She stands up against an army with an automatic bomb she can’t activate because she is too afraid. WOW.”

After writing this last two sentences, I made this piece with the caption “She holds all the power in the universe, but she cannot use it,” which represents how I feel about my mother. She had the power to stop my abuse, she knew what my great grandfather was capable of, she could have forbid him to be near us, or reported her abuse, making his sins public, but she didn’t. Maybe she too was afraid.

Decompression 4

Figure 3.

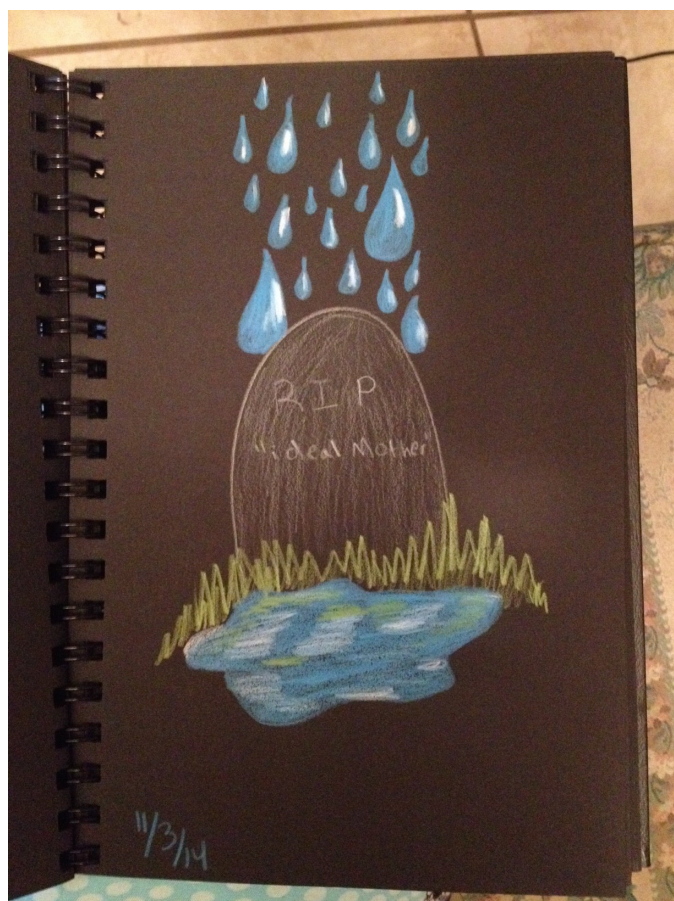


This decompression was the done on 11/3/14 (no time was noted) after a few weeks wherein no decompressions were done as I was traveling, and then was ill. Again I journaled about the mother in the story, and the fact that I didn’t know what would happen to her in the story. I noticed that perhaps that was because I don’t know what happens to my mother in real life. Will she ever get therapy? Will she ever process her trauma? I don’t know. I journaled that, “My therapist suggested I grieve for the mother I wanted, for the condolence, the protection, the compassion I wanted and needed. I think through Sigh I can grieve, perhaps that means Sigh’s mother needs to die in the book, or at least become a distant participant, somehow locked

away from Sigh, for her own protection.” This paralleled my current relationship status with my mother, as I had recently decided I needed an emotional cut off from my mother, as, “She is not the mother I needed, like Sigh’s mother, she is not a protector from abuse, she is too busy trying to heal or forget her own wounds, to be able to focus on her child’s.” In response I created this art piece titled “RIP ‘Ideal Mother’.”

Decompression 5

On 11/8 I wrote from 9:40-10:40 then journaled in my shortest entry yet. I was very tired, and was dozing off as I journaled. I had started writing with the idea to change Sigh’s blue suit to a reflective suit, after thinking about how, as a therapist, I am a “mirror” for my clients. I wrote in my journal entry that Sigh’s suit being reflective, means that “If the world is beautiful she is beautiful etc... That speaks to my feelings as a teen where I felt that



since the world was bad I was bad. I remember feeling dirty and “used” like no one *Figure 4.* would want me because of what I had been through. But over the years I have learned I am not my TRAUMA. If the world is bad, it doesn’t mean I have to be bad too.” In response I made this art piece of Sigh’s suit not reflecting the chaos around her, showing that she can make the world a brighter place in order to “make up for the bad.”

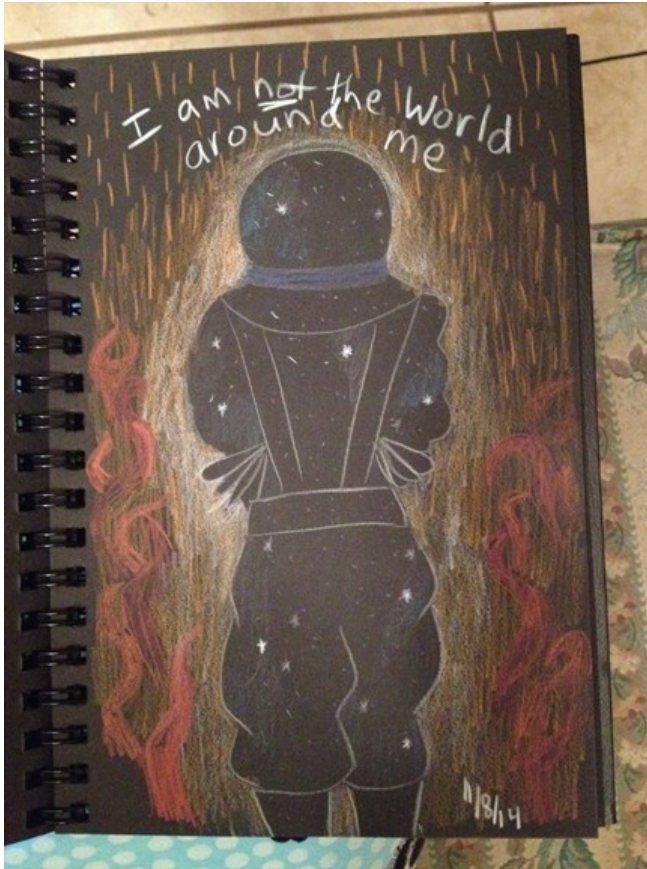


Figure 5.

Decompression 6

On 11/16 I wrote at my earliest time, from 6:09 to 7:09 in the evening. I wrote three pages on Sigh Ko, and decided “who was trying to destroy the Earth and why. The ‘bad guy’ isn’t a bad guy, it is a creature who somehow got telepathically linked to Sigh and now thus felt all her pain, tears and fears of the past year and this creatures whole world now feels it, and so they came to Earth, to destroy everything that would hurt Sigh. And wow is that latent content if I have ever seen it.” As I wrote on Sigh Ko I had to stop to draw out the creature as I saw it in my mind in order to describe it better. Then when journaling I wrote that “The creature in the sci-fi story represents the traumatized feelings to PTSD. They are an externalization of PTSD OMG I JUST REALIZED THAT!” I ended my entry by writing that “I look at it, and I see it as my PTSD, starring back at me. It wants to protect me, warn me of danger, but it’s not a good

enough protector, it instead needs my protection.” I drew this interaction between Sigh and the creature I named a “Watcher,” titled “looking each other, right in the FEAR.”

Figure 6.

Decompression 7

My last decompression was written on 11/19, coincidentally my birthday, from 9:15-10:15pm. I wrote several pages again that night, perhaps due to the fact that I knew it was my last decompression. In my journal I dictated that I had the “‘watcher’ character give Sigh the compassion she had never gotten because she had always been the empathetic one, the therapist. And that is what I wish I had with my mother. I wish when I had

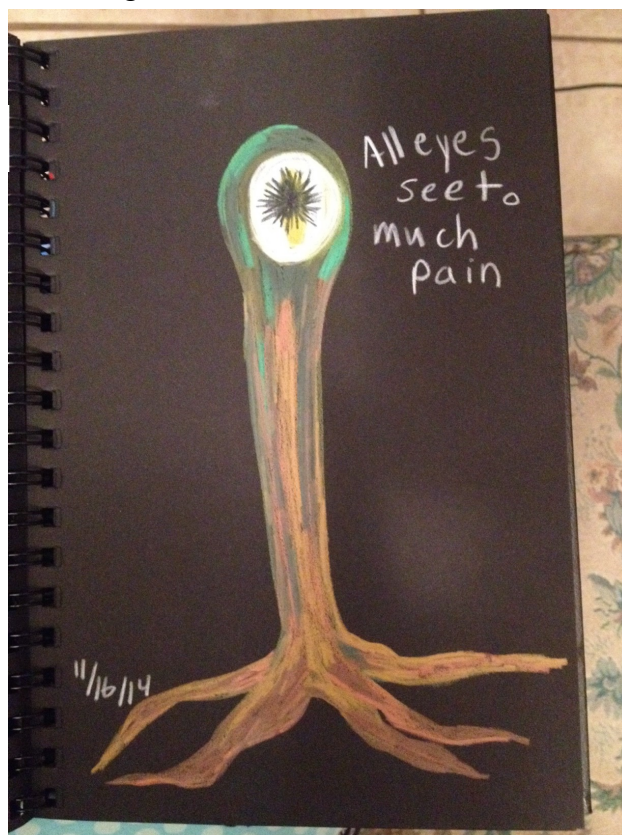


Figure 7.

told her about what happened to me, she would have fell down to my level and hugged me and cried for me, and told me she would protect me from that monster-but she didn't, she said 'I am not surprised.' After all, she wasn't, we had the same monster, and she never got support from her mother, so she never learned to

protect, so she could never protect me.” I wrote that realizing that, was painful, and predicted that my mother must have repressed so much anger over the years. The last line of Sigh Ko that I wrote said “anger gives power, fear eats it.” I journaled that this is what happened to Sigh’s mother, and that perhaps it is what happened to my mom.



Figure 8.

After drawing this I recognized that I made the “watchers,” tree like creatures like my safe place as a child, a weeping willow tree which I would sit in for hours reading and writing, escaping into my imagination (which I also drew in the first piece of decompression art). Another thing I noted was that my favorite song as a child was Patsy’s Cline’s “Walking after midnight,” where she sings, “I see a weeping willow, a crying on its pillow, maybe it’s crying for me.” That idea that the tree is crying for the singer, resonates so much with me, as well as with this story. The Watchers give Sigh the compassion and love she always wanted but never received.

Analysis of Data

I began this analysis and illumination process by photographing the art pieces and typing up the journal entries made in each decompression session. I reflected on the journal entries and the art pieces, and as I coded them 7 themes emerged.

Protection: The word “protection” came up 7 times in the journal entries, and codes emerged for it through the words nurturance, attachment and support in the mother-daughter relationship. In the group analysis process feelings of being unprotected and isolated, were named when looking at *Figure 6* and *Figure 8*. I titled *Figure 8* “Safe,” as this art piece expressed to me the feeling of protection and safety that the character in *Sigh Ko*, and myself craved, and did not feel like we received.

I noticed I ended up using the same material, water color pencils on black paper, for each art entry, which I think was my way of giving myself some consistency and containment, and by not actually adding water to the art pieces to blend them, I protected them from smearing or blending into the dark background.

I also saw protection in the physical suit that *Sigh* wears, in how it creates skin boundaries. In the story the suit is made to protect her from anything, for instance an atomic bomb, or her own feelings. For me the latent content in this suit is that it is rape proof, which was my greatest fear as a teenager. I didn’t feel like I was protected from that happening, and thus became hyper vigilant. This suit is bomb proof suit can be seen as a rather excessive form of protection. Why didn’t I just give the character a gun? I think I gave the character this suit, because it is what would have protected me back then. Could I have realistically shot my grandfather? No. But, though still not very realistic, would a skin barrier have stopped his lips

from touching mine? Yes. I think the suit is so excessively everything-proof to show how much fear I had, and how much protection I felt that I needed.

In the beginning of the story I wrote that her father put her in the suit in order to protect her physically from himself due to his violent past, however at the end of the story I wrote that the only way to remove that suit, was by the helmet's fingerprint recognition of the father's hands. This speaks to me about control. Sigh is technically protected by the suit, but was she really safe? My mother was very strict on my siblings and me growing up in order to protect us. We weren't allowed to watch PG 13 movies, go out on dates or spend the night at anyone's house. She tried too hard to protect us, even taking us out of school after I came home asking what "Fuck you," meant. Yet, in the assumed safety of family, I was unprotected, and I got hurt. At the end of the story, by Sigh making a new suit with the help of her father, one that can be removed by her hands alone, control is redistributed appropriately. Sigh gains control and is able to protect herself. She decides when she needs the suit and when she doesn't. This is where I feel I am at in this journey, I am capable of choosing when to shield myself, and when to open myself, in my personal and professional identity as a wounded healer.

Role reversal: The theme of role reversal appeared through the words abandonment, and grief, and specifically the quote, "not a good enough protector." In the group analysis process *Figures 1, 2 and 4* elicited feelings of sadness and isolation. Specifically *Figure 4* speaks to the idea of mourning for the ideal mother, and to me represents the role switch my mother and I experienced as I tried to protect her emotionally, like the character Sigh physically protects her own mother in the narrative. Sigh's attachment to her mother is severely damaged due to her abandonment at age 4. Sigh resents her mother for it, and thus views her mother as someone incapable of protecting herself, and thus Sigh protects her. I think this mirrors my feelings about

my mother for what I feel was emotional abandonment when I told her about the abuse due to her blase' attitude over it, since she had already experienced the same abuse and was thus not surprised. Due to my mother's view that the incestuous abuse didn't affect her, I have grown to feel that she is struggling to protect herself from this emotionally, and thus feel that when I have shown that it affected me, that this has been overwhelming for her. Hence, I protect my mother by keeping my experience separate from hers. Even now I am protecting her by not letting her have access to this finished research project.

Anger: The theme of anger emerged in codes and was specifically used 9 times in the journal entries. The group analysis used similar codes to describe *Figure 3*, where the image of a bomb about to go off represents to me the ticking time bomb that *is* anger. The fact that the emotion "anger," was used more than any other feeling word in the journal entries other than "fear," was shocking at first, as it seems to mean that I was angrier about my families' incestuous patterns than I consciously knew.

Countertransference: The theme of countertransference appeared in both the journal entries and the art work. *Figure 5, 6 and 7* speak to me about the experience of countertransference. I was surprised to see this theme appear, as I only mentioned the specific word "countertransference," once in the journal entries, and in that entry wrote about a specific client I was feeling countertransference towards. However, it seemed it was still in my mind since it came out in three of the art pieces. *Figure 6's* title, "All eyes see too much pain," seems to relate directly to my experience of countertransference with a client who was incestuously abused by her father, and who I have trouble not becoming overwhelmed with or vicariously traumatized by.

Wounded healer: The theme of the wounded healer was seen in the text with the words resilience, strength and compassion, among others. The overarching theme of the narrative seemed to be living in the present and not the past, which is to me an essential part of the wounded healer's process. This theme also appeared in the group analysis description of the progression of all 8 art pieces which elicited feelings of rupture and repair, loss and reclamation, growth to acceptance of self, safety and containment, and emotional searching. In this explication process I realized the main character of Sigh Ko is also a wounded healer, and she like me, did not know she was one at first. However, her dedication of her life to the helping profession, despite her personal trauma, makes her fit the description perfectly. The alien like creature in *Figure 7* and *8*, named a "Watcher" in the narrative, a creature that can read minds and feel others pain, seems to also be a wounded healer.

Bad vs. good: This theme appeared in the codes of the text analysis as well as in the art. The group analysis saw this in *Figure 7*, perhaps due to the juxtaposition of the alien creature and the kneeling heroine. This theme appears in the narrative itself as I choose one "bad guy," the father figure, and in him projected all possible "bad guys." It also appears in the alien invasion, in which they seem like the antagonist at first, but the main character soon learns that though what they were doing was technically "bad," their motives were purely "good." This conflict appears over and over in the story, as the father figure himself also does bad things later in life for the good reason of making up for his past abusive behavior. I also noticed that the main colors used in all of the art pieces were red/orange, blue/green, which to me represents the struggle between the fiery, explosive "bad," and the green nurturing "good." This struggle could represent a split, as it is known in object relations theory.

Fearing feelings: This theme was seen in the text as well as the art. The group analysis describe *Figure 3* titled, “She holds all the power in the universe, but she cannot use it,” as feeling powerless, dangerous, fearful, conflicted, and scared. The words “fear,” and “afraid” were used 12 times in the journal entries themselves and were the most used feeling words in the text. Fear, I think, was the true antagonist in this narrative. Fear made the husband beat his wife and child, fear made him lock away his daughter in a space suit that could kill her, fear made the alien “Watchers,” destroy half the Earth, and Fear stopped the mother from destroying the aliens in return. If fear was the antagonist, then compassion was the protagonist. And in this narrative, compassion, in the form of the character Sigh, won, and through this metaphor I have learned about my own battle with fear. This process has brought to mind memories of sleepless nights filled with nightmares of being raped, which I felt was inevitable for me considering I had already been “marked,” as a victim, as an object, and felt powerless to stop whatever happened next since I was unable to stop that first disgusting kiss. It made me think about how I lived in panic, about the flashbacks I experienced, and that if this little invasion could affect me so dramatically, it made me understand, and have empathy for others who have experienced sexual abuse. I do not say “little” to belittle my own experience of incestuous abuse, only to say that in the spectrum of sexual abuse, mine, though on the lower end of the scale, was still devastating to my emotional wellbeing as it introduced the villain fear, and the possibilities of further abuse. In reflection, that fear of “what next?” was probably more traumatizing to me personally than the actual abuse. This may explain why fear came up so often in this heuristic process.

I also think the setting of the story, being in outer space, and with a character able to travel through not only space but time too, also represents this fear of feelings. Sigh can escape situations by a mere press of a button and Robin (the love interest) floats away from danger

when triggered. Sigh's suit also literally prevents her from FEELING. This aspect of the story seems to scream at me, showing me how afraid of feeling scared and sad I was before entering this MFT program and learned through my own therapy and through my education how to self regulate. Learning to self regulate is also something Sigh has to learn how to do when she finally escapes the suit and has free range of her emotions. At the end of the story Sigh also builds a new home for herself on Earth, which represents to me her choosing to live with emotions, to embrace her "ability to feel" and not escape to the sky all the time. Instead she only dons the space suit when she works, as a way to protect herself.

