

crazy

This dialogue is transcribed from repeated visits with a patient in Aaronsville Correctional Center in West Virginia. Madeline*, a thirty-six year old woman, was sentenced to life imprisonment after the brutal slaying of her boyfriend during sexual intercourse. According to police reports, Madeline sat with the remains of the man for three days after the murder until police arrived on the scene. They found her in the same room as the body, still coated with blood and malnourished. Three doctors studied her behavior for a total period of eight months, and the unanimous conclusion they reached was that Madeline was not of sound mind when she committed the act, which involved an ice pick, an oak board from the back of a chair, and eventually a chef's knife. Furthermore, she continued to show signs of both paranoia and delusions of grandeur long after the murder, swaying back and forth between the two, much like manic depression.

For three and a half years Madeline has stayed at the Aaronsville Correctional Center, and she has shown no signs of behavioral improvement. She stays in a room by herself, usually playing solitaire on her bed. She talks to herself regularly and out loud, usually in a slight Southern accent, although not in a very loud tone, according to surveillance videotape. Her family abandoned her after the murder. Occasionally she requests newspapers to read, but she is usually denied them. She never received visitors, until these sessions with myself.

The following excerpts are from dialogues I have had with her, although I am tempted to say that they are monologues. She wasn't very interested in speaking with me, rather, she was more interested in opening herself up to someone for the first time in years, someone who was willing to listen. At times I began to feel like a surrogate parent. I try not to think of what will happen when our sessions end.

* Madeline is not her real name.

I know they're **watching me**. They've got these stupid cameras everywhere - see, there's one behind the air vent there, **hi there**, and there's one where the window used to be. They've probably got them behind the mirrors, too. It wouldn't be so bad, I guess, I mean, there's not much for me to be doing in here anyway, but they **watch me dress**, too, I mean, they're watching me when I'm naked, now **what's that going to do to a person?** I don't know what they're watching for anyway, it's not like I can do anything in here. I eat everything with a spoon, I've never been **violent**, all I do, almost every day, is sit on this bed and play solitaire.

Solitaire is really relaxing, you know, and I think it keeps your brain alive, too. Most people think you can't win at solitaire, that the chances of winning are like two percent or something. But the thing is, you can win at this game like over half the time. I think that's the key, too - **knowing you can win** half the time. I mean, the last four rounds I played, I won twice. Now I'm not saying that's good or anything, like praise me because I won two rounds of solitaire, but it makes a point that as long as you know what you're doing

and you actually think about it, you can win. The odds are better.

I think **people just forget** to watch the cards. Half the time the reason why you lose is because you forget something so obvious. You're looking for a card through the deck and the whole time it's sitting on another pile, just waiting to be moved over, and the whole time you forget to move it. People just forget to pay attention. They got to pay attention.

You know, I'd like to see the news. I hate t.v., but I'd like to see what acts other people are doing. Anything like mine? Has anyone else **lost it** like me? You know, I'll bet my story wasn't even on the news for more than thirty seconds. And I'll bet the news person had a tone to their voice that was just like "oh, the poor crazy thing," like, "that's what happens when you lose it,"

But I want to see what's happening in the real world. I just wanna watch to see what, you know, the weather is like, even though I haven't seen the sun in a year or two. Or, or to hear sports scores. They won't let me have a t.v. in the room. I think they think that I'm gonna hot-wire it or something, like I'm going to try to **electrocute** the whole building with a stupid televi-

sion set. They let me have a lamp in the room, like I can't hurt someone with that, but no t.v. They won't even let me have a newspaper. What can a person do with a newspaper? Light in on fire or something? If I had matches or something. But it's like this: I've never been violent to nobody in all of the time I've been in here. I haven't laid a hand on a guard, even though they're tried too many times to lay a hand on me, and I haven't cause one single little problem in this whole damn place, and this is what I get - I don't even get a t.v. or a newspaper.

You know, I don't really have a Southern accent. See? Don't I sound different with my regular voice? I picked it up when I started sounding crazy. See, I'm not really crazy, I just know the kind of shit they do to you in prison. I think it's bad enough here, I would've had the shit kicked out of me, I'd've been sodomized before I knew what hit me. I think this voice makes me sound a little more strange. I'm actually from New York, but I mean, changing the voice a little just to save me from going to prison, well, I can do that. Here it's kind of nice, I don't have to deal with people that often, and all the crazy people around here think

I'm some sort of tough bitch because I mutilated someone who was **raping** me. Oh, you didn't hear that part of the story, did you? Those damn lawyers thought that **since I wasn't a virgin I must have been wanting him.** And he wasn't even my boyfriend - he was just some guy I knew, we'd go out every couple of weeks, and I never even slept with him before.

What a **fucked up** place. You see, I gotta think of it this way: I really had no choice but to do what I did. In a way it was self-defense, because I didn't want that little piece of shit to try to **do that to me,** I mean, what the Hell makes him think he can do that? Where does he get off trying to take me like that, like I'm some **butcher-shop piece of meat** he can buy and abuse or whatever? Well anyway, I know part of it all was self defense and all, but at the same time I know I flipped, but its because of, well shit that happened in my past. I never came from any rich family like you, I never even came from a family with a dad, and when you got all these boyfriends coming in and **hit - ting you** or **touching you** or whatever, you know it's got to mess you up. Yeah, I know, people try to use the my-parents-beat-me line and it's getting to the point

where no one really believes it anymore, but if a person goes through all their life **suppressing** something that they shouldn't have to suppress then one day it's going to just come up to them and punch them in the face, it's going to make them go crazy, even if it's just for a little while.

