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Layers of Injustice

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Layers of Injustice

Patricia Geist-Martin

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In the end, this is a VERY powerful story. I sat for moments (even hours) after reading the final page, reflecting back over the story and how it could have gone differently — not the story as it was told, but the events that transpired. The injustice it represents is there in all of our lives in some way or another and yet for most of us, that injustice is not a life or death situation. But what really caught a tear in my throat in the last page was the return to the character we met in the first sentence — the juror that “sobbed uncontrollably”. And in the end, that same character — Amy — visited death row, decided to go to law school, and sends all of her grades to the man on trial, Leven, who she helped send to death row.

The story inspires me. It inspires me to question rules, laws, even beliefs that certainly are unjust. It raises issues about the intent of the law versus the interpretation and carrying out of those laws. We learn in the first few pages of the story “how the jury got tricked into ordering him killed. Again.” As a communication scholar I wonder about the informal agreements that get made to reinforce these injustices. I wonder about the group think mentality that mandates jurors to vote against their hearts, that bows down to reason — reasoning that often unquestionably supports the injustices.

This piece represents well what I teach in my ethnographic research methods about the invisible line between art and science, between fact and fiction, between self and other.

I can't even begin to enumerate the audiences that might benefit from this story. Any person that believes that if we don't stand up for ourselves, we stand for nothing will see the lesson here. Amy was intimidated. We see that. We see why and how it happened. But in the end, we know that the facts that might have helped Amy and others to make a different decision were withheld from them. Equally, we learn what Amy confesses “I did not want this. I wanted life all along. I just didn't know how that was ever going to happen, so I folded.” The wallop that begins the reflecting and the tear that forms in my throat is the author's confession “I could only breathe in. I did not tell her the truth. It would have wrecked her.”

Layers upon layers of injustice are what make this a compelling read from beginning to end.