Study Questions:

1. How does the narrative technique of storytelling support insight in healing from incestuous abuse?

When I first started writing Sigh Ko in 2013 I thought it was just a random science fiction romance. I have always been a writer, even as a child I wrote stories about bad things happening to good people. I didn't realize I was the main character in this story until I started this MFT Art Therapy program, then I realized I was always the main character in all my stories. They always have green eyes and red hair, they always are whatever age I am, and their personalities are always similar to mine. However, no story had so many parallels to my own narrative until this one. This story represents all my stories, all my attempts at having a voice. Through this story I have gone back in time and been able to face my perpetrator and say all that I always wanted to say to him. I have been able to confront my family about this abuse, and gain a sense of closure in this fictional tale that I may never get in real life. Through this story I have been able to heal, vicariously, through the eyes of a time traveling therapist. Through her, I have gotten to know myself.

2. How does the process of heuristic research bring awareness and healing to wounded healers?

I think this process of self-reflection has been pivotal in helping me form my identity as a wounded healer. It was empowering to research words I was always afraid to name, things I daren't say outloud; words like "sexual abuse," and "incest." Before starting this project I had never realized that what happened to me and my family was actually *incest*.

Knowing that this thing I had before called my "deep dark secret," or the "shit I went through," had a name, was both terrifying and enlightening, it gave me power. Once I could name it, it became less foreign, less scary, and as I researched ways for treating it with both art and narrative techniques, the word started to leave less of a terrible taste in my mouth. The taste of the dust rag I used to clean out my mouth after my great grandfather stuck his tongue down my throat 12 years ago also started to fade. Incest. It has become something I could now scream instead of whisper. As I calculated just now how long it had been since that terrible day, 12 years, it seems more than a coincidence that I was 12 then it happened, and that moment now stands half a lifetime ago for me, and for the rest of my life I will move further apart from that moment. However, I will always remember it as the most pivotal moment in my life. That wound, taught me the difference between good and bad, and made me choose the good. It made me want to fight, fight him and everyone else that tried to hurt others. It is what made me want to be a therapist, and it made me the wounded healer that I am today. The heuristic research method helped me become more aware of my process and that of others by giving me knowledge and empowering me to find answers. It helped me heal by giving me a sense of containment, by creating a safe place, and by being a structured method of searching one's self for the answers I had been looking for all my life, not knowing until now I held them already.

3. How does the art making process support healing from multigenerational patterns of incestuous abuse?

Art has always been my way of coping, so using art therapy techniques came naturally to me. The art process gave me a way to tell my story with images and thus it worked perfectly along with the narrative process of storytelling. Art not only gave me a voice in this process of healing, but I literally came to life in the sketches of the character done in this art process. In most of the drawings, the main figure is wearing a helmet, and you cannot see her face. But I don't have to see her face to know that it is me in there. In the space suit that appears in 5 of my 8 drawings, I am protected by this suit of armor so to speak and thus safe in the suit to process my family's patterns of multigenerational incestuous abuse.

In this journey through the images I am alone until the last two, *Figures 7 and 8*, when I am given support and protection by an alien creature. Through my art analysis process I have realized that alien is my PTSD symptoms, and thus in that way it is a projection of myself, it is an attempt by my brain to keep me safe. It holds me in *Figure 8*, safely in its root like arms, and it is latent content that it is similar to the willow tree in *Figure 1* which is a depiction of the actual tree I would hide in as a child when I needed to be alone and where I would feel protected.

Meanings

Through the themes mentioned above it seems that the experience of using an art process along with narrative techniques to heal those wounded healers who have experienced multigenerational interfamilial sexual abuse is one of enlightenment and transformation. For me, it involved learning about the need for protection I felt as a child, and the role reversal I feel like I experienced with my mother, as well as the anger I felt over the abuse and even more anger as I

found out that it wasn't an isolated incident but a pattern of abuse that steams back at least three generations. My experience of countertransference as a wounded healer was explored and my identity as a wounded healer became more concrete. This process involved acknowledging my experience of embracing feelings, instead of fearing them, as well as my integration of the bad vs. good and the creation of a cohesive and congruent narrative.

The theme of protection, of needing to be protected and wanting to feel safe instead of isolated, came up in this research and is touched on by Lorentzen, Nilsen and Traeen (2008), who interviewed seven women and one man about how their sexual abuse (incest) ended, using a narrative approach. The two things named as roadblocks to ending their incestuous sexual abuse were, the "Lack of support from family and friends, and having feelings of powerlessness" (p. 170). I was fortunate in that I was able to avoid my perpetrator and thus avoid further incestuous abuse, even though my family did not discuss the patterns of abuse or name my great grandfather openly as a child abuser. My art pieces reflect that feeling of powerlessness, and looking at them now it seems undeniable proof that I felt powerless as a child. I dealt with the situation by avoiding being near the perpetrator, which was hard because my family lived in the country with our houses barely a quarter of a mile apart. I constantly felt like I had no voice as I was forced to be polite and even feign sadness at my perpetrator's funeral.

The theme of role reversal found in this researcher's analysis was also mentioned in Barnett (2007), where the interviewees reported feeling especially sensitive to other's needs, and that they were often the confidante, though they were not listened too. Perhaps this role, she suggests, led them to that of the professional listener, a psychotherapist. This also related to the attachment process, in how often abuse upsets this process and creates role reversals, and parentification of children. This experience resonates with me, as I have realized through this

heuristic process that my feeling of being unheard in my family, led to me being so determined to be heard later in life, which this research project itself is a testament too.

In discussing anger, it feels relevant to note that Lemelin (2006) wrote that to be a wounded healer, one must work hard “to neither internalize one’s rage nor project it onto others” (p. 344). This “rage,” was seen in this researcher’s heuristic process in the theme of Anger. This anger was externalized through the narrative technique in the bomb illustrated in *Figure 3*, the bomb that won’t go off because of fear.

Just as countertransference came up in this researchers work, it also came up often in the previous research on wounded healers. Cain (2000) found that wounded healers in her study experienced countertransference issues such as “a) concerns about hospitalization of clients, b) comparison of therapist with client, c) identification with clients, and d) over identification with clients” (p. 24).

I can attest to over identifying as well as comparison of therapist with client, with the client I mentioned in Decompression 6, in which I wrote in my journal that the client “reminds me so much of myself at her age, unable to handle my own pain, unable to see anything but the pain, and feeling destructive. Like the only way to deal with the pain was to be strong, and fight it, destroy it.” I agree with the participants in Cain’s study who felt that their wounding experiences had helped them become more self-aware and successful clinicians capable of truly empathizing with their clients. My research also supports research on post traumatic growth (a type of countertransference) by Hernández, Gangsei, and Engstrom (2010) and Staub and Vollhardt (2008), which states that it is not the traumatic experience that predicts whether there will be post traumatic growth, but how the survivor interprets and internalizes these events.

These authors also mention “Altruism born of suffering,” which seems to me what fuels wounded healers forward and draws many of them including me, to the field of mental health.

Mander (2004) found that many future therapists say they are motivated to work in the helping field because they want to give what they did not receive in their early years and Barr (2006) found that 73.9% of therapists fit the category of wounded healers. In 1995, Schauben and Frazier reported that of their study of female mental health workers, 70% of the psychologists and 83% of the counselors reported personal victimization that consisted of either, rape, attempted rape, incest, sexual abuse, sexual harassment or other sexual assault. Through this heuristic process this was confirmed to be true for me, as I noted my childhood experience of sexual abuse as what brought me to the helping profession in the first place.

I think the theme of bad vs good identified in this research relates to countertransference, and how often a wounded healer may over identify with a client due to the “good” identified in the client, or by projecting the “bad” of past abusers on clients that a therapist may have negative countertransference towards (Cain, 2000; Hernández, Gangsei, and Engstrom, 2010; and Staub and Vollhardt, 2008). This theme also relates to splitting, an object relations term, where ones identity is split into a good and bad internal object. I feel like this is seen in the “bad guy/good guy” character of the Watchers, who at first represent to Sigh the bad in herself and in the world, and in the end represent the good, and Sigh learned that not everything is all good or bad, but that her identity can be integrated, and she can accept both the bad and the good in herself and in the universe.

The theme of fearing feelings also relates to the countertransference experience of the wounded healer. Barnett (2007) named that many wounded healers may experience a strong maternal identification in therapy, which may negatively impact therapy as the therapist will be

overly controlling due to their early experience of uncertainty, and may be unable to merely sit with the client's feelings. In Decompression 6 when I journaled about countertransference with a client unable to hold her own pain I realized I too have trouble as Barnett said, sitting with their feelings. In forming my identity as a wounded healer, I have realized that is something I must always be conscious of, as I want so badly to "fix the client," and make them feel "better," but to do that I need first to be able to hold their pain. *Figure 5* titled "I am not the world around me," also relates to this theme as the red fiery shadows seem to overwhelm the suited main character, whose reflective suit should mirror the pain and instead shows a clear night sky when it should be mirroring. This art piece reflects my own "fearing feelings," as they relate to my clients. This is something I hope future wounded healers will be conscious of and an area in which more research needs to be done.

(Study Questions)

The narrative technique of storytelling supports insight in healing from incestuous abuse by re-authoring problem saturated stories and creating a new strength based story. Through the realm of science fiction I was able to tell a new story, one that had similar problems as my own, but was not held back by the binds of time and space and was thus able to have fantastical strengths that helped me realize my own, human strengths in the process. Part of the process was that the story itself was an externalization. I was able to process and find meaning in the story because it was about Sigh (an externalization of myself) and not me.

By witnessing (another narrative theory technique) the abuse survivor's story, the therapist can become the support that they did not get at the time, the ears that did not hear them and the arms that did not fight for them (Lorentzen, Nilsen & Traeen, 2008). In my experience, my own therapist has helped me in this way by being supportive of my evolving story and

literally supporting me through this research project as even though she was not a part of the heuristic process, I saw her every week throughout this time and knew she was there to witness when needed. Even my research supervisor and research group members became witnesses of this process.

Literature on using story telling for survivors of sexual abuse is extremely lacking, and only one article was found that pertained to the topic. Herman (1997) helped a four year old survivor of sexual abuse tell her story through the metaphor of the fairytale Aladdin. The client found the truth of her abuse so terrifying and anxiety provoking that she was unable to talk about it without role playing in her favorite fairytale. This story gave her a voice she did not have in her real life. My research has revealed similar results. I too, feel like this fictional story I am writing, is integral to my personal journey in that it gives me both a voice, and a safe place to play out these alternative and exception experiences. It is hoped that future research will be done on storytelling, and that it will be found useful for those struggling with identifying their survivor voice.

Metaphors appeared in this story that were undoubtedly metaphors for my own healing. The main character was so obviously myself, and her suit represents both the protection I yearned for, and the isolation I experienced due to my abuse experience. The alien represents the protector, and at the same time is a nurturer and safe place, while also being powerful enough to destroy the Earth. The alien is both my PTSD (a thing that tries to protect me in warning me of danger, but often hurt me through the nightmares and flashbacks) and as I am writing this I also think the alien is perhaps a metaphor for parenthood, as parents have the capability to both nurture their children, and unfortunately, damage their children as well.

The process of heuristic research helps bring awareness and healing to wounded healers through the search for answers. This heuristic process has helped me explore my own trauma, and as Miller (1990) wrote, this will assist me in helping my clients to do the same. As Mander (2004) warned, therapist “cannot take the patients further than they have come themselves” (p. 162). As Barnett (2007) explained, that the most important thing about being a wounded healer is how one has dealt with their own wounds. In this researcher’s experience only Martin (2011) also used a heuristic process in trying to understand more about wounded healers, however I hope this research encourages other wounded healers to do the same.

In this search for answers I learned that 10-15% of the population has suffered from incest (Craighead, 2001), and that 20% of women have suffered from incest (Courtois, 1988). This made me feel less isolated in my experience, and at the same time angry that incest is by no means rare, and yet I did not know until I was 24 years old that what had happened to me *was* incest. The lack of information about incest is very unfortunate, since the research that has been done on incest shows the negative effects it can have and proves that it is still a prevalent issue. My personal experience agrees with Brand and Alexander’s (2003) findings that those who used avoidance to deal with incestuous abuse had higher levels of distress and depression and those that used distancing coping reported better adult functioning as I felt that doing this heuristic project, that helped me face my abuse at a safe distance, greatly improved my overall functioning as an individual and as a wounded healer.

The art making process supports healing from multigenerational patterns of incestuous abuse as it facilitates coping skills, aids affect, speeds affective processing, highlights support as well as assisting in mapping the trauma narrative (Pifalo, 2007). Art therapy interventions have been used as treatment for sexually abused children and their care givers in an attempt to

decrease various symptoms of posttraumatic stress and anxiety (Hagood, 1991; Pifalo, 2002; Pifalo, 2009; Pretorius, 2010). Pacific (1992) said that art for the incest survivor is “integral to survival itself... it exposes the inner self and breathes life into the artist’s soul, heretofore cauterized by pain” (p. 27). Arnheim (1990) proposed that perhaps wounded healer art therapists have found art to be helpful in their own lives, as it promotes caring and self-exploration and that is why they choose art therapy as a career. This rings true for me, as art helped me through those years after abuse in which I felt isolated and helpless, knowing of nowhere to turn except my art. Clements (1996) recommended using the metaphor in the art, whether it is a character or a story, as in her experience that is the way children automatically tend to communicate. For me, the metaphor was both in the character of the story, as well as in the plot itself.

In doing the response art aspect of my decompression protocol I discovered latent content, was able to gain insight into my experience, and mainly externalize fear, anger, my experience with PTSD and my relationship with protection and nurturance, my identity as a wounded healer, and my own resilience.

Creative Synthesis

During this research project it was impossible for me to keep Sigh out of all aspects of my art work. She appeared in my doodles during research meetings, in my countertransference sketchbook and in paintings done during this time period. This process inspired me to begin working on transforming my sketches of Sigh, into a tattoo. The idea of a tattoo, as a wound that heals, but leaves its mark, felt like a fitting metaphor considering the theme of Sigh’s suit as a skin barrier, and a form of protection. To get the tattoo I had to let myself be vulnerable, and trust that the artist wouldn’t hurt me.

Just as I feel marked by my experience internally, I am now forever marked externally as well, yet this time, I was in control. I choose the placement of the tattoo, the color, and drew it out exactly how I wanted it done. Through this research project her pose changed from her arms behind her back, seemingly in retreat, to her arms on her helmet, ready to take it off, which to me represents her readiness to come out of her “safe space,” and face the world head on, no longer controlled by a fear of feelings. After finishing my protocol I had the final drawing of her tattooed on my thigh (see *Figure 9* on page 83) as my creative synthesis.

The placement of the tattoo was given much thought, I first wanted her on my arm, as a reminder of strength and something that could be seen and witnessed. However, the more I thought about it, the more I realized she belonged on my right thigh, below my first tattoo which reads, “I control what hurts me.” These words represent another emotional marker in my life, done in the time in which I was applying to art therapy programs and had just began to write the story of Sigh Ko. The words are upside-down when I stand up, meant for me to read, for my eyes alone. I placed Sigh right side up and below the words so when I stood, she stood too. In this way, I feel this externalization of myself has come back, and joined with me, through this painful and yet joyous experience of doing heuristic research, and through the needles and ink themselves, I am now one completely integrated person, at ease with myself and understanding of my history and how it has affected me. I am one who embraces her identity of a wounded healer, and is ready to take off her helmet, and face the many challenges and responsibilities that come with it.



Figure. 9

Conclusion

As predicted, metaphors appeared in this heuristic process as parallels in the science fiction story and this researcher's personal trauma narrative. It is felt by this researcher that the art process along with narrative theory techniques made this heuristic process specifically enlightening in regards to healing from multigenerational incestuous abuse and in exploring the wounded healer identity.

In reflecting on the heuristic process and the protocol chosen I think there could have been more of a chronological exploration of the story. Instead of just writing for an hour on whatever part of the story came to mind, perhaps separating it into specific sections, and working on one per decompression, would have made for better reflection. However, not limiting the content revealed which parts of the story were more important to me, for example I journaled about the mother/daughter relationship in the story almost exclusively versus the father/daughter or the romantic relationship of the character.

This research has implications for clinical practice in relation to the wounded healer's experience, as well as to the use of art and narrative theory in combination as a treatment for trauma, sexual abuse in particular. This research suggests that though wounded healers are not impaired by their personal "woundedness" as a clinician, they can be without proper supervision and if they have not processed their wounds before processing their client's. I have also found that art therapy and narrative theory can work cohesively to better tell the trauma narrative as this process both gives visual evidence and provides a voice for those who may feel both unseen and unheard due to being incestuously abused, which though more common than many think, is still terribly taboo and thus rarely discussed openly.

The significance of this study is in the exploration of vicarious healing, a term not found in the literature, but that seems to summarize this researcher's experience of healing vicariously through the externalization of herself in the character Sigh. This researcher defines vicarious healing as an experience of healing through another person or experience. The literature discusses in detail the concept of vicarious trauma, and vicarious healing can be understood as its opposite, because just as one can be traumatized by an experience, one can also heal through it.

Regarding future research I would suggest conducting more research heuristically on the wounded healer experience, as well as conducting more clinical research on storytelling, specifically as a narrative technique for healing from multigenerational patterns of sexual abuse. What words we articulate, what stories we choose to tell, speak so much to our internal experience that they cannot and should not be ignored. Yet so many people, with their own unique, sad and beautiful stories, are ignored. I want to hear their stories. I have attached my own here in the appendix of this paper, not because it is a well written story or particularly riveting, because it probably isn't to many. But it's my story, so here it is. What's yours?

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Appendix 1

SIGH

She's here to save your mind.

Description:

This is the story of a girl so fueled by passion, that it stops her from feeling anything else. Sigh Ko transcends space and time for one mission, to stop mental illness from destroying lives. She fights it like a plague, like an alien invasion. She is just a girl with an exoskeleton space suit that functions as her time machine and space ship. Her father made her the suit to protect her. Her space suit runs on passion, on positive emotions, on love and trust and hope. If she feels any other emotion, if she lets sadness sink in, or a tear wink on her eye, then her suit will fail, and with it her life support systems. She is just an average savior of the human race. But then she meets a boy, and realizes, she doesn't know who she is at all.