Society's kind of **weird**, you know. It's like they teach you to do things that aren't normal, that **don't feel right down deep in your bones**, but you have to do them anyway, because **someone somewhere decided** that this would be normal. Everyone around you suppresses stuff, and when you see that it tells you that you're supposed to be hiding it from the rest of the world, too, like if we all **just hide it for a while**, it will all go away. Maybe it does, until someone like me blows up and can't take hiding all that stuff anymore, but then the rest of the world can just say that we're crazy and **therefore it's unexplainable** why we went crazy and then they can just brush it all off and everything is back to normal again. It's like emotion. People are taught to hide their emotions. **Men** are taught not to cry, **women** are taught to be emotional and men are told to think that it's crazy. So when something really shi-

ty happens to someone - like a guy loses his job or something - and he just sits in front of a friend and breaks down and cries, the other guy just thinks this guy is crazy for crying. Then the guy rejects the guy that's crying, making him feel even worse, making the guy bottle it back up inside of him.

I think people are like Pepsi bottles. You remember those glass bottles? Pop always tasted better in those bottles, you could just like swig it down easier, your lips fit around the glass neck better or something. I wonder why people don't use them anymore? Well, I think people are like Pepsi bottles, like they have the potential for all of this energy, and **the whole world keeps shaking them up**, and some people lose their heads and the top goes off and all of this icky stuff comes shooting all around and other Pepsi bottles want to hide from it and then the poor guy has no Pepsi left. And how can you do anything when you have no Pepsi left? Or maybe you do lose it, but you still have some Pepsi left in you, and people keep thinking that you don't have any left, and then they treat you like you shouldn't be allowed to **tie your own shoelaces** or you should be watched while you're getting dressed.

Can't you turn those cameras off?

I heard this story in here sometime about Tony, this guy that was in here for murder, and after he was in here he went crazy and cut off his own scrotum. I don't know how a man survives something like that, but I guess he did, because he was in here, and from what I hear he was using the pay phones to call 800 numbers to **prank** whoever answered at the other end. Well, I guess he kept calling this one place where **these women** would answer the phone, and they got **fed up** with it, I guess, and traced it or something. They got the number for this hospital, and talked to his doctor. I think he told them that Tony cut his balls off, now I thought doctor-patient records were private, but I suppose it doesn't matter, because we're just crazy prisoners, killers who don't matter anyway, but he told these **girls** that Tony cut his balls off a whole two months ago. And then he called them back, **talking dirty to them,** not knowing they knew he was a murderer with no balls and they laughed and made fun of him and told him they knew, and he hung up the phone and never called them back. True story, swear to God. Can you just imagine him wondering how they knew? Or were they just making a joke, or...

Did you know that I write? I figured that if they won't let me read anything, maybe I could put stuff down on paper and read it to myself, I guess. I try to write poetry, but it just don't come out right, but I've been trying to write a thing about **what I went through**, you know what I'm talking about? Well, I just figure that if other people that are in prison can get best sellers and make a ton of money, then so can I, I mean, my story is better than half the stuff that's out there, and I know there are a lot of **women** who have a little part of them that wants to do what I did. I think **all women feel it**, but the most of them are taught to **suppress it**, to keep it all bottled in like that. But now that I think of it, what am I going to do with a bunch of money anyway? I'm never going to get out of here to enjoy it or anything. Anyway, how would I get someone to want to read it in the first place, now that everyone thinks that I'm crazy.

Sometimes I get so **depressed**. It's like I'm never going to get out of here. I think **I wanted to have kids one day**. It's easier, I guess, not having to see kids, I guess then I don't miss them too much, but...

For the longest time they tried to get doctors to come

in here and talk to me, and you know what they did? They got **men doctors** - one after another - and then they wondered why the Hell I didn't want to talk to them.

Amazing. People really just don't think, do they?

I guess **it's hard**, being in here and all, I mean. I was going to go back to school, I had already taken the GED and graduated high school, and I was going to go to community college. **It was going to be different.** Sometimes

I wonder, you know, **why this had to happen to me**, why I had to snap. I really don't think I could have controlled it, I don't think this could have happened any other way. It's hard. I have to find stuff to do, because otherwise all I'd want to do is sleep all day and night,

and I suppose I could, but then **what would happen to me?**

At least if I write a book about my life, about this whole stupid world, then maybe everyone would at least understand. It wasn't really my fault, I mean, I think we

women have enough to deal with just in our regular lives and then they keep piling on this **sexism** crap on

us, and then expect us not to be **angry** about it because we're taught to deal with it all of our lives. Maybe this

guy was just **the straw that broke the camel's back** or something, maybe he was **just another rapist**, maybe

he was just another drunk guy who thought that he could do whatever he wanted with me because he was the man and I was his girl, or just some chick that didn't matter or whatever, but shit, it does matter, at least to me it does.

I know I've got a lot of healing to do, but I haven't really thought about doing it. I mean, what have I got to heal for anyway? To get out of here and go to prison? Then I'll just get abused by guards over there, have to watch my back every second of the day. At least here people watch my back for me. They think everything and anything in the world could harm me, even myself, so they're so overprotective that nothing can go wrong, unless it goes wrong in my own mind.

The story "crazy" was previously published in *Art/Life Limited Editions May 1994* and *v17 #3 No. 179 in 1997*, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, <http://www.poetryboard.com>, *mal - content*, *Out of a Maze*, *Plain Brown Wrapper #32*, and *Children Churches and Daddies magazine*. It has been published in the chapbooks *Everything and Anything*, *Knife, Gasoline and Reason*, and *The Written Word*. It has also been published in the book *(Woman.)*

The crazy fragmented body image on the opposite page was previously published in <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers/pages/the-kuypers-art-center.htm>, and <http://www.-authors-den.com/den/editpoetry.asp>. It has also been released in the book *Torture and Triumph*, and it was also used for the cover of the compact disc *The Final*.