Sigh looked down at the world around her. This planet wasn't much different than the last hundred she had been on. The number of arms or legs or eyes or trunks or tails or wings changed, but the creatures of the worlds stayed basically the same. They were all at a point where there were rules in their societies, be it a society of mud foxes, long creatures that breathed under and lived in oceans of mud, or a society of 18 tongued amphibians that were the size of apes and spoke via their long tongues touching each other. All had created societies over time that hence forth had created rules of behavior in society. It was there that the problems started.

Certain creatures started to stand out as odd. The mud fox that had anxiety attacks, feeling like it would suffocate in a world all the other mud foxes felt was safe, the 18 tongued amphibian that felt certain tongues had villainous germs that would try and kill him if they touched, these creatures and so many others became victimized. Some were killed for their differences, and others just ostracized. On Earth they were put into Sanitariums, that was two centuries ago. Sigh wished her home planet at least had evolved enough to accept the mentally different, but all she had ever seen them do was medicate them and run tests on them. She had heard stories that they used to be listened to and accepted by strange people called "therapists," but those seemed like fairy tales to her.

The world she was on now was one of granite like creatures, that didn't move, but spoke through vibrations. This particular creature that Sigh was next too, heard more vibrations than there actually were, and the vibrations told him to do bad things sometimes, thus his society had outcast him. He would have lived a sad life, if he even survived the voices, if it wasn't for Sigh and her mission, given to her by her father. The one she had been trained for her whole life.

Sigh looked over the gray world and sighed. She reached down and touched the creature, “Don’t worry,” she said, “the voices won’t reach you where I am taking you.” And with a touch of the red button on her wrist, in a seconds time they were transported a thousand light years away, to the middle of almost empty space. She floated next to the rock like creature, that didn’t look to dissimilar to the astroids floating near them, and put her hand on his smooth back one last time saying, “I know you can’t hear me out here, but the astroids will keep you company, they all suffered as you did once and have adapted to this place, like you will. No vibrations equals no voices to tell you who you are. Goodbye.” With that she logged in new coordinates into the arm of her suit and she disappeared again.

Rocky floated in the silent vacuum of space. Forever at peace.

It wasn’t always this easy to find a new home for the clients Sigh found, but the main goal was the same. There are millions of planets and trillions of types of creatures living on them, if one doesn’t fit on one planet or environment, or even in one time period, there must be a place for it somewhere else. That is her goal. To help the mentally different find places where they can live comfortably, and be their own kind of normal.

Sigh flew back through Earth’s atmosphere and into sight of her familiar home. Of all the sights she has seen, this is still the most beautiful for her. Her father had heard her coming and was waiting on the balcony of their two story, twentieth century style home, for her to land and to greet her. As her space suit engaged for landing and Sigh came down gracefully next to him, her aging father took her in with aging eyes. Sigh was a woman now, but with large eyes like a child. Her mechanical suit surrounded her with shields, control panels, various tubes and pumps,

making her look like an astronaut or an ancient deep sea-diver. The reflective nature of the suit, reflected back a distorted image of himself in it, her golden curls had grown so long that they filled her helmet around her face like a lions mane. Her flawless skin grew freckles like a grass field grows dandelions, easily. Mr. Ko wrapped his arms around her and whispered “my sweet girl,” where he knew her helmet would not pick up the sound.

He led her into the house while she caught him up on the results of her most recent missions. It had always been this way for Sigh, them working together to help the mentally different, as they called them, referring to them as clients, even though they were never paid, and only rarely thanked. Mr. Ko worked hard to keep their existence as secretive as possible, his wealth helped with that. Secrets cost money, but since what they did was not strictly legal, it was worth the cost. Mr. Ko stayed at their secluded home, researching the universal web for those who needed them, and then sent Sigh out with the mission. After all, this was a time where technology thrived, where time travel wasn't just science fiction, but reality. Where information was available and people were trackable. It was a time of knowledge, and thus a time of fear.

They walked together through swinging doors into their extensive lab. Huge computers took up most of the walls, and cupboards overflowing with equipment, from welding torches to rare chemicals, took up the rest. To Sigh the cluttered lab was her childhood, it was where she grew up. She remembered the days before her suit, the feel of the cool glass flasks on her finger tips and the texture of the hard tile on her bare feet. She shook these thoughts away instantly, as they made her resent her suit, and thus made it power down in response to her sadness.

Sigh told herself she appreciated her space and time traveling suit. It after all was a genius invention, totally independent, so the wearer didn't need anything other than it. It provided food, water, and even sunlight. It could keep the wearer warm or cool. It could fix

broken bones and heal scrapes instantaneously, not that it would ever need to since it was fully loaded as a weapon of mass destruction, capable of surviving even an atomic bomb.

Sigh remembered when she was very young, her father had asked Sigh to try on this suit he was building, she had thought at first it was a punishment. The previous day she had gotten angry over something, she couldn't even remember what now, but she remembered she had broken all her toys in her rage and that when her father saw her crying in her room surrounded by beheaded dolls and unstuffed teddy bears he had looked sadder than Sigh thought a person could be sad. So that day she climbed compliantly in what was then a huge foreboding creation, and let him configure all the buttons and straps, quietly listening to him explain as he went over what each thing did and showed her how to use them. "Daddy," she remembered asking tearfully, "is this because I was bad?" Her father stopped with the adjustment he was doing while kneeling in front of her and looked up at her big eyes, welling silently with tears.

"No Sigh, you haven't done anything wrong. This will keep you safe." He wiped away her escaping tears and continued. "It will keep you safe, as long as you don't cry." Sigh sniffled and nodded, promising herself she would never cry again. He continued teaching her everything she would need to know about the suit to survive. Which buttons did what, etc... Sigh realized there was one thing he hadn't taught her.

"Daddy, how do I take it off?" She remembered asking with a stubborn sigh.

"You don't sweetie, you won't ever need too." He said smiling up at her as he placed the helmet on her head and locked it into place.

It had taken a while for Sigh to realize the consequences of the suit. At first it was like christmas every day, as she discovered she didn't have to brush her teeth, the suit did it, or

change clothes, she was always ready for the day. She remembered loving how tall the suit made her, she could look her father in the eye now, and she felt strong, like knights in old stories her dad read her.

But then little things started to happen that hinted at the full terror of what her father had done. One day Sigh's pet mouse got lost and when Sigh couldn't find him, she started angrily crying, before the first tear fell off her cheek the suit responded. "Daddy! I can't move!" She yelled across the house. Dr. Ko came running and told her not to cry. Her lone tear had already been cleared away, evaporated into the suits subsystems. "What's happening?" She begged.

"Sigh, if you cry the suit will stop working, it won't be able to protect you any more, and it will stop you from acting out on your sad feelings by putting you to sleep or momentarily paralyzing you, like right now."

"What do you mean," she said, snuffle free, more curious then scared now.

"All you have to be is to be strong. It runs on your happiness, just be strong and you'll always be safe." The paralysis wore off as her and her father talked about how together they would look for her mouse and soon she was up and skipping about in the suit, happy and hopeful.

All that had been so many years ago, the memories of the suit out weighed the memories without it. She curled her toes inside her suit, thinking, she really could only remember that one memory, just bare feet. Her feet felt cold just thinking about it. Her suit automatically raised the temperature in her boots to counter that feeling.

She was brought back from her memories by watching her father try to find place for himself at his always cluttered desk in his office that was connected to his lab by a door covered in dusty book shelves, that when entering from the front of the house, was almost unnoticeable.

Papers were piled so high on the desk, that when he sat down, she lost sight of him momentarily. As he dug a window out of the papers with which to see Sigh through, he started talking about her next mission.

“I have been working on this one for some time. It is a human case, and you know how I hate to have to take people from our planet, but this boy needs our help.”

“Okay dad, I am ready.” And Sigh listened.

As she heard about the boys tragedy, she felt that feeling when the passion builds. She felt it in her boots, her toes twitched and flexed, tapped to the beat of her racing heart. Her chest felt hot and heavy, and the pulsating red hot compassion sped through her veins, leaving her out of breath as she stood there listening, taking it all in. Her suit sucked up this energy, stored it away as time fuel in the tanks on the back of her suit. It was a good thing too, because Sigh felt that if it wasn't for the suit, her passion would explode out of her every limb and she would be obliterated with her own need to feel. To feel what other's felt, to let their pain be hers, to carry it, to take care of it, to guide them to a better place. She was certain that without the suit she would die. Not just because it gave her air and nourishment, but because she needed it to regulate her emotions. She felt her blood pressure lower and her toes come to a rest as her father looked over his glasses at her. He smiled. That was enough to get her going again. Her back up tanks were already full so there was nothing else she could do but use it.

Out of the room she ran, moving as a blur, she jumped off the balcony and glided up into the clouds, leaving holes in the clouds that got in her way.

“I'M SO HAPPY!!!!!!!!” She screamed.

Sigh loved being in the clouds. Who wouldn't? You might say. But it was especially magical for her. As someone whose job was to find a place for others to be happy, it was important that she have one too. This was her escape, her sanctuary. She laughed like a child and pretended she was swimming in murky water as she dove through some, heavy with rain. Her visor was wet with condensation, that the suit soon started to clear away so it wouldn't impede her vision. She checked her wrist to see that she had used the extra compassion fuel and floated back down to her father, who was still sitting at his desk.

"As I was saying," he said casually, "Robin, is 24 years old and has been diagnosed with Severe Dissociation. He is being held in a locked unit, at a medical research facility as he has developed a defense mechanism that the scientists find very valuable. It seems greed has got the best of them. The boy is in isolation, and since he has no family, there is no way out for him. I just can't see a future for him on Earth."

"What is it that makes him such an interesting medical subject? Dissociation normally involves somebody escaping the situation mentally, escaping from their physical situation by retreating into their mind. When they dissociate they normally just look frozen, not blinking or speaking or responding to any outside cues. Dissociation isn't a new defense mechanism, why are scientists so interested in this phenomenon now?" Sigh questioned.

"Because Sigh, when Robin dissociates, he can fly. His body has adapted to literally take not only his mind, but his body out of the triggering situation. The only thing is that he cannot fly unless he is associating."

"What does that mean?"

"It means he doesn't know when he flies, he has no control over it."

Wow. Sigh thought, this was a new mutation for the human race. She could see why a person randomly floating away would have troubled Earth people. Though time and space travel were every day things, humans on their own did not have the capacity to fly like a bird does, alone without any equipment, it was impossible. Mankind had been trying for millions of years. No wonder scientists were keeping him on lock down. He was the missing link to them.

“Any ideas on where I should take him?” Sigh asked, as she gathered the papers on the ground she had disrupted by her faster-than-the-speed-of-light take off, only minutes ago.

“Not of yet, but I will let you know on your way to free him.” Mr. Ko took off his thick glasses and looked at Sigh without them for the first time in years. Science had progressed where his eye sight could be fixed instantly, but he liked having this escape, an option not to see. He rarely needed it, but this was one of those rare times when he just couldn’t look her in the eye and say what he needed to say. He blinked slowly, in her direction. He could just make out the shiny edges of her suit, and the contrast of her gold hair in her helmet. He knew somewhere in that messy colorful blob was his little girl. He missed that little girl. Sometimes he feared the powerful space and time traveling woman he had raised, feared that perhaps what he had done wasn’t for her best interest- but he shook those thoughts away. After all these years, all this planning, he really couldn’t waste time with any second thoughts.

“Sigh.... there is something I need to tell you, and I need you to remember all I have taught you, about your suit, about your mind. I need you to remember to take care of yourself, so use your passion for the greater good, and to never ever let sadness destroy you. Because it will destroy you. You know that right?”

Sigh had flash backs to her childhood, of the countless hours of her father teaching her about this great gift he had given her, the suit. The ultimate weapon. Sigh knew everything about the suit that had become to her what skin is to most humans; it contained her.

“Yes of course father.” She responded.

“When I die, one day, I will have to leave you, but I will be happy to know I have not left you alone, with no protection. My death, will be your greatest mission. You must not cry. You cannot risk it. Believe me, if I could live forever to save you that pain, I would. But promise me, you will not let sadness destroy you, instead live with the knowledge that I will always love you.”

Sigh’s suit beeped at her, indicating that her breathing pattern wasn’t normal. She exhaled and inhaled quickly, she hadn’t realized she had been holding her breath. “I promise father,” was all she could utter.

The silence seemed to expand the room, her father’s desk seemed to get further away from where she stood. Finally he coughed and said, “All right then, off you go” and waved her away as he pulled out some paperwork and after trying to read it without them, he put his glasses back on. The room fell back into its proper place in space.

“Goodbye father,” she said, “I love you.” And off she flew.

Mr. Ko couldn’t bare to watch her soar off. Instead he read and reread the file in front of him. The name on it, was his. The prognosis, was death.

The coordinates were already logged into her data system, but Sigh knew since the location was on Earth, and in the present time stream, she didn’t need to transport there, instead she could enjoy a couple hours of flying. Her dad was always a serious man, so there talk

shouldn't have spooked her as much as it had, after all he had said the same thing many times before. But something about this time felt different. She felt her suit slow down in mid air as her mood dropped and she immediately shook off those feelings, least her suit stall and she plummet to her death and instead breathed deeply her freshly processed air and focused on the mission ahead.

Sigh knew what she was planning on doing was illegal, but from the directions that she read as they flashed on her visor, she knew it was doable. Go through 4 levels of security, break through a titanium cell, and locate Robin, then get him out again. The trick was to not be caught, and a golden haired girl in a space suit did stand out. It made grocery shopping impossible, but for now she did what wouldn't work to buy milk and bread, she pressed the blue button on her wrist that activated her cloaking device. And just like that she was one with the clouds, undetectable to the human eye. She saw the towering medical facility loom below her and she prepared herself for battle.

Her boots hit the cement in front of the ten story black tinted windowed building soundlessly. She walked through the automatic doors without a second look from the security guard behind the desk who assumed the door was just malfunctioning due to the wind. Even though cloaking technology was often used for spaceships and other government controlled technology, it hadn't been approved for personal use, so there were no systems set in detecting it. Sigh passed through the first two security points by pure luck, as two scientists had been walking through and she merely shadowed them up to the third floor. From there she waved her suited wrist over the next two ID stations which sent a signal to the buildings security system that overwrote its previous programing and casually walked through the heavy doors they guarded.

The titanium cell was smaller than she suspected, only looking about three yards wide and 4 yards tall. She pushed her clenched fist against the shiny wall of it and within moments she stepped through it, leaving a hole the exact size and shape as her suit in the impenetrable wall. It took a moment for her suit to adjust to the complete blanket of darkness around her, but soon her suit lit up the room. The empty room. Sigh was confused, from hacking into the facilities data base her father had found out where the patient was set to be at that time of day. As she mentally scratched her head, she heard a light thump above her. Following the sound, she looked up to see a man floating some 11 feet above her.

He didn't respond to her calling his name, so she herself flew up to him and grabbed him in her suited arms. He looked unconscious, but she knew he was dissociating. He was covered in what looked to be red needle pricks all over his body and his veins were bruised from all the tests Sigh presumed he had been put through earlier day. His hair was auburn, and shaggily long, as was his beard. She hadn't expected such facial hair on so young a person, but sadly, it probably meant he had been here a long time. He was tall, even with her suit he was 4 inches taller than her. She tried to pull him down to the ground but whatever pull was holding him in the air was so strong, it made her feel powerless. Frustrated, she held his hand with one hand, and with the other typed in coordinates to a base on the Earth's Moon that she knew she could use till her father sent her the coordinates of where to take him. "Funny," she thought, "he should have sent them to me by now."

She had been on the moon two hours before Robin slowly floated down from the ceiling of the small room that looked like an emergency bunker and was filled with boxes of supplies and moon dust. She had teleported them out of the cell and as soon as she landed in the bunker

she found herself on the ceiling with the man, even though her feet had been on the ground only seconds ago. She had again tried to pull him down, but soon got sick of failing and just let him float up there while she continually tried to make contact with her father.

When Robin reached the floor, his eyes opened and he blinked quickly and sat up stiffly. His legs sprawled in front of him, he seemed in a state of shock. Sigh sat down a yard or so from him, and said what she normally says to clients.

“Hello, my name is Sigh. You are safe. I took you from your home planet and hope to find you a place where you will be more comfortable, and that will accommodate your unique condition. Do you understand?” She added, seeing him looking confused as his eyes focused in on her, “We are currently on the Earth’s Moon, awaiting further directions. You are safe with me.”

Then he responded in a way client’s normally didn’t. “Finally,” he said, “you are a sight for sore eyes.”

“What?” Sigh asked confused.

“Love the suit, does it make muffins? I am starving.” Robin asked, leaning towards her to investigate her suit.

Now dumfounded, she got up before he reached her, and instinctively opened up a box of the non-perishable supplies and put a can of soup and some biscuits on the table that Robin now waited patiently at. “No muffins, will biscuits do?” She asked pushing the food toward him.

“It’s better than whatever the white jacket fools have been pumping into me,” he said between hungry mouthfuls.

While he attacked his food Sigh sat across from him and wondered why he kept shocking her. After all, she had been all over time and space helping creatures of all types and sizes. He

was just a human, yes he could fly but she had seen much more exciting things on her missions. That's when she realized it, she hadn't spoke to another human other than her father for a long, long time. After all, she was 22 years old, and had been doing missions on her own since she was 15, and they were rarely on Earth. He wasn't a laser shooting mouse sized dragon, or a 500 foot tall mushroom creature, he was something all the more intimidating, a human man.

She let herself look at him, for the first time, as a human and not just a client, a person who desperately needed her help. She took note of the way his tangled hair slightly curled, and the deep cobalt blue of his eyes. She watched his large strong looking hands as they moved gracefully toward her face-

“HELLO?” he said, waving his hand frantically in front of her helmeted face. “I asked why you are wearing a fancy smancy space suit, are you an alien?”

Sigh snapped back into her mission mindset and said, trying to hold in a laugh at the irony that he thought she was an alien, when he was more alien to her than any alien she had ever met, “No, I am human just like you. I just need to wear this suit to survive.”

“Why?” He asked. He seemed almost childlike to Sigh, with his many questions, so she explained simply.

“My dad made me this suit, it helps protect me, and regulate me, so I can function like everyone else, and so I can survive. I wouldn't be alive without it.”

“Why do you have to wear it though?” He questioned. Now done with the food, the can scraped clean and leaving not a crumb of the biscuits, he leaned forward with his head in his hands, one hand stroking his messy reddish beard. He raised an eyebrow in the silence that followed.

Sigh fumbled with her memory and her words, “I, I honestly don’t know. I just trusted that my dad did what was best for me. It is scary to think about “the why,” so I never had the urge to find out more.”

“You are lucky,” Robin said. “Lucky to not remember.” His eyes drifted down to the table and Sigh saw him start to lift out of his chair as he dissociated about whatever memory she had triggered-

“Come back to me!” She yelled instinctively.

Startled, Robin’s body seemed to adjust to gravity and rest in his chair normally, he shook his head and looked at her without blinking for a full minute. “Do you have a razor?” He finally asked impatiently, as if he expected her to read his mind.

Sigh watched as Robin carefully shaved himself with the antique shaving kit they had found among the supplies. Not finding a mirror however, Robin was currently using Sigh’s helmet with its reflective shield up as a make shift mirror. This made it so Sigh could see him, but he couldn’t see her. She smiled as a well defined jaw and chin started to emerge from under the old beard. As he cleaned himself up she explained that they were merely stalling time here till she got directions of where to take him.

“Why can’t you leave me on the moon? It seems nice here.”

“The moon has even less gravity then on Earth, regular people float like you do on the moon, if you went outside now, even in a weighted space suit, before your foot could touch the Moon’s surface you would be sucked up into space. We will probably find you a place that has more gravity then Earth, so you won’t float up anymore.”

“Oh,” was all he said as he turned toward her from washing his face in the sink. “Do I look like a human now?” He joked, grinning.

Her suit interrupted them with a loud beep, alerting her of a coming storm, as had become more common on the moon over them last hundred years. “The storm must be what’s been blocking my communication with my father,” she said with a sigh, and sat down, prepared to wait out the storm.

They sat together at the table and watched through the ten inch glass the storm outside. Through the dust and rain and snow and debris swirling around them they could faintly see the Earth. A tiny little marble in the night sky.

“It makes it all seem so pointless, when I am looking at Earth like this.” Robin said.

“Makes what seem pointless?” Sigh questioned, drawing her attention away from the madness outside and onto the madness in him. She had found a thermal blanket in the bunker and it was draped around him now, making his tall ragged frame look tiny beneath it.

“Whatever the scientists were hoping to gain from me. I have been passed from experiment to experiment for years, I lost track after a while how long it had been. Over the years, it’s as if they realized that I don’t have the answers they are looking for, that’s when everything got worse and they stopped treating me like a human, I became a prisoner, until today that is. And now I can just think of them down there on that tiny blue planet, frantically searching for me, I am sure it’s on the news, “Estranged Astronaut Girl Steals Flying Man!” He stopped speaking to laugh.

His laugh had a weight to it, it was heavy, expansive, it filled the room. As he laughed it seemed he got lighter, his posture straightened, like the laugh, kept inside, had been weighing him

down during all these years of misery and torture. Sigh's heart filled with compassion, and beat faster. Her suit took the passion and put it in the time energy tanks, and Sigh was only able to stay sitting because of it. If it hadn't been for the suit, she knew she would have leapt across the table, and held Robin in her arms, like he was a child, trying desperately to comfort him.

He stopped laughing abruptly, and a melancholy look appeared on his face. "Thank you for saving me," he said, staring deeply into Sigh's green eyes. But they were too deep, too dark, they held too much behind them. He looked away.

"It's my mission," Sigh explained.

"It must be a hard mission. Why do you do it?"

Sigh thought for a moment, then said "I was made for it. With this suit I am an independent entity, designed specifically for this work. My heart runs on it, as does my suit. I need to help, like most people need to breathe."

"You're beautiful, you know." Robin said, again leaning toward her across the table. His head tilted sideways as if he could see her beauty better at that angle.

Sigh blushed, her freckles seemed to multiply under the pressure of her quickened heart beat, giving her cheeks a golden hue. "You can't even see me." She said looking down at her completely suited body. She wondered sometimes what she looked like under there. How many toes were down there in her boots? How big were her hips??? "It's been so many years, I don't even remember what I look like," she said shyly.

"Well, you've got a nice looking head on, what I presume are shoulders. Hows that?" Robin said grinning at his flirtatious compromise.

Sigh allowed herself to laugh. Robin continued, "but what I meant was that you seem like a beautiful person, on the inside, under it all."

Sigh looked down at herself, blushing and suddenly feeling very naked. She looked up at him and changed the subject, saying, “Tell me about yourself, Robin. I mean I have read your file, but it doesn’t say much really. I have never seen a file so blacked out actually.”

“Well that’s pretty much it actually. My life is lots of blacked out parts connected by fragmented images of things I don’t understand,” Robin countered. “I think I remember, remembering, though.”

“What do you mean?” She asked, intrigued.

“I remember how it felt to remember, and it didn’t feel good. So I stopped remembering.” Robin looked down at his hands sadly, and then out the window. “The storms passing,” he observed, “can we go somewhere?”

Sigh thought before she responded. She had never spent this much time with a client, normally she just transported them and it was all very meticulous and strategic. She was so used to her rules and plans, that she was momentarily at a loss. She checked her communicator, but it still reported no signal due to the storm. Sigh looked at the man in front of her, who hadn’t been a boy in a long time, yet still seemed like one. She thought to the tragedy that was his life, all those wasted years imprisoned and abused, treated worse than a rat in a lab.

Her passion had filled up her back up tanks, so she rationalized that they had the time, and literally had the time energy, so why not?

“Okay,” Sigh said, “Where do you want to go?”

All Robin had said in response was “Down.” It was an odd answer to be sure, but Sigh typed in some coordinates with a smile on her face. She took Robin’s hand and in that millisecond they no longer had the small bunker around them. Instead they were standing on the

edge of a cliff on a small Island on the watery planet of Iseon. The island was precariously small, and was the only land on the entire planet. Robin gripped Sigh's hand tighter as she explained to him where they were. They stood together at the edge of the cliff, some twenty feet above the beautifully clear water that reflected the light purple sky above it. The water was so still, it looked like glass, but Sigh knew better. Underneath was an underwater world, she couldn't wait to share it with Robin.

He stood next to her, somewhat frozen, staring out at the vast watery mirror below him. Slowly he let go of her hand, freeing her to release the spare oxygen mask her suit provided and fit it to his face. It connected to her suit by a long tube from her oxygen tanks. "We are going to jump," she said looking into his eyes through the bulky mask, "are you ready?"

A grin appeared in response and she took his strong hand again in her gloved one. "Don't let go," she said and together the duo stepped off the edge of the cliff and disappeared into the water below, with barely a ripple, the water closed behind them.

Once under the water Sigh knew what she would see, she had been here to place a client a year ago. But that didn't change the intensity of the sights now. Every color imaginable seemed to shoot out towards the two of them, wrapping and enveloping them as they slowly sank, then disappearing to leave them in a black and white underwater world filled with buildings made of gray stone and coral. She looked over at Robin floating next to him, bubbles floated up from her tanks reassuring her that he was breathing safely. His thin ratty shirt floated up with the waves of the current revealing his muscular, but heavily scarred stomach. She felt such pity for this man who had been through so much, too much. Some of the scars were old and healed and some were bright red, telling her of their recency.

Sometimes the universe is a terrible place. Robin's scars reminded her of this. Sigh knew this more than anyone. She lived in a time of technological advances, the threat of war was high as the Earth's population had just reached 10 billion, and the uneasiness due to lack of resources had led to fear and greed. She was well educated, and knew about the devastation of wars, on her home planet and on hundreds of others. She had seen first hand hundreds of clients abused and abandoned due to their mental differences. In her short life she had been confronted with tragedy upon tragedy, and she carried these with her in the passion that fueled her forward. She knew she couldn't let anger or sadness overwhelm and destroy her, but it was hard. Really hard.

She heard mumbled sound and realized Robin was trying to talk to her, she pressed a bottom on his mask and soon heard his voice in her helmet as it picked up his words. "Can we get closer?" His soft voice excitedly questioned. She nodded and together they swam down further towards the landscape below them.

The grayscale city seemed empty, but Sigh knew better. The life forces on this planet move faster than the human eye could grasp, the luminous colors that had seemed to fly through them were the Iseon natives casually swimming by. To them Sigh and Robin looked like statues, inanimate objects that they just swam around. She explained this to Robin and he just looked on in awe. The buildings looked like they were from Earth's victorian era, the stone buildings were covered in seaweed that grew up them like ivy.

Sigh swam beside Robin, following him in and out of buildings, watching with pleasure as he explored the seemingly abandoned city. After an hour Sigh said through the radio that they needed to leave as they were running low on oxygen. Robin seemed to snap out of the trance of curiosity he had been on, and started swimming up towards the surface. Sigh caught up to him

and laughed, grabbing his hand she pressed the button on her suit that transported them back to the top of the cliff above them.

Once again on the sandy island cliff they collapsed where they stood, exhausted and heavy after the feeling of the weightless sea had left them. Robin laughed as he removed his mask and stretched out on the warm sand which stuck to his damp skin and clothes, almost like it was attacking him. Sigh lay next to him, not knowing why they were laughing but laughing anyway. Her suit had automatically dried itself, and the sand seemed almost repelled by the material of her suit, she momentarily felt envious, not just of Robin being able to feel the sand, but of the sand being able to feel Robin.

“Thank you.” Robin said rolling over to face Sigh, once again leaving his laugh abruptly, abandoning it in thin air, to look seriously into her eyes.

“Your very welcome Robin.” Sigh said, smiling shyly.

They lay on their sides, simply looking at each other. The softest of breezes blew Robin’s hair in his eyes, Sigh’s of course, remained untouched.

“How many worlds have you been too,” Robin asked curiously, pushing his hair back behind his ear.

“Oh boy,” Sigh responded playfully, laying back on the sand and looking up at the purple sky as she mentally counted, “probably near 1000.”

“One thousand????!!” Robin exclaimed, almost jumping to lay closer to her, as if being nearer in proximity would make her story better.

“Well I have been doing this since I was 15 years old,” Sigh explained, laughing at his adorable excitement.

“Wow, so young! How old are you now?” Robin asked.

“I am twenty two, just two years younger than you,” Sigh answered matter-of-factly. She immediately regretted it, seeing Robin’s smile drop as he looked down at the sand.

“I am twenty four years old???” Robin whispered, almost to himself. Time had moved slowly and days were uncountable in his prison. He had lost count earlier than he'd thought he had.

“Oh Robin, I am so sorry,” Sigh apologized rolling over and reaching out to him. Her gloved hand wrapped around his and squeezed.

“It’s not your fault,” Robin looked up at her, shaking his head and the feelings away. “I guess neither you nor I had a normal childhood.”

“Definitely not.” Sigh responded mournfully. She tried to think of something funny to say to distract Robin from this dark fact.

“One time, when I was little, for my 8th birthday I think, my dad decided he would take me to an amusement park. This was a huge deal because we rarely went anywhere. So here I am, 8 years old, in this huge suit, holding hands with my dad walking around the park. We must have looked like an odd pair.”

Robin laughed and squeezed her hand that was still entwined with his.

“That’s not even the funny part!” Sigh explained laughing as his laugh prompted hers, “The first ride we went on, my suit got stuck and they couldn’t get me out. They had to shut down the whole ride to get me off. It felt like it took hours. It was terribly embarrassing. But I remember my dad sat next to me the whole time, and he couldn’t stop laughing, he tried to convince them to just let us ride the ride all night. Needless to say that was our first and last amusement park.” Sigh smiled at the memory, it was one she hadn’t thought of in awhile. Robin’s laugh seemed to echo in her helmet.

“Tell me more stories, I want to know about my rescuer, my knight in shining space suit,” Robin teased, pretending to swoon.

“Ha ha!” Sigh laughed, but one look at his pleading eyes meant he was serious. “Ok. I will tell you about my favorite planet. It’s name is hard to say in it’s native language, the closest translation would be ‘sound.’ The whole planet sings almost, everything you touch has a particular sound. A rock, a plant, a house, it all speaks to the hearing sense. Vision didn’t mean much to the natives, all communication was a simple touch to the object of person and they spoke like that, not with words but with tones. It’s wonderful.”

“It sounds loud.” Robin said.

“It is, very loud, but somehow it is loud in a way that makes sense come from the chaos.”
“Oh,” Robin said thoughtfully, then added, “What is going on in our world?”

“What do you mean?” Sigh asked confused by his abrupt change of subject conversation.

Robin explained, “I mean that you seem to know a lot about other planets, and that is fascinating, but what about Earth? I have been kind of out of the loop on that one.”

Sigh was silent for a while, then replied, “This is the trouble with time traveling. You are always moving backwards, or forwards, you are never in your own time, or in my case on your own planet. I am ashamed to admit I don’t know much about our time, other than things aren’t going to good.”

“Oh,” said Robin, “but can’t you look ahead, peek into the future, see how it all ends?”

“That’s the number one rule of time travel,” Sigh scolded him, “you can’t look into your own future, or your own past. It’s too dangerous.”

“Well. I guess if we want to find out what’s really going on, we should see it for ourselves,” Robin pointed out.

“What? Go back to Earth?” Sigh thought that was the last thing Robin would have asked of her. After all he had just escaped that planet, a planet that had never shown him kindness, only greed and pain. Why would he want to go back there? And then there was the question of this paradise they were currently at. Warm sand, a purple sky and their own personal island atop an underwater world, why would anyone want to leave here? Sigh thought mournfully.

“Yes. You can transport us anywhere right? You can take us right into the action, we can find the truth for ourselves, and we can easily jump back in time, since I know you are ‘working,’ after all, and take me to my new home, wherever that may be, whenever you need to.” Robin spoke animatedly, excitedly, leaning over Sigh. His wet salt filled hair had turned into loose ringlets as the warm sun dried them and Sigh watched them dance against his forehead.

Sigh laughed, “Didn’t I just explain the complexities of time travel to you?”

“Just a couple of days-or hours,” he corrected himself, “wouldn’t hurt anything. And, if we do destroy the universe,” he smiled mischievously, “I’ll take full responsibility.”

“The Reality Destroyer and the Estranged Astronaut,” Sigh joked, “too bad no one would be left to tell grand stories of us.”

“If it was just us, it would be okay. “ Robin mumbled, looking over her with shy glistening eyes, like a moon rat in rover headlights, he looked both shocked and accepting of this fate.

“Robin, you are going to get me into lots of trouble,” Sigh said reaching up and poking his nose playfully.

“Why yes I will,” he replied, as he leaned over and pressed his lips on her visor, then stood up and offered his hand to help her up, smiling out of the corner of his mouth. She took it, and stiffly stood up, her mind, momentarily blank.

“That was meant for your lips.” He said quietly. But Sigh heard and she felt like her internal organs had shifted around in an attempt to contain her quickly beating heart. She was glad her suit didn’t alert her of the change by beeping, “that would have been embarrassing,” she thought nervously. Robin kept hold of her hand while she typed in the coordinated onto that wrist.

“Hold on, you silly boy,” she said grinning, thinking to herself, “...was that my first kiss????”

Sigh had entered the date they had left, April 1st, 2200, and in a moment they were transported from the calm Island beach to a bustling city. All around them people moved, shuffled, danced around each other on the crowded streets. Everything was brown, everything looked rusty and squeaky. Sigh pulled Robin out of the busy lanes of human traffic and soon the two found themselves in a trash filled alley, looking out at the chaos. A feeling of doubt and insecurity seemed to sneak up on Sigh, she felt nervous suddenly, anxious that something would go wrong. She checked her monitors. No sign of danger. Her scans picked up no weapons on the people that walked so quickly past her, nor any hostile feelings on her emotion scan. She explained to Robin what she knew of the increased poverty, homelessness and crime in areas like this. Robin wasn’t looking at her, he didn’t look like he heard a word she said. Instead he was eagerly looking out at the people going by.

“Sigh, look, it’s wonderful.” Robin said interrupting her speech on robot murderers. Sigh looked at Robin in the twilight of the city, he looked so unreasonable excited. Sigh followed his pointed finger but didn’t get what she was supposed to see.

“What is so wonderful?” Sigh asked, thinking, “We just came from a planet with purple skies, and he is pointing at an old woman in dirty clothes, that doesn’t look like she has ever had a bath.”

“Look! It’s starting to rain!” He exclaimed. Sigh looked again at the homeless women, through bustling people she noticed the woman holding a dirty styrofoam cup up towards the heavens. As the clouds broke and the rain came down the busy street emptied like someone had pulled out the drain and let the water wash everything away. Soon it was just the old woman and Sigh and Robin watching from the darkening alley. The woman’s eyes seemed to brighten up as the water started to fall down her dark face, rain drops racing down the wrinkled lines of her face, clearing them of degree. She smiled up at the sky and the cup filling with water, slightly leaking through a hole in the side. When the cup started to overflow she pushed it upwards, in a motion of respect, then drank the contents of the cup like it was the most delicious thing in the world.

Sigh caught herself smiling. Robin was beaming at her, drenched head to bare feet. Sigh of course hadn’t felt the heavy torrents, and immediately felt embarrassed for making him stand in the rain with her. “Oh no! You are soaked! I am so sorry.” Sigh fussed. Robin pulled against her as she tried to pull him under a nearby storefront, Sigh resisted her suit’s urge to fight back and let him pull her out into the empty road that was slowly becoming a river. He grabbed her other hand and said, “Let’s dance!”

It was like he said things in a such a way, so strongly, so hugely, that there was no room left to question them. Sigh couldn’t stop to think. Instead she felt herself being led across the growing puddles like it was a proper dance floor. She felt silly, as Robin twisted and twirled her, but one look in her eyes made all doubt go away. He looked so happy, so very careless. It

wouldn't matter if the whole world were watching him, let alone one homeless woman, he would still dance. Sigh decided she liked that about him, she liked that very much. Their laughter drowned out the noise of sirens in the distance, Sigh almost didn't notice the dark figures emerging from the shadows and lunging for Robin with greedy hands. Instinctively, she hit the red button on her wrist.

The next moment they were on her balcony, where she had been only 1 day ago, saying goodbye to her father. It seemed like more time had passed.

“What happened?” Robin said, frozen in the pose of intimacy they had been in moments before. “I saw something dangerous, someone trying to grab you, take you back where I stole you from I assume.”

Robin let her hands go and stepped back, looking down at his bare feet. “Of course.” He said shaking his sullen head, “I am sure there is a price on my head.”

“Yes, well, we are safe now at least.” Sigh reassured him.

His eyes met hers as he asked, “Where are we anyway?”

“Welcome to my home,” Sigh said shyly, “It's wear my suit is programed to take me when I am in danger and don't have time to type in new coordinates. Wait here while I check on my dad?” He turned to look at her, like he had been snapped out of a trance. Sigh was reminded by his sad, childlike eyes, that Robin wasn't just some guy she met. He was a client, a man who must have gone through something horrendous, unimaginable. “I'll be right back,” she promised.

As Sigh turned from Robin and walked into the house her smile left her face. Where did it go? She hoped she'd find it again and that this sinking feeling in her chest would go away. Her father should have heard them and come outside, he was always there to greet her. She walked quickly towards his office, visualizing seeing his smiling face behind the stacks of paperwork, but the only sounds of life she heard were her heavy boots hitting the old wood floors, creaking, like it had her whole life.

She walked into the room, saw the books lining the shelves on all four walls, saw her father's heavy wooden desk, saw the papers piled on it, and the usual papers scattered over the floor. She saw her father hunched over the desk, his gray haired head laying on the papers scattered and splattered with dried blood.

"Dad!" she yelled, or at least she thought she yelled it, but the word that left her chest was a mere whisper. The so familiar room that had been around her only moments ago, disappeared and was replaced with where she was now. And with it a world she couldn't bare, one where her father wasn't alive.

"He is still breathing," Robin's voice seeped into her ears, reassuring her. She turned stiffly and saw Robin had appeared beside her, and was now, seemingly in the same moment, at her father's side, lifting his head off the desk, shaking him by the shoulder, trying to get a response out of him. His wrinkled skin looked pale, and older than the last time she had seen him. His mumbled voice was the switch that unfroze Sigh, she rushed to him, and with Robin's help, they carried him between them to the couch and lay him down. He was rambling incoherently but seemed unharmed physically, dried blood covered his chin and Sigh ran to the kitchen and came back with a cloth to wipe up the blood and brought water for him to drink.

She tipped the water down his throat, repeating over and over the question, “dad are you okay, dad what’s wrong??”

His eyes caught hers and he managed to say, “I am fine Sigh, just, fine...” before passing out again. Guilt weighed down on her, she had only been gone one day, she should have come home right after she rescued Robin instead of wasting time with him when her father obviously needed her. “What is wrong with him?” She asked herself, looking at her father’s pale sickly skin. Robin’s voice reached her and at first she didn’t understand the words he said. She looked over and he was standing stock still behind her father’s desk, staring at an open folder laid out on it. “I know what’s wrong with him,” Robin’s words seeped into her consciousness, “he is dying.”

It was there that her heart stopped for the second time that day. Robin walked over and grimly handed her the file. She sat on the ground by her father’s side and looked at what Robin had given her. It was half covered in blood and had her father’s name on it. Mr. Ko. Sigh opened it with shaking hands. She felt like she was going to faint but her suit stabilized her in time. The file was filled with test report among test report saying the same non-sensible gibberish over and over again that translated into only one thing, her father was dying. From what she could make sense of the scrawled doctor’s handwriting it seemed he only had hours left. Some kind of stomach cancer. Terminal cancer. She sunk further to the floor, and tried to stifle her sobs before they breached her chest. She couldn’t cry. He told her that when this happened that she couldn’t cry. He had known he was dying, the last time they spoke, she realized, and she had promised not to cry. And it was apparently the last promise she would make to him.

Her suit sensed her negative emotions, her sadness overcame her, overwhelmed her, filled her entire body and started to leak out her ever green eyes. Her suit went on the defensive, alarms started buzzing, warning her to calm down. She started yelling “No, no, no, please no...”-

a needle inside her suit's various subsystem injected her arm with a sedation drug that put her body and mind to sleep instantaneously. Her suit cushioned her as her head fell to the ground. The alarm beeping at her stopped, and then there was silence.

“Sigh, Sigh, Sigh, what's happened, what's wrong?” Robin asked dropping to her side and picking up her helmeted head and laying it in his lap. Her shining curls filled her helmet, swallowing her face. He watched as her breath left her pink lips and fogged up the inside of her visor. He too breathed easier knowing she was alive at least. “She couldn't have fainted from shock, she had been yelling instead like she was being attacked and then it was like someone knocked her out,” Robin thought. He took his eyes off Sigh to glance at Mr. Ko on the couch beside them, he was still asleep. “He couldn't have hurt her....” Robin thought aloud, eyes back on Sigh.

She was beautiful, he thought, a beautiful thing trapped in a cage. And this was a complicated cage. He looked at the various buttons and tubes, cogs and wires that made up this heavy suit that encased her, a machine that trapped her. He tried with all his strength to remove her helmet, pulling and twisting and turning. Time seemed frozen around him, like it was waiting for Sigh to wake up to start again. Robin finally gave up, realizing her helmet wasn't coming off. He looked over her with feelings Sigh had been prevented from even comprehending. Anger, sadness, pity, and a thirst for vengeance that started in the pit of his stomach and made him want to know more than anything why this girl, this shy, sweet girl who he had only just met was tricked into this, this- coffin.

When the sedation wore off Sigh opened her eyes sleepily and saw Robin looking down at her curiously. “Sigh! Are you okay?” he said asked, the worry thick in his voice. Sigh didn't

even wonder about the worry, for in that moment she was happy. In her drug induced state, Robin's face was calming, and the world seemed okay. She went to move her arm towards his face, but found it still locked around her father's paperwork. "NO!" she yelled, her memories rushing back, she lurched up to a seated position, her heart racing. She tried to find the words to explain to Robin what was happening, but as her panic hit so did another injection of drugs. "It won't let...me...feel..." Sigh sighed with her last bit of consciousness. Her head dropped back in his lap.

With blood curtailing anger Robin left Sigh softly on the floor and stood over her father, and started shaking the shit out of him. "I know you are dying sir but wake up! The suit is killing your daughter!!" Mr. Ko woke up grumpily and confused, and demanded his glasses. Robin stood there, shocked, put his arms in the air then dropped them at his side. He looked around the room, marched over to the desk like a kid having a tantrum, grabbed the glasses and threw them at the dying man. Mr. Ko struggled to sit up and slowly put them on.

"Sir, your daughter is going to die if we don't do something." Robin begged.

Mr. Ko looked down and saw the twice opened and twice dropped blood stained file and knew that the worst had happened. Sigh was feeling the exact feelings he had tried so hard to protect her from, and know it was going to kill her. He knew that every time she woke up the suit would just continue to sedate her, until she woke up calm, and he knew that wasn't going to happen. How could it? She just found out her father was a failure. He failed at keeping her safe.

"I can't do anything." Mr. Ko sighed, his voice heavy with guilt.

Robin slapped the dying man hard across the face. "Why the hell not!!!!?" He yelled.

"I can't take her out of the suit, she is in it for a goddam reason! Who the hell are you anyway??" Mr. Ko spat the words at the tall young man above him.

“My name is Robin, you sent Sigh to save me. And now we are going to save her.”

“Oh god.” All the blood drained from Mr. Ko’s face.

“Mr. Ko!” Robin was looking down at Sigh, the fog of her breath was making smaller clouds against the glass. “Why is her breathing slowing? What is happening to her?” Robin felt his body lighten. Panic filled his every nerve. “I can’t leaver her,” he thought over and over, the words seemed to help weigh him down.

Mr. Ko got up frailly and looked over the dials and levels of the suit, reading it like a familiar book. “She must be dreaming, no, nightmares. The suit is responding to her negative emotions even though she is unconscious. The suit is going to kill her via sedation overdose.” He said all this mechanically, emotionlessly. He wished he was dead already. He wondered why he wasn’t. He was living on borrowed time, time he didn’t want. His body was keeping him alive long enough to see his daughter, the one thing he loved in this world, die. And it was all his fault.

“Then we have got to get her out of this fucking suit!” Robin yelled, getting angrier every moment Mr. Ko sat there calmly staring at Sigh.

“The suit is protecting her.” Mr. Ko defended in a monotone voice.

“The suit is *killing* her!” Robin yelled.

“You don’t understand,” said Mr. Ko shaking his head.

“Well then explain it to me. Please.” Robin retorted, “Because I have been tortured and restrained my whole life, and I have learned a lot about how to make people feel pain, and Sigh told me you made the suit, so you know how to take it off, and if you don’t share with me your knowledge, then I will show you mine.” The threat lingered in the air as Robin seethed.

“Help me cary her to the lab.” Mr. Ko directed.

Robin lifted Sigh onto the cold metallic counter. Her breath was still there, but faint. Mr. Ko put his tools on the counter, too weak to even stand, he sat on a stool hunched over Sigh. Mr. Ko explained how every aspect of the suit was connected to her as a life support system. The minutes ticked by as Robin listened attentively, nodding, trying to keep from panicking right up and out of this situation. His whole world had changed, literally opened up since he had met Sigh. He wasn't going to let her go.

“So her positive emotions fuel her oxygen tanks, and her oxygen is being depleted rapidly?” Robin repeated back to Mr. Ko, whose only response was a heavy nod. “So we need to remove her helmet, so she can breathe.” Robin had tried to remove her helmet while she was past out, to no avail. He knew that Mr. Ko must know the trick.

“No!” Mr. Ko yelled. “There has to be another way...” He mumbled under his breath. “But from everything you just said, the helmet is the fastest way to save her!” Robin said frantically. Every moment he stood over her helpless body felt like an eternity. “What aren't you telling me?” Robin looked at him, deep into his dark brown eyes, and saw the same pain and darkness he had seen in Sigh's. “What is her helmet really doing?”

Mr. Ko sighed the heaviest sigh of them all. He fell back slumped on the stool, his body exhausted from expelling it. He had to tell him, he knew he did. Not because he was afraid of the young man torturing him. He was already being tortured, being held precariously in-between life and death. This was his purgatory. He took a deep breath, with it he made his final confession.

“Her helmet is connected surgically to her brain, blocking certain memories. If you remove her helmet the nodes will detach and she will remember all I have worked so hard to help her forget.”

“What secret is worth her dying for???” Robin yelled.

Mr. Ko’s eyes welled with tears. “I beat her. Florence. I beat her mother. I beat them both bloody. I was an alcoholic, but that is no excuse for what I did to them. One night I beat her mother so badly I thought I had killed her. Sigh had tried to protect her, and in my rage I had knocked her out too. After that Florence left. It killed me, seeing Sigh look up at me with those sad eyes, she was only four years old. Even after I got clean, she couldn’t look at me without crying, she was too young to understand what had happened, but she knew it was wrong. I was so ashamed. I built her the helmet so she wouldn’t remember what I did to her and her mother. I built her the suit so no one could hurt her ever again, not even me. The suit had to be made to block certain emotions, or else those emotions, the terrible ones she got from me, the anger, the rage, the sadness, would trigger her to remember what I did.” He paused, silent tears slipped from his cheek and splattered against Sigh’s helmet visor. “I have lived my whole life in redemption for my sins. Only to see that it was not enough...”

Robin exhaled and leaned in close to Mr. Ko. “You are going to take off her helmet,” he demanded. “Her life, is not worth your good image.”

“You are right.” Mr. Ko said. Silent tears slid down his cheeks. He looked pleadingly into Robin’s eyes and said, “But I can’t. I can’t let her feel what I feel, its too, too much.”

“Then let’s make her feel something else!!” Robin yelled, grabbing the old man by his collar.

The dying man’s eyes lit up. “I have an idea.” He breathed.

With that, Mr. Ko explained his complicated and intrinsic idea of making the suit convert her angry and sad feelings into compassion, instead of making her suit shut down.

Robin worked quickly while the weakening Mr. Ko directed him to make the adjustments. Sprockets, nuts, screws and electric panels and wires flew through the air as the duo worked frantically, every couple seconds their eyes drifted to Sigh's, counting how many breaths they had left. "It's going to work!" said Robin excitedly, as he pulled one plug and shoved it elsewhere.

Suddenly Mr. Ko's excited directions stopped. "No." He mourned. "We have to take that, and put it there." He said pointing to the wire in Robin's hand and then pointing to inside her helmet. "We have to put that in the panel inside the helmet. We cannot get there without taking her helmet off." Mr. Ko was suddenly knocked over by a coughing fit that left his hands covered in his own blood.

"We have to do it." Robin said emotionless. "It's the only way."

Mr. Ko looked into his reflection in the shining lab table. He was old. He was worthless. He was ashamed. He wanted to die, he closed his eyes and squeezed. He tried to die. He willed his cancer to finish him, then and there. But it didn't. Cancer is a bitch.

He opened his eyes and reached over Sigh's still and suited form. He placed his hands around her helmet, and twisted. The inside of the helmet scanned his fingerprints, and beeped. Only Mr. Ko's finger prints triggered the release systems. Robin heard a slight pop sound and the helmet was detached. Mr. Ko slowly moved the helmet off her head, coils and coils of red curls fell out, tumbling across the table and over the tools. The red spread like blood around her. At first Robin didn't notice her scalp. On the back of her head there was a bald spot where no beautiful red hair grew. Instead there was a metal plate drilled into her skull where the wires that had been connecting her to the helmet had just been ripped out from. Mr. Ko grabbed the wire from Robin's shaking hand and attached it to one of the nodes there.

Sigh breathed deeply and opened her eyes. She saw her father, for the first time without the glass in front of her. She was confused, even more when she noticed the fear in his eyes. Before she could take a second breath of this cold, fresh air she was transported back in time to her childhood home. She felt like she was dreaming. She could still feel herself laying on the lab table, her father's hand on her face, but that wasn't what she saw.

She was hiding behind the brown couch. She heard yelling from behind it. Her heart beat so fast and hard it was impossible to make out what they were saying, or who was saying what. She looked down at herself and saw short stubby legs coming out of a yellow dress. She bravely peeped her child eyes around the corner of the couch. A tall strong man was yelling and holding a woman by her neck in the kitchen in front of her. Pots and pans were all over the place, beer cans scattered on the floor. The woman had two black eyes and blood spilled from her nose and mouth. She also had red hair.

"I will kill you Florence you fucking bitch!!!! Do you hear me?! Do you hear me woman!!" The man shook the woman. Her small hands reached up and scratched at his around her neck.

"Daddy!" Sigh found herself screaming. She ran out from behind the couch and through her tears begged him to let her mother go. Florence looked down at her daughter, so small beneath her.

"Kill me, I dare you." Florence managed to say with hate in her eyes.

"STOP DADDY STOP!" Sigh cried, she grabbed a pan that was near her and slammed it into her fathers knees. He toppled over and released his grip on Florence. She stood up, gasping for air. Sigh tried to climb over to her from under her father. "Daddy you are hurting me!" She begged.

“Get out of my way you stupid child!” he yelled managing to stand up and grab Sigh by her hair as she tried to scamper away. He held her by her hair in front of her mother. “Your mother is a whore,” he yelled, “she doesn’t love us! Do you really want to save her? She doesn’t want to save you!” Sigh screamed and cried from the pain of her hair ripping out of her skull and the words ripping through her. He flung her across the room, she hit a glass cabinet and felt it shatter beneath her, stabbing her as she fell. She was screaming as her eyes closed and was still screaming when she opened them again and saw the familiar lab in front of her.

Sigh sat up, heart beating wildly like she was still there, still in that memory from so many years ago. How had she forgotten that memory until now??? Her eyes focused through her tears and she saw her father in front of her. Her father. The man who she loved, who had taught her to save people, who she worshipped for his generosity, was the same man who beat her and her mother. The same drunk. She slapped him with her gloved hand hard as she could. His glasses flew off his face and shattered on the ground. His white skin was red instantly. Tears seeped down the paths carved deep in his cheeks as he begged her for forgiveness. That triggered another flashback.

Her father was helping her into the suit, the memory started just as before, but this time when the helmet went on there was pain. Terrible pain. Sigh screamed, her father begged her to trust him, to know it was for her own good. She remembered feeling the metallic plate screwed to her skull, the wires pushed into her brain.

Her whole body was shaking. Robin grabbed her around the shoulders to keep her from toppling over. Mr. Ko had his head in her hands, filling them with tears and regrets.

“What have you done to me!” Sigh yelled into him, pushing him off of her and rising to her feet. She felt the strength of the suit around her, she felt her blood pumping through her, and

with it the most powerful emotions she had ever felt: fear and anger. She clenched her teeth and her fists and stared at her father, now just a crumpled old man on the floor. She looked up at Robin who stood near her with worried eyes, reaching out to her, unsure of whether he should hug her, tackle her or float away. "It's you." Sigh said in a whisper.

Another memory had come back to her. Sigh was in their hover van with her father. Her head was still sore from where he had ripped her hair out, so it must have been soon after her mother left. Her dad had been drinking, beer cans filled the floor of the hover van. He had turned off the auto pilot of the vehicle and had somehow tricked it into letting him drive manually, despite his breath's alcohol content. She was scared. He was muttering words she knew were bad under his filthy breath. Sigh held back tears in her eyes. She knew he would just yell at her if she told him how frightened she was. It was getting dark and Sigh didn't know where they were going, but they were going fast through the hills. Sigh bravely looked out the window at the steep cliff side and shuddered.

As they turned a sharp corner, she heard herself and her father scream as they collided with another hover car's trajectory. Sigh saw metal glistening cans fly through the air in slow motion. As they screamed to a stop Sigh saw the other hover car shoot off the unguarded edge of the cliff. The last thing she remembered was seeing a little boy in the back seat float out of the sun roof like a bird, and hearing the crash of the hover car landing hundreds of feet below them.

"Oh Robin." Sigh moaned as she reached for Robin, he looked confused as he held her close and she sobbed ground breaking sobs into his shoulder. He instinctively ran his hand through her hair, focusing, in his confusion, on uncoiling her long curls with his fingers that had been held back for so long.

Mr. Ko lay on the ground, looking up at his daughter, once again hiding from him, like he was a monster. Except instead of hiding behind furniture she was now in the arms of another man. One he couldn't believe he didn't remember was the same child, from that terrible night all those years ago. It seemed like a fitting last moment for him, as he lay there coughing up blood, looking up at the two people he had fucked up most in the world.

“So this is it,” he thought, “everything I did to protect her, only made her scared to live, I killed my daughter the day I put her in the suit. I hid, terrified, behind the suit and let it stop her from knowing the truth, knowing who I really was. Knowing that I was the scared one. I was the one who was afraid to feel. Afraid of what I was capable of in my anger and hatred. But I have always known what I am capable of.” He reached into his lab coat pocket and pulled out the snub nosed .357 revolver he had kept on him since his diagnosis. He had thought he would use it to end the physical pain. But this, this was much worse. He pulled back the hammer and placed it against his skull.

Sigh jumped away from Robin as the shot rang in her ears. “What the fuck!” she yelled. Eyes blood shot from crying and cheeks red from the first tears they had felt in years, she looked at what was left of her father with disgust. The room was silent except for the ringing in her ears. She fell to her knees next to him. Her suit even made that soundless. For a moment her head was empty. It was overloaded, and was backed up with emotions. She heard a thump in the soundless dead space and knew what that meant. “Poor Robin,” she sighed, looking up at the boy on the ceiling. Her father was responsible for his parents death, for his dissociation and trauma, and even in his death he had managed to hurt Robin.

She felt her new feelings, her anger and rage, and she felt her suit doing something it hadn't before. She didn't feel weak or paralyzed like she normally did when these emotions

leaked out. Instead she felt strong and powerful. The suit was converting those once forbidden feelings into passion. These negative emotions made much more energy than anything she had ever felt before. She felt the red hot compassion fill her time fuel back up tanks till they overflowed and the passion was still flowing through her, she had never felt so powerful. She knew exactly what she was going to do with it. Sigh stood up, leaving her father's crumpled bloody body behind her and reached for her helmet. She saw on the inside the connections that fit on her scalp that blocked her memory and emotions. She punched them to a pulp with her gloved hand till there was nothing there to stab her. She slid the helmet on, and locked it in place. "One last mission," she thought, "I am going to save Robin."

She realized now how silly it seemed that just relocating someone like Robin would make him better. There was no "perfect place" for him. Wherever he went he would still have that terrible trauma weighing down on him, and thus his body would continue trying to take him away from a world that had done nothing kind for him. Drifting in and out of consciousness, that is no way to live, not knowing what he was scared of or why he flew away, that is hell. She typed in the coordinates to that day, so many years ago, to that day she first saw him fly.

Her finger hovered above the red transport button. She realized that if she were to go back and save him she would be sacrificing their good memories. She looked up at him on the ceiling. She could simply run away with him, try to make a life somewhere with him. But no, Sigh could never live with herself, having to look at him everyday and knowing she could have saved him so much pain. She hit the red button.

Her suit beeped at her furiously, as the lab around her melted into time, Robin and her father's corpse disappeared, she knew why the suit was trying to stop her from doing what she was doing. Crossing your own timeline is not something done, even by the most skilled time

travelers. Around her it looked like all the stars in the galaxy were swarming her, circling her. Going back in time used a lot of time energy, she wouldn't be able to make this jump without the change made in her suit that let her feel. Oh and how wonderful it was to feel. She felt like she was falling through a tunnel made of stars moving so fast they looked like streams of fire. She screamed from the pain, the heat of time moving in reverse for her, the heat of the whole universe changing and opening up to make room for her in it.

Her boots slammed down on the mountain road, leaving dents in the unused asphalt. She stood up and tried to catch her breath. Her monitor said what she knew was true. She was standing in the exact spot her father's hover car would collide with Robin's. She heard both vehicles coming in the distance. She had less than a minute to stop this from happening. She had less than a minute to change her world.

Sigh hadn't thought this far ahead though. She looked around, still panting from the exertion that this time jump required. All the alerts and warning lights on her suit were buzzing and flashing. The suit knew what she was going to do and was still trying to stop her. But it wasn't strong enough anymore. Her passion overran all the suits mechanical advantages, so she simply tried to ignore all the noise and listen to the approaching hover cars. They were getting close. She ran around the bend and saw her father's hover van coming at her. She saw the top of her younger selves head, since her father had irresponsibly buckled her into the front seat instead of her booster seat, she was too small to see Sigh over the dash.

Sigh locked eyes with her father. Panic filled his eyes. She thought she must look like a threatening figure, standing boldly in the middle of the road, blocking his way. Sigh felt pity for him in that moment, realizing that he was actually scared of her. He slammed on his hyper brakes and Sigh heard the same squealing scream as the machinery clenched and ground, trying

to stop the flying car. She stepped in front of the hover van as Robin's hover car came from behind them, zoomed by them with a confused honk and disappeared around the next curve of the road, safe. "I did it," Sigh breathed. Her father stumbled out of the hover van, confused and black out drunk.

In the distance she heard an explosion, they both looked up at the sky and saw cracks in it. Time was breaking down by the paradox she had created. She had only been able to travel back in her own time line due to the changes in the suit Robin had made, and now she had made it so they would never meet, as he no longer needed saving. The earth shook beneath her boots. In the moments before it all faded black, she looked into the horrified eyes of her father, into the eyes of the simple, unimportant old man whose one wrong move, created hurt enough to make Robin fly away from the world in order to escape it, and said the words dreamed about by everyone who has been wronged for millions of years and in millions of worlds: "You cannot hurt me. Not this time. You are not going to hurt anybody else anymore." His face went white and melted into atoms, and those atoms melted into the black hole she had created. Everything went black. Then there was light.

Sigh woke up feeling cold for the first time since she was a child. She felt bright light on her eyelids and tried not to open her eyes. Her head ached like it was filled with two different sets of memories from two different lives. "Oh my god!" she exclaimed, Remembering what she had done, she lurched up and trying to see where and when she was. The room around her looked familiar, "my bedroom," she mumbled rubbing her forehead with her bare hand. At the touch of her bare skin she went into shock and looked down at her naked body like the foreign entity it was.

The suit must have burned up in the explosion that was caused by the paradox, but it had protected her, and it seemed, transported her back again to her home, Sigh thought. She looked at the clock on her dresser and saw it was the same date and time as the day she had left. She moved her eyes back to her naked body, almost afraid of what she would find there. Her skin looked pale and strange to her, almost flawless except for scars where the suit had connected to her body or injected her with something.

She started her overview of herself by counting her toes, “five on each foot, that’s a good sign,” she said aloud smiling as she reached down and felt her soft stubby toes. Sigh ran her hands up her surprisingly smooth legs and up to her hips, “not too big thank god,” she said. She bravely hunched over and looked between her legs. “Interesting,” she mumbled shutting her legs quickly. Sigh put her hands on her waist and noticed she had what she thought was called an “innie” belly button, she poked her finger in it and laughed. On her chest she saw two round breasts with small pink nipples, one on each. Her breasts fit comfortable in her cupped hands, and she jumped up excitedly, still holding her breasts, and ran to the bathroom mirror which she never had a reason to use before. She gasped when she saw her reflection, but she didn’t gasp because her red mane had been burned off, her skull was now bare, except for the metal plate was still there, its once protruding wires singed off. She gasped because-

“He was right. I am beautiful.” Sigh whispered thinking of Robin, her memories of him felt like a lifetime ago. She remembered going back in time, and her adventures with Robin and her father dying brutally, she also remembered a life where she never met Robin and her father was still alive. But in both lives she wore the suit.

Her eyes filled with tears as she was overwhelmed with pity for herself. She had thought that by going back in time and confronting her father she would have prevented him from putting

her in the suit. Apparently not. In time travel there are some things that cannot be changed, some events too big, some moments too pivotal. "It must have been a fixed point," she thought feeling silly. She wiped her tears away with her soft fingers thinking of all the mentally different people and creatures she had been able to save with the suit. If it hadn't been for the suit, she would not have been able to do all she had. She sniffled, wiping her nose with her forearm. "Eww," she said aloud. Living without the suit would be something she would have to adjust to, she thought. But she knew she wanted to try.

Sigh looked around the room for something to cover herself with. Her room hadn't changed much over the years. After all, she hadn't had much use for it with a fully independent space suit. Her walls were faded pink, a doll house and other toys remained in the corner gathering dust. The rest of her room looked like an office and library, bookshelves lined two walls, filled with everything written on the field of psychology in the last two hundred years. A large computer system filled the last wall that she had used for research. Her childhood bed was permanently made in the corner by the toys, sheets tucked on tightly as she hadn't even needed to lay down in order to sleep in more than a decade. She grabbed the dusty crochet blanket from the foot of the bed and wrapped it around herself. She sighed with pleasure of the feel of the warm soft fibers of the blanket against her virgin skin.

Sigh looked again in the mirror and made sure she was modestly covered. She knew her father would be in his lab, and she would need to confront him, and somehow explain why she was naked, bald and what happened to her bomb proof suit.

Mr. Ko was sitting at his desk looking over his file wondering how he could die without hurting his daughter when Sigh entered the room. He didn't recognize her without her suit, but

stood up, confused gawking at her. She looked like she had as a child, scared and confused. “Hey dad,” she managed choking up, “I had a rough night.” Sigh hadn’t expected that seeing him would overwhelm her so much. After all, she had seen him commit suicide, what felt like only minutes ago, not a reality ago. She found herself leaning against his chest, crying hysterically while he automatically wrapped his lab coat around her shoulders. Sigh was struggling to put together the two images of her father she now had: the old man who protected her and the young violent monster of a man from her memories who hurt her and her mother. She didn’t know whether to punch him or hug him, so she kept her fists clenched against his chest as she cried into them.

Mr. Ko was having a similar mental crisis. He found silent tears falling down his checks and onto Sigh’s bare head as he held her shaking body and feared for the worst. Her suit was gone. She must know the truth now. His mind overflowed with words, trying to figure out what to say that could make all this better, to try to make her understand that what he did was for her own protection. He settled on the words most used by adults who actually don’t know at all what will happen next; “It’s going to be okay,” he whispered, more for himself than for her.

Sigh pulled herself away finally and put her arms through the coat and buttoned it up around her. She let the blanket fall to the floor once she was covered. The thin fabric did not make her feel any braver like she thought it would. Mr. Ko pulled her towards the couch and sat down next to her. Sigh looked down at the couch that in another reality she and Robin had placed her father on when they found him unconscious. Just being in the room again felt surreal.

“Sigh, tell me what happened,” Mr. Ko pleaded.

“I, I don’t remember.” Sigh said looking down at her hands. “Something must have gone wrong during my last mission.” She remembered leaving him for a mission yesterday, a random mission

that in an alternate universe would have been Robin's. "I am fine though," she said looking up at her father's terrified eyes, "I don't remember anything."

Mr. Ko's heart flipped in his chest. She didn't remember. He breathed deeply. "I am just glad you didn't get hurt," he said through tearful nervous laughter as he hugged his daughter to him.

"Me too." Sigh replied hugging him back with both arms. She knew she couldn't tell him what she knew, he was still dying, she could tell by how he looked at her. He looked at her like he would never look at her again. She decided to let him die unknowing, guilt free. The secret was still between them though, both embraced knowing it was what was on both of their minds. Sigh thinking how she couldn't bare to tell him she knew, and Mr. Ko thinking how glad he was that she didn't.

The sound of her father coughing brought them both back to the major problem at hand. He coughed into the antique handkerchief he always kept in his pocket and tried to hide his blood stains on it by crumbling it up in his hand from his daughter who sat next to him looking so small and exposed to him.

"Dad," she said grabbing his hand. Mr. Ko froze. "I know that you are dying. I saw your file. I need you to know that you don't have to worry about me anymore. I am going to be fine, sad, but fine."

Mr. Ko sighed with both relief and terror after hearing his daughters words. He held her hand in his and squeezed. "I cannot bear to think of you all alone, unprotected," he complained. "I won't be." Sigh said, shocked at the confidence she heard in her own voice, "You are going to make me another suit, one that I control."

The idea had hit Sigh like a bolt of lightning, thrown at her by a six fisted Leap from the planet Leaperton, and she knew this was the only way her father could die at peace. He would know she was protected, and she could still work for the mentally different. She explained to him how this suit would need to allow for a full range of emotions and have the negative feelings converter for unlimited energy and last but not least, be removable. Mr. Ko fought her on that part, but she explained she would only take it off when she knew she was safe. In the lab they worked quickly, fighting time and Mr. Ko's cancer so they could finish the suit together. Mr. Ko had kept a back up suit, so doing the adjustments was all that was needed. They worked through the night, taking turns welding, wiring and fueling the machine till they finished, but altered suit, stood dauntingly between them.

Mr. Ko slumped against the work table, drained of all energy. Sigh rushed to his side to support him but he waved her away saying, "get in the suit Sigh, just get in the suit." She stood next to it, feeling the warm air touch her skin through the thin fibers of the lab coat as she touched the cold steel of the suit. "But I only just got out of you," she thought looking at the suit, what had been her skin for so long, seemed threatening, after only one day. Sigh configured the suit to open up, she looked at her father's dropping weak eyes and saw him nod. She saw so much in that nod. He looked away, knowing she needed to take off the lab coat to put on the suit properly. She held her breath and dropped her father's coat, and stepped into the suit. She felt familiar pokes and pinches, and some new ones. The suit closed in around her, securing her, protecting her, at least this is what she had to remind herself.

Her helmet looked ominously at Sigh. She knew that this time she would be able to take it off, it now unlocked with her finger prints instead of her father's. Her gloved hands reached out and placed the helmet on her head. This time only one node pinched into her scalp. All her

memories remained intact, her thought process and range of feelings unaltered. The only thing that changed was that instead of feeling weak with the pain of the day, the pain of knowing she would soon watch her father die for the second time, the pain energized her. She picked up her father's nearly unconscious body in her strong arms and she carried him out of the lab and onto their balcony. Dawn was coming, but she could barely see the sun peaking through the heavy clouds that made up the sky. Placing him down gently on the dented floor of their balcony that had served as her landing pad, and their meeting place for so many years, she didn't need to scan him to know he only had moments.

Mr. Ko's eyes opened, wincing with pain, he saw above him his daughter, safe behind bullet proof glass. The clouds looming above him didn't scare him. But those eyes staring back at him did. The eyes he had seen, since she was born, through the dark days and the good that followed, had changed. There was something in them he couldn't name. He coughed up more blood and Sigh soothed him and dabbed his mouth with his kerchief. She smiled at him, lovingly, her smile was big and wide but the corners of it twitched, as if it was weakening with sadness. But those eyes, those eyes so big that they could fit a world in them, somehow, they fit two. He blinked to make sure he wasn't seeing things. Her eyes had always been green, emerald green, grass green, a bright vibrant green- now one was gold. He had read about this in old books on time travel, legends about time travelers who had changed their own time line, forever marked by what they had done.

His eyes closed as he sighed his last words, heavy with the knowledge that she *knew*, "I am sorry."

Sigh's breath caught in her throat, her suit beeped at her to breathe, but she held it, she needed a moment before she replied. She knew all that these simple three words stood for, she

tried to make it sound genuine. “I forgive you,” she murmured as the clouds emptied their burden upon the earth and her words mixed in the rain that fell on her dead father’s face.

The rain poured down on her still as she buried her father near her favorite tree on their property. She remembered climbing it, higher than any other child could have, and using the suit to fly safely to the ground. Cremation was more common these days, but they were recluses. No one would come looking for the body of Mr. Ko. The earth she dug up turned to mud instantly. She put the lab coat he had given her over his face before she poured the earth over him. With the suit, it was easy work, but she knew she should feel exhausted. She dropped her shovel and looked at the plot of brown amongst the green. “I am all alone now.” Sigh said to no one. With that she reached up and took off her helmet and climbed out of the suit. Her bare feet sang in the wet soft grass, she felt as if she could feel the whole world moving beneath her.

A smile grew on her lips, even though the tears streamed down her cheeks, she found her self laughing as she leaped and skipped and danced around their garden, naked in the rain, thinking, how many people can say, “that could have gone a lot worse,” and actually know for a fact that this life, this world, this version of reality, was the one for her.

As the clouds emptied their last bits of rain so did Sigh’s eyes. The sun came out and dried her as she lay on the cool cement of their porch. She was having the, “what now,” moment that all heroines go through after they felt they have had the climax of their adventures. She smiled a one sided smile, which seemed fitting to her considering the duel aspect of her reality recently, as she realized she still had her mission. Birds chirped in the distance, and as Sigh stood

and took in the beauty of her home that she hadn't had time to realize before, she knew that her future would be full of adventures, and this was definitely not the end of her story. "My first mission," she said aloud looking down at her bare body, "online shopping spree."

The next few months Sigh spent learning to be human. She bought removable, non bullet proof clothes and accessories, tried every type of food she could imagine, learned how long the lines are in public women's restrooms (and how convenient her suit was in that department), and that you could talk to people about things other than trauma, mental illness and time travel. On one of these exploration days, Sigh was walking down a busy street, flying hover cars overhead and people pushing past her with their robot dogs, when she was overwhelmed with the huge monitors on every building that blared the news 24/7. And on this day, the news was not good.

The resource war now seemed inevitable. Fossil fuels had burned up and things like solar energy had not managed to make up for its loss. Rolling black outs were expected, people were encouraged to stock up on water and non-perishables, leading to stores being luted as the people of Earth frantically realized their way of life was ending. Sigh could feel the tension in the crowd around her that looked up at the screen now showing images of burnt buildings and arguing politicians. She looked down at herself with a sigh. Her lace up boots and skin tight silver pants still looked foreign to her. The fibers of her woven jacket felt warm and comforting to the touch as she played nervously with her sleeve. Her different colored eyes were drawn from her toes and back up to the screen when a familiar voice spoke out, her words echoing in the street.

"We do not need war. We have burned up our oil, we have chopped down our trees. Smog blocks the sun in most cities. We need to learn from our mistakes. Fighting each other is not the answer. We are on Earth together, we need to work together. Two hundred years ago we

did not know that we were not alone in the universe. Now we know of hundreds of other planets that manage to work together to survive, completely independent from us. We have tried to reach out to these planets. We have received no response. We are once again alone in the universe.”

A politician interrupted her, “This is why we need to fight! This is the end of our world, only the strongest will survive!” The crowd around her started yelling at the screen, some agreeing, some disagreeing. Sigh felt small and invisible as she stood breathless in the crowd.

“Mother?” Sigh breathed. For the woman on the screen was most definitely her mother. Her red hair was pulled back in a tight bun, but her green eyes were the same as Sigh’s used to be, before her paradox marked her forever. Sigh’s breath caught in her throat, in her panic she instinctively pushed where her red transport button used to be on her wrist. “Damnit,” Sigh cursed when nothing happened. Her heart beat faster and she felt her cheeks flush and anger filled her veins. Her suit was not there to convert it to passion, so all she could do was turn and run away. Run away from the daunting figure on the screen. Away from the person who abandoned her. The person who left her with her father. Left her with the man that turned her into an emotional prisoner. Since her father’s death Sigh had tried not to think about her mother, had resisted researching her name, thinking, there must be a reason she wasn’t in her life. Now her head fumed with thoughts, and doubts as she pushed through the busy street, trying to hail a hover cab while mumbling, “I really wish I could fly right now!”

Finally in a cab, she gave the automated driver her address and leaned back in her seat and tried to calm herself down. “What the fuck!” Sigh moaned, squeezing her eyes shut. “How could my father not know where my mother was, or who my mother was? And if he did know, why hadn’t he told me?” She thought over and over to herself until the cab dropped her off at her

house. Going through the front door was still weird to her, it's rarely used key had to be forced to turn and the door creaked as she pushed it open.

"Home sweet home." She said sadly to the empty house. Only the noise of the robot maid cleaning in a distant room greeted her. She dropped her grocery bag off in the kitchen, and went to her room, sitting down in front of the computer, her hands hovered shakily over the keys.

Her fingers made contact with those daunting keys, but she found herself typing in a different name than her mother's into the powerful search engine. The name was Robin's. She stared at the screen, once again finding herself frozen from pressing a key. "Where are you Robin," Sigh thought, "are you safe, are you happy? I want to find you... But you don't even know who I am. The brief moments we had, never truly happened." Tears filled her eyes and a tear slipped out of the gold one and scampered down her cheek, landing with a tiny splash on the enter key. Instead, she pressed down on the delete key and wiped her eyes, blinking away the watery emotions.

"Florence Night" now filled the search box and she pressed enter without anymore hesitation. Sigh had seen on the news that her mother's last name was different. It was odd to Sigh, that she had never really thought about her mother when she was growing up. She assumed her father had made her suit block all memories of her mother, so now that she was free of the wires and probes she wondered why other memories weren't coming back to her. "Why don't I remember you?" Sigh asked the computer screen, now filled with information about one Florence Night, as if it could answer her.

Sigh scanned the information and gathered that Florence Night was a leader of an anti-war group known to take radical actions against the government and military forces. Florence had been arrested several times for partaking in anti-war protests, and was gaining fame because

of them. Sigh thought it made a lot of sense that her mother, a victim of domestic abuse, had taken an anti-war and anti-violence stance. She quickly found the location of the group's headquarters, who called themselves the CALM, and made up her mind to pay them a visit. "Tomorrow," she said aloud, "I'll go tomorrow."

The sun was setting as she made her resolve so she left her room determined to not think of her mother anymore and instead do something extremely exciting and possibly dangerous: cook dinner. So far, Sigh had been surviving on take-out, taking care of her body seemed like a full time job now that the suit wasn't there to do it all for her. She felt like a child, learning all these things for the first time, things like you need to drink water and ice-cream isn't thought of as a balanced part of a healthy breakfast.

She set out the groceries on the counter. Everything was in cans. Fresh fruits and veggies were a thing Sigh had never seen in person, on Earth at least. The world had been taken over by humanity, and nature had little room left to grow that wasn't man made. Now "Farmers" grew food in laboratories with artificial sunlight. But Sigh had been to planets where people lived off the land, and ate fruit right off of the tree. She thought how Robin would have loved to see that, then quickly shook those thoughts away and focused on making spaghetti, an alien looking food she had only seen on Earth.

After dinner Sigh wiped sauce of her cheeks and left the clean up to the robotic help. She stripped down and turned on the shower, standing a moment to see her reflection in the mirror before she got in. "There I am," she thought, "I am still here."

The heat of the shower exhausted her, though she enjoyed the water dripping over and exploring her body more than anything her skin had yet felt, she turned off the water, another precious and quickly diminishing resource, quickly dried off and got in bed.

No more dust covered her blankets, she had had them washed 5 times before she felt they had efficiently lost their stiffness. As she pulled them up to her chin, the now soft blanket hugged her body, warming her, she stretched peacefully and curled up among the stuffed animals she had put on the bed for company and was quickly asleep. And as she slept, she dreamed of Robin.

They were on the beach of Iseon, lying, laughing in the sand as they had after exploring the underwater world, but this time Sigh wasn't in her suit. Instead she wore a long silky robe, and Robin was shirtless. Sigh's heart beat loudly against her chest as she felt the warm sand against her cold skin. Suddenly Robin was hovering over, his muscular chest Sigh noticed was free from scars, and instead of being pale, he looked tan and healthy. His glistening cobalt blue eyes met hers as he reached down to kiss her, but this time no helmet interfered with their trajectory. They met hers with the power of waves crashing against the rocks on the cliffside below. Sigh felt warm all over, and opened her mouth, moving her lips to match his. Her back arched up automatically to him, she felt his heat against her. He stopped kissing her to push her wild hair behind one ear and whisper, "you are beautiful," into it.

Sigh woke up panting, her skin felt hot and damp with sweat. She looked around her dark room, she was alone. "Again?," she thought. She hadn't had dreams when she wore her suit, but ever since she started sleeping without it, she had this same dream. This same torturous, wonderful, foreign and yet familiar dream. She threw the blankets off of her in order to cool down. As her breathing returned to normal she tried to go back to sleep, but she couldn't get Robin's face out from behind her eyelids. "Oh, Robin," she whispered, "I wish you were here." Her suit must have been suppressing her sex hormones, for Sigh had never felt this feeling before, this lust, this almost magnetic emotional and physical draw to another person. Sigh fell

asleep thinking about how much she wished she could draw Robin to her, that he could somehow find her in this version of reality, and that he would still think she was beautiful.

The next morning Sigh walked naked past her now full closet and into the lab where she stored her suit. “Ok buddy, let’s get to work,” she said looking at the sturdy mirror like metal that used to be her skin, now she thought of it as more like an exoskeleton, one she didn’t need all the time but she could use as a defense when she needed extra protection. Sigh didn’t think she would be in any physical danger visiting the CALM and seeing her mother, but emotionally??? Her heart beat faster and her hands shook just thinking about it. Once inside the suit she felt the normal pricks and pinches as the suit locked her safely in place, she felt immediately calmer, the suit must have injected her with something soothing, for once she was okay with that. The first couple times she had got back in the suit, she had felt terror. After all the thing had tried to kill her, had taken away her memories and her ability to feel, but after making this new one with her father, and making adjustments over the last 2 months whenever she thought of something else, it was feeling more like her creation than the one her father had forced her into. In this suit she had power. In the last one she had been a prisoner.

The helmet locked in place and Sigh walked out onto the familiar balcony, typed in the coordinates and pressed the red button, which transported her to the roof of a tall building in the middle of the city. Her visor showed her the floor plan of the building, and Sigh followed its directions till she was on the 37th floor, supposedly home to the CALM. She pushed open a door covered in anti-war fliers and alien propaganda, all printed on recycled paper, and found herself in a busy office filled with volunteers who didn’t seem to notice the young woman in the space suit who had just entered. Sigh breathed deeply and walked up to a dark haired girl about her age

who was nearest. "I am here to see Florence Night, where is she?" Sigh tried to ask professionally. The girl's brown eyes blinked at her quickly, as if trying to make sure she was really seeing what she thought she was seeing.

"Who are you?" The girl asked, still blinking.

"I, I am a volunteer," Sigh lied. She didn't think saying she was the abandoned daughter of their group's leader would go over very well.

"She is very busy," the girl said automatically, but started walking towards an office door down the hall so Sigh followed. The door was bullet proof, "but not me proof" thought Sigh as the timid girl knocked, entered shutting the door behind her, then came out again and ushered Sigh in with a gentle push, closing the door behind Sigh and leaving her alone in the unrealistically neatly kept office.

"How can I help you?" Questioned her mother from across a sturdy metallic desk which contents were minimal, a small computer screen and phone looked lonely on the shiny surface. Sigh thought of her father's eternally messy desk and smiled, amused. "My parent's are total opposites," she thought.

Florence stared at her, green eyes heavy with dark make up and even sitting up straight she looked small and dainty compared to how dominating she had seemed on the screen. Florence's elegant face was beginning to wrinkle, and streaks of gray pulled through her red hair that was once again in a tight bun. Sigh tried to relax, thinking, "this woman is just a woman, not some powerful alien monster, she just happens to be my mother. Or is that worse?" Sigh cleared her throat.

"I know how to prevent the war. I know how we can save Earth."

Well, that got Florence's attention. She immediately leaned forward, as if waiting eagerly to hear more. Sigh was impressed with how assertive she sounded, but her words were true. She did know how to save Earth.

It was about a month after her father had died, when Sigh had skipped by her father's office and saw all the mounting files of missions waiting to be done, client's waiting to be saved. Her heart sank every time she saw them. She knew there were hundreds, thousands more who needed her, and she felt powerless, overloaded with responsibility, frozen, and unable to move, to help even one. Bravely, she sat down at the desk, and was saddened by the familiar squeak of her father's chair. Sigh wasn't used to doing the research part of this job. That is what her dad did. He watched the news, he read history books, he found records and planned carefully how to best help each client. Sigh didn't know how he had done it, it was all so, so depressing. Her world was going more crazy everyday, and Sigh knew of many other planets who had destroyed themselves and more civilizations that had died out when they were in even better shape than Earth was. "Saving one being at a time isn't going to cut it anymore," Sigh thought.

It was like Robin's case. Simply relocating him was not enough. There was too much trauma in his past, too much bad that outweighed the very little good. No one deserved to live like that. Most of Earth would be trauma victims, if they even survived this upcoming war. "Being a time traveling space therapist isn't enough anymore." And with that simple thought, Sigh realized how she could save the world. And it was all because of Robin.

"How? What do you suggest we do that we haven't already done," Florence was now standing, her perfect nails were clenched into fists on her desk. Surely Sigh had shocked her.

“There is a new type of energy that I have learned how to capture, to convert, and to use. This world is angry, and I know how to convert anger into compassion, and compassion can fuel factories, can create, can grow crops and give light. It is all very complicated and scientific, but what it comes down to is this: We can save ourselves.”

The next hour was spent showing Florence charts, graphs and formulas that Sigh had created from studying her suit and its new emotion/energy conversion system. Florence and Sigh talked quickly back and forth, Florence throwing out doubts and questions and Sigh giving answers and showing data in return. “It seems too good to be true,” Florence said flopping aggressively into her chair. “Who are you anyway?” She asked inquisitively, playing with a long silver necklace that hung almost to her waist.

This was the part Sigh had been dreading. When she saw her mother’s face on that screen she knew she was the one to tell about her discovery. With her popularity and the CALM’s resources, Florence was the one to help her stop the war. But, there was this one awkward thing stopping them from having a professional relationship.

“My name is Sigh Ko. My father was John Ko. You used to be Florence Ko. You used to be my mother.” The words flew from Sigh’s lips, through her helmet speaker and to her mother’s ears faster than Sigh thought they would. Before Florence could respond, Sigh found more words following the first. “If you want proof that this technology works, then look at me. The raging anger I feel for you for leaving me in that terribly helpless situation as a child, the anger I feel for my father for beating us and scarring us, the anger I feel for you for not coming back for me, for never trying to find me, for never wondering if I was even alive, is all converted by this suit to compassion. That compassion fuels me forward, gives me energy. It literally creates fuel

that my suit runs on and thus creates air and nutrients that help me survive. So thanks I guess. You have given me a lot of fuel.”

Her words hung in the air. Through the wall Sigh could hear mumbled voices of everyone outside, working and probably gossiping about her, but in the room it was silent. Sigh didn't know if she should transport out of there, and really leave dramatically, or stay and try to talk everything through with her mother. While she was thinking it over, Florence spoke.

“If I hadn't left you, we wouldn't be here now. We wouldn't be about to save the Earth.”

Sigh's eyes filled with tears. She had expected her mother to apologize, to give excuses, to beg forgiveness. This was... not at all what she had prepared for. She let the suit absorb her tears and hoped Florence hadn't seen those few drops escape. “What?” she managed to ask.

“I know this is hard for you Sigh. It was hard for me to make the decisions that I had to make, but I made them and I cannot change the past.”

“I did,” Sigh thought stubbornly, “I changed the past.”

Florence walked out from behind her desk, her body language was still controlled and stiff but her eyes looked pleadingly up at Sigh. In the suit Sigh was taller than her mother, without it they would have been eye to eye. “I am sure you have lot's of questions for me. But I need to get my team working on this, this, this is bigger than us.”

“Us?” Sigh asked.

“Yes us. We can work together on this, CALM needs you and your knowledge of this technology.”

“I can work with you,” Sigh resolved, “but I cannot call you my mother.”

Florence reached up and placed her delicate hands on each side of Sigh's visor. “I never wanted to be a mother Sigh, that is the whole point. I loved your father, and I had you for him,

but then he wanted me to be someone I wasn't, and then, well, you know the rest. I had to leave. I had to leave you. I, I know it is hard for you to believe, but I am sorry for all the hurt I have caused you. You were innocent, and," her voice cracked, "look what we have done to you."

Sigh pulled away from the woman who now, officially would never be her mother. She pressed the red button on her wrist before the tears she felt coming could leave her eyes.

Florence was left reaching out to empty space, a sob left her chest and she fell to the floor.

Sigh landed again in her lab and frantically took off her helmet and suit while the tears poured out of her. She stumbled into her room and curled up in her bed. The sun peaked at her through her window telling her it was only noon, Sigh's only response was to cry more. After all, she deserved a little time for self pity, and she told the sun so.

Florence sat on the stiff carpeted floor, her body felt like it weighed a thousand pounds, she didn't think she could get up. Her mind buzzed like old tv's when they couldn't get signal, she couldn't make sense of her thoughts. She managed to pull herself up, and sat again in her desk chair and automatically pulled out a mirror from her desk to check her make up and hair. When she saw her reflection she froze. She hadn't realized she had been crying. "She looks just like me." Florence whispered. Seeing Sigh was like looking back in time at her younger self. Her foolish, foolish younger self. "How could I stand to be with you everyday, to watch you grow up, to see the same fear on your face that I tried to ignore on mine for so long?" Her words were mere whispers. Florence wiped the tears from her face methodologically. "The worst part," she thought, "is that I really wanted to be a mother. But it didn't work out..." Her mind clouded

with violent memories from Sigh's childhood, her husband John getting worse and worse, till she didn't recognize him anymore, till she didn't know why she was letting him hurt her. She had felt so beaten, so trapped and helpless... the night she left was the last night she had ever seen him. And it had taken all her strength to get herself out. She hadn't had enough strength to save Sigh too. "And know it's too late," she said assertively, physically shaking the memories away with a toss of her head. She closed her mirror with a snap.

She watched on her television screen as Florence addressed the world, giving a passionate speech about how we have the power to save ourselves, but found her mind drifting. The pile of client files had remained untouched.

Sigh stood up and wondered over to them. She picked one of the top and opened it absentmindedly, glancing over the information until one piece stuck out. The name on the file was Robin's. "No!" Sigh yelled, "this can't be! I saved you dammit, I saved you!" Sigh tried to read through eyes blurred by anger. She tried to find the form that talked about his diagnosis, his trauma, his family dying, but found nothing that looked familiar. Hot tears burned as they fell from her eyes. She made herself stop and take a deep breath, her eyes focused and she realized the folder was full of articles and newspaper clippings. Slowly the words started to make sense, it wasn't a client folder, it was a collection of Robin's work. Sigh bit her lip nervously as she read about the person Robin had become. He was a scientist, famous for the research he had done on his own ability to fly.

"Oh my god," Sigh exclaimed, reading about his success, about his loving parents who supported his work, he was a genius, only 24 years old, and the first man to fly. Sigh searched frantically for a picture of him among the clippings. She wanted to see his face so badly, to

confirm that it really was him, that this amazing life really was what she had given him, to confirm that what she had done, made a difference. She found no photograph, but laughed when she saw what her father had written on the file as a note to himself: “Interesting.” Sigh laughed at her father, of course he had found this person interesting. He had obviously been keeping tabs on his work for awhile. Sigh doubted they had ever met as her father rarely left their home, but still, she wondered if her father had somehow known this was the person who’s parents he killed on that terrible night another reality ago. Even if he didn’t, Sigh was ecstatic to know that the boy who had been in her dreams for months still existed. Sigh sat on the couch, now excited and smiling, and slowly read again each clipping, this time without the worry that had plagued her moments before.

That night she couldn’t sleep as she faced the question dreaded by all those infatuated, “Should I call him?” Of course there weren’t always phones to call from, but Sigh was certain even before telephones and telegraphs, there had always been something, fire signals or what have you, always something to debate to do or not to do. Her situation was peculiar though she mused, since he would not know who was calling. That fact made her put her communicator down on her bedside table and curl into a sad ball under her blanket. “He doesn’t even know who I am...” She felt like this too had been said since the dawn of time, unrequited love and what not, but this was different. “He did know me once...” she thought as two lone tears fell from her gold eye.

She was shaken awake by a massive BOOM that seemed to echo through every bone in her body. She ran to her window, her breath faltered when she saw what was to be seen. The

city, and all the colored lights that marked its place in the sky, were gone, replaced with mountains of smoke contaminating the already heavy air. “War has begun” Sigh said aloud, her breath fogging the glass of her window, blurring the once clear view even more. She opened the window and heard distant sirens, and smelt the worst smell in the universe, the smell of death. She choked on it, tried to cough it back up, as if expelling it from her system would expel it from her world. The house shook again, causing the window to slam back down. Sigh jumped back from it.

Who was attacking? Sigh did not even know. The War had always been there, a constant threat in the background of her life, but she never thought it would actually come. She wondered who had decided to take the first blood. That is when Sigh realized what was wrong with the world outside her window, other than the fact that a city had been destroyed, there was something worse there, silence. It was silent. There weren't even screams left to fill the air. Whatever had been done, and whoever had done it, had done it so well, that not a single human voice could be heard fighting back, screaming, mourning, crying- nothing. Sigh felt suddenly overwhelmed with the pain of the millions of people who had been killed in their beds, and with the fact that she somehow, was still alive. “I am alive. I can scream,” she whispered, then screamed.

Sigh didn't know how long she screamed for, but when she finally stopped it was because she found herself lifting her helmet over her head and securing it to her suit. Her voice faded as the helmet echoed the sound in her suit. The helmet hooked into her skull and she automatically felt a sense of relief as she felt all that anger being pulled out of her, like venom from a wound, and being turned into compassion, being turned into fuel. She flexed her fingers in her gloves and felt strong for the first time since her father's death. Lingering a moment, she stood on the

balcony where he died the second time and looked at her house with eyes that knew it would not be there when she got back. Blinking away those thoughts, she prepared her suit for flight and shot into the sky.

Her boots sunk into ash thick ground as she landed on what used to be a metropolis. She had hoped to find survivors, but what she could see through the destruction filled air was merely more dust, more ash. Her scanner picked up spacecrafts all around the Earth's atmosphere, but that didn't make sense. The Earth's space program had been shut down decades ago due to lack of resources. This war, Earth's Resource War, was supposed to be fought on foot, country against country, not from alien spacecrafts, Sigh thought. No planets had made contact with Earth for centuries, Sigh heard her mother's voice in her head saying "We are again alone in the universe."

"It seems she was wrong," Sigh thought. As if confirming her thoughts, her scanner picked up a foreign communication and Sigh anxiously messed with the dials trying to translate the message. Suddenly the incomprehensible noises turned into words Sigh understood, yet did not understand. A gruff voice politely said, "Your welcome," out of her communicator.

"WHAT!" Sigh yelled at her communicator, hitting it with her fist as she tried to get it to track where the voice had originated from. "What do you mean, 'your welcome,' we did not ASK for this!?!)" Sigh yelled into the dark dusty air.

A blinking light caught her eye among the blackness. Sigh's heart beat faster in the hope that it was survivors. She scanned her suits information feed and saw that it was not just this city that had been destroyed, that cities all over the world were being targeted. Sigh had always thought it was cliché that in movies the aliens always attacked New York, or other big cities, but

one heart wrenching look at all the destruction around her made her understand. “This is where the people were.” Sigh said.

The blinking light was getting bigger, and spreading. Sigh wondered what it could be, a flashlight, a candle, a distant hover car’s headlights??? She walked quickly towards it, but the faster she walked the more she felt like the light got bigger, but further away. The yellow glimmer turned to orange, and the clouds of rubble around her turned pink and purple when hit with its rays. The world seemed to light up around her, but with a dim, murky light, like a candle behind a black curtain... “Oh god.” Sigh sat down clumsily, overwhelmed and momentarily out of control of her legs, “It’s the sun.” Sigh stayed sitting and cried for the broken homes that had become graves that she now sat on as she watched the ever stable sun try to rise. It seemed wrong to her for it to rise, like it should not have to see this. “What a terrible thing to wake up to,” she thought.

After an hour it seemed the sun had fought through as much as it could, though the world still looked hazy and dark, like she had her sun visor on. Sigh sent a message out on every communication channel she could, in every translation she could find, hoping to find others, hoping to find some answers. “Hello, Earth? Is anyone there? This is Sigh Ko, send me your coordinates, I will come help you.” She waited a moment, biting her lip.

Finally, the first sound that she had not made pierced through her ear piece, a muffled list of coordinates seemed to fill her helmet. Quickly typing them in, she did not realize until she hit her transport button that they were her same coordinates, the exact coordinates to where she was standing, just miles above her, through the unseeable sky. By the time she realized her destination it was too late. She was standing on the deck of a spaceship, staring down at Earth

through the thick glass, at the little blue green marble below her that wasn't so blue or green anymore, where she managed to say, "Shit."

"We are not 'shit' we are Watchers," a gruff voice said from behind her. She gulped and turned around slowly. But when she did she faced a creature she recognized. It had been a year ago in her time that she had been to their planet, Oyed, but fifty years for them as she had gone back in time to relocate a client. The natives of the planet were huge, telepathic, tree like creatures but instead of branches a giant eye stared back at her from the top of the 'trunk' of the Watcher in front of her. "I know who you are," Sigh said telepathically, "but I don't know what you think you are doing here."

"We are here to help." The watcher explained. He towered over her a good 4 feet, and his neon eye was three foot wide. His long roots easily wrapped around her boots, holding Sigh captive. She did not try to struggle. Her suit could withstand an atomic bomb, but it was no match against mother nature's soldiers.

"Help? I know you to be a peaceful planet, why are you bombing Earth? Why are you trying to kill us, and why the hell did you say 'you're welcome'???" Sigh spat at the giant creature, feeling that just thinking it was not enough to get her message across. The unblinking eye stared back at her.

"We see you. We have watched your planet for years. We cannot stand it any longer." "What do you mean you have 'watched'" Sigh thought, but already the answer filled her head like it was being shoved full of someone else's dreams, but the images in her head were of herself, of her life, just from another's perspective. "Okay this is weird," she tried to respond but the images kept coming. It showed her coming to the planet, transporting one of the natives who was mute, telepathically mute, away, as he was ostracized for being different. But as she was

leaving it showed her waving at another watcher, and then she was gone. Instead of images her head was filled with thoughts, her thoughts, yet old thoughts, old feelings, things she had said and done in the past, things she had forgotten she had thought of or said, all filled her brain at once. Sigh put her hands to her helmet, as if she could push the invasive thoughts out of her head. She felt so much pain. The pain of all the client's she had met and relocated, the pain of her isolation from other humans, more recently, the pain of her newly remembered memories of her father beating her and her mother abounding her, then her father dying, and her mother rejecting her, her feelings about Robin and the fact that he no longer knew her... "Oh it was just so much pain!" She heard the watcher say in her head. All the other thoughts faded, he was lifting up, no longer screaming at her all her memories and emotions.

"I don't understand," she said, feeling emotionally exhausted. "Why do you have my memories?"

"You gave them to us, on accident," the watcher explained. The image of her waving at the other watcher filled her head. Sigh's brain kicked back on.

"Oh no." She responded, realizing, that day she must have somehow set up a psychic connection, a one way connection with that watcher.

"And he passed it on to the rest of us," the watcher explained, "and it has spread over the last fifty years so now all of us, all fifty billion of us, all have your story in our heads. We cannot turn away, we are always watching, always linked for some inexplicable reason to you, a ridiculous human girl, and we just can't watch anymore."

"Oh." Sigh said again. It hurt to be told that your life sucks so much nobody wants to watch it. Or enough to kill you over. "So that is why you are here? To kill me so you don't have to hear my thoughts anymore?"

“No.” The watcher said blinking at her, showing her mind an image of their whole world, fifty billion eyes watching her in their minds, caring, caring so much. She understood their compassion. Their logic not so much. “We are here to destroy your pain.”

“WHAT!” Yelled Sigh, lurching towards him out of instinct, she felt his roots grab onto her boots tighter in response. His single eye just starred at her. Her mind filled with battle plans, their battle plans, she was being given detailed information about how they planned to destroy her home planet. Didn't they know that is the classic “bad guy” mistake? She thought, but then again she was given the image of all those eyes, filled with tears, watching her, and she realized something all the more painful. “If you were bad guys, if you were evil masterminds, doing this out of pure hatred and heartlessness, it would be so much easier...but this is worse... because all you are trying to do is protect me,” Sigh choked on the words and tears as they left her body, “and you know, better than anyone, I could have used some protection.” Sigh shut her eyes and gave into the sadness, she felt her body give out under her in pure emotional exhaustion but instead of falling to the floor, she felt herself caught by the strong roots of the watcher, and felt them wrap around her soothingly, and rocking her back and forth.

When she finally stopped crying the watcher released his grip on her and left her standing in front of him, stooping down lower to be at her level, and looked her eye to teary eye. Sigh heard him think, “We know you don't want us to do this, we feel the pain you feel, but we are intelligent creatures, and we have calculated that the pain of destroying everything all at once, will be less then letting your world live and continue to hurt itself and you and all the other earthlings, over and over again, into eternity.”

A familiar voice once again filled Sigh's ears, this time over her communicator, somebody had hacked into it. A shaking, female voice said “Hello, this is Earth, we are fighting

back.” A static filled image appeared on Sigh’s communicator, through the fuzz and sparks she saw her mother in some sort of metal contraption, strapped in and connected by wires too a rust covered rocket. Sigh was confused for a moment, Earth did not have rocket fuel anymore, not for a century, and if Earth still had a rocket, what could her mother hope to do with an unflyable rocket, one that should be in a museum- her mother’s voice broke through again explaining, “All the worlds countries have come together on this day, our greatest hour, and our remaining nuclear and atomic power are all inside this rocket, that I am sending it up into the atmosphere. If you do not leave our world, we will be forced to blow up the sky.”

Silence filled Sigh and the watchers minds, until Sigh muttered, like an embarrassed kid on the playground, “yep, that’s my mom. She is going to try to use my power to kill you.”

“I have to go talk to her,” Sigh pleaded to the watcher, “I am the only one who knows how that technology works, I have to make sure she is okay.”

The watcher made no response to her begging and instead merely looked her up and down, resting his gaze on her feet. Sigh followed his gaze, and looked down at her booted feet and realized he had never restrained her again. She was free to go. She typed in the coordinates her computer had got from the video message and put her gloved finger on the red button. “I don’t want anyone else to die.” Sigh pleaded one last time.

The watcher started to cry again and sent her one last message, before reaching with one of his roots and pressing the button for her; “Sigh, please don’t take off your suit.”

Sigh found herself in a buzzing lab/war room filled with military and political representatives who had been at each others throats only hours ago and scientists all trying desperately to save the world. A giant screen showed the Watcher’s wooden ships (yes did I not

tell you that since they are organic creatures they fly wooden ships?) filling the sky, and Sigh rushed to her mother, attached to the base of the huge antique rocket. Florence looked so small under the machinery she had encased herself with, but barked orders at those scientists and generals near her, explaining what to do and how to do it. Sigh stood in front of her mother calmly until she stopped yelling and noticed her. Florence went pale.

“I thought you were dead... your house, it was destroyed...” Florence managed to mumble.

Sigh shushed her, “I am fine mom. You not so much. You cannot attack these creatures, you can’t fight them like this, it won’t work!”

“It’s too late Sigh. The rocket is already calibrated. It is programmed to hit the main ship and set off a chain reaction that destroys all of the fleet. All I have to do is let myself feel, let myself fill with anger and they are gone. Like that the enemy is dead.”

“The situation is not that simple!” Sigh yelled, overwhelmed with how she could convince Earth that yes, they were all about to be all mercy killed, but there was genuine compassion behind it. No one would stand by and let that happen, Sigh wasn’t about to either, but she just wished there was another way.

“It’s begun,” a high up looking soldier said. The rocket above them exploded to life, smoke and sound filled the room which quickly emptied as the high up went to hide in bunkers, leaving Florence strapped to a rocket engine, and Sigh, helpless to stop her.

“Anger, anger, anger,” she heard her mother yelling over the noise. Sigh grabbed her small bare hand in hers as the building shook with the power of the rocket. Sigh watched Florence’s wire encased head shake back and forth, as if she was trying to kick start an old motorcycle. The minutes passed. The rocket did not lift off. Florence allowed herself to open the

floodgates to the memories she had repressed for so long. Her loving husband, turning into a monster, hitting her, yelling at her, beating her, threatening her, watching her daughter get thrown across the room, looking at the woman in front of her, and all those years in-between she had lost.... so much anger, so many reason's to be angry...

“I don't understand! Why isn't it working? You said it runs on anger and it is not working!!” Florence yelled at Sigh. Sigh only looked back with pity in her eyes. Florence focused harder on the memories, she remembered looking in the mirror, covering her battered face with pounds of make up, not wanting to leave the house incase others saw her, but wanting to leave so badly at the same time, wanting to escape this hell so entirely, but she couldn't. She was to scared.

“It doesn't work with fear mom. I am so sorry.” Sigh soothed at last as she realized what was happening. Her poor mother, all those years of being afraid, but pretending everything was alright, had made her incapable of truly feeling anger. Anger gives power, fear eats it up.

Tears filled Florence's eyes and made their way down her reddening cheeks for the first time in a decade. “I...am... NOT AFRAID!” Florence's broken voice filled the room and the walls began to shake. Sigh tried frantically to pull her mother from the grips of the over heating machine, as sparks and smoke filled the air. The metal that caged Florence bent easily in Sigh's gloved hands but her mother was fighting her, screaming that she was going to save her, that she would make the rocket go up. Sigh screamed above the sound of the coming explosion, “I don't need to be saved mom! You can't save me-“ her voice cracked as she looked the frantic woman in the eyes, “you couldn't save me then, you couldn't even save yourself. But your okay now, and I am okay. We just need to get the fuck out of here before it blows!!!!” Florence stopped flailing long enough to nod in response to Sigh's offering of forgiveness, and took her

outstretched hand. Once she realized she wasn't being fought, she took her daughters gloved hand and stepped warily out of the jumbled machine as the rocket started to burn. Sigh held her mother's hand tight and pressed the blue bottom knowing they only had seconds before the rocket obliterated them.

She had typed in her default coordinates, those that had taken her back to the safety of her balcony so many trips before this one. Instead she landed on a pile of rubble. Dust rose as her feet hit one the once stable ground and let her mother drop in exhaustion at her side. Sigh felt that heavy feeling in her throat that meant tears were coming, as she looked at what used to be her home.

And in that moment of chaos and devastation Sigh realized why the world was the way it was. It could be a dark place, filled with horrors that no one should have to hear about, let alone live through. But it also could be a place of hope. Because sometimes the darkness makes the light shine brighter, and its beauty grows and electrifies in comparison. Sigh realized what she was supposed to do. Somehow, in this terrible moment, a part of Sigh lit up. And oh, how that fire blazed. Sigh felt it run through her veins, from her fingers to her toes, even the short hairs growing back on her skull felt like they were standing on end. "I am alive," Sigh said, grounding herself to the earth around her by digging her boots into the ash, "I am alive not to change the world, but to do good in it."

Sigh saw the Oyed's ships break through the dusty clouds until they could be seen clearly above her. It looked like the whole sky was made of wood. She heard the Watcher's thoughts fill her head with a kind of calm silence, like it was thinking, "hmmm." Her head filled with images of what had just transpired, it was so weird seeing her recent memories through their eyes. She heard herself utter the words that her just left her lips, "I sound rather confident," she observed,

and then she heard nothing. Her mind was blank. The ships hovering above her disappeared with the thoughts of the Watcher. Sigh scanned the sky and could see Oyed ships leaving her galaxy and returning to their own (she has a really good scanner).

Florence shakily stood up at Sigh's side as she looked up at the sky with a furrowed brow. "They are gone," Florence stated, "we are safe."

Sigh smiled at her mother but wondered aloud, "yes but why? Why did they leave?"

"They came because they felt your pain, they left because they felt your strength,"

Florence responded.

"How??" Sigh asked, wondering how her mother could know this, and sound so sure of the fact that they were safe now.

Florence stood in front of Sigh and put her hands on Sigh's helmet. Her green eyes were big and heavy, they took over her whole face. They looked into her daughter's and ran with tears as she explained; "You forgave me. You forgave the universe, so they did too. They told me everything, just now before they left, they said they thought I should know my daughter. They showed me your life, the beautiful wonderful life you have created for yourself. I am so proud of you."

Tears fell from Sigh's eyes. She removed her helmet so Florence could wipe the tears from her cheeks, like mothers do. And in that moment Florence finally felt like a mother. As the girls embraced the Earth to, began to put itself together again.

It took a while, but they did it. Since the cities of Earth had almost all been destroyed the survivors fled to the country, and took up with the farmers, and found work bringing life out of the laboratories and back to the earth itself. Seeds took, and mass graves became gardens. The

earth mourned, and came together, consoling the common pain. The dust cloud cleared and took the smog with it. The two million that survived breathed.

Sigh's mother went back to work, leading the survivors back to life, and reminding them that they cannot fall into their old patterns, that they must stay together in order to survive. In the local election Florence won and quickly moved up in the new ranks of democracy. Sigh smiled as she watched her mother preach green, from her salvaged television. She turned it off, knowing her mother was happy, and looked over the quiet home she had made for herself. Her favorite tree had somehow survived the blast, and in it Sigh had built a treehouse out of the wreckage of her family home, literally creating a new life from her families broken one. With her suit it was easy work and she now had a space all her own among the birds. She felt that was fitting since she too could fly. "Robin," she thought as she looked out the window at the setting sun, "I hope you are out there somewhere." All of Earth was looking for survivors, and Sigh had had no luck trying to find the boy who didn't know her. She left the window and got into bed, glancing proudly at the stack of client files she had relocated over the past few months since the Oyed's had come to Earth. She yawned as she pulled her comforter over her, and stretched and curled into it. And so she slept and lived and slept...

Until one fall day, she was grocery shopping in the farmers market, dressed in scarf after scarf as she deplored the cold but really enjoyed winter fashion, she suddenly felt that creeping feeling like someone was watching her. She turned around, and searched the moving crowd, her eyes at first glancing over the auburn haired man who stood still among the masses. One side of his mouth lifted into a smile as he realized she was looking at him too. "Robin," she whispered. The name was so familiar to her lips that it seeped out unknowingly as she tried to breath evenly. He started to walk towards her, closing the yards that separated them easily with his long legs.

After looking toward to this moment for so long Sigh started to panic, she reached for her transport button but found only a bracelet on her bare wrist where it should have been. “I picked the wrong outfit for this,” Sigh thought to herself.

“Hello,” he said smoothly as Sigh found herself looking up at him, thinking he was even taller without her suit. “This is going to sound like the worst pick up line in the world, but I swear I have dreamt about you. You are normally wearing this weird space suit though. I know, crazy right?”

Sigh couldn't help but laugh as she struggled to contain her delight. “Oh I bet you say that to all the girls,” she joked and reached her arms around his neck and kissed him. His lips seemed shocked at first but parted to greet hers. Her heart flipped and her stomach flopped as she felt his arms reach around her waist, holding her up. When he finally pulled away, he said, still stunned, “I swear I haven't but I think I should considering this result.”

Sigh laughed and kissed him again, then said, “do you happen to like muffins? I have some in my bag. Would like to go somewhere and talk?”

“Muffins?!” He said in shock, releasing his hold so Sigh once again stood on the ground. “What is your name dream girl?” He added curiously.

“Sigh,” she said smiling mischievously, “my name is Sigh, it is awfully nice to meet you.”

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