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The National Gallery of Art

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Notorious Trials

by Marien Helz

A society or culture can, perhaps, be best judged by how it treats the people it doesn't like rather than by how it treats those it does like. In February, we saw the beginning of two trials of the rich, famous, and formerly loved personalities, Michael Jackson and Martha Stewart. Both of these people acquired wealth and fame because they had the power to attract; both have seen that power not simply fade, but reverse from attraction to repulsion.

I have been amazed at the feelings that Martha Stewart evokes. Before her recent problem with trading, a friend told me that the wives of the executives at her company "hate" Martha Stewart. "Do you know what she expects us to do?" they inquire indignantly.

What she expects us to do. Fascinating. They made the choice to be housewives, and that's a perfectly reasonable choice, but apparently because Stewart is able to tell the world how to cook, decorate, and so on, they resent her for making them feel guilty about not being the perfect homemaker. There is an easier and far more sensible reaction. Don't buy her magazines, her books, her products; don't watch her TV show. It's a choice, and they have the choice. They should not be wasting their life-force on foolish hatred.

As far as Stewart's personality goes, it's been thoroughly revealed. She's on the edge. It was reported that she once made perfect picnic baskets for an outing with friends, forgot one basket and left it in the drive directly behind a car, and became hysterically aggressive when her friend backed over it. Someone who does that obviously barely has control over her responses.

Combined with her lack of emotional control is a proficiency at lethal verbal swordsmanship. Before the ebb of her popularity, she gave a talk to an audience in Buffalo, New York, and was expected to autograph her books for people who had stood in a long line. Stewart left, or had to leave, before autographing the books. Those who had waited for a long time in line were irate. Instead of apologizing, Stewart got out the verbal sword and made a statement about their "chilly, unfriendly city." Since Stewart is from Buffalo, she was well aware of just where the weak spots are. Buffalobians, as a rule, have a major inferiority complex about their city, and are affronted by the slightest negative comments directed toward it. They like to think of themselves as the "City of Good Neighbors." The newspaper habitually carries stories and letters comparing other cities unfavorably to Buffalo. If anyone refers to Buffalo as being cold, it generates negative public comments for days. A celebrity once made a comment about the cold in Buffalo, and in the minds of the city's people, he was done for from then on. Then there was Martha Stewart, a famous native, making a harsh statement about the city.

Given Stewart's lack of emotional constraint, no one should be surprised that she phoned the prosecutor before the trial. Her attorney's biggest job must be to keep her from shooting herself in the foot. Yet there is every reason to suspect that she is innocent. Articles have pointed out that the money she made on the securities sale was a very small part of her wealth.

The serious concern is that government offices are using trials of high profile people to deflect publicity from more serious wrong-doers with high connections. These fears are fueled by the manner in which the Rigases of the Adelphia scandal were arrested. They were not allowed to turn themselves in. They were arrested in the most humiliating manner conceivable, recorded by media cameras in the early hours of the morning before they were dressed, looking as bad as possible. The facts behind Adelphia's problems make mishandling funds by the Rigases nearly certain—but why the circus? The most vile murderers are allowed to turn themselves in to their attorneys.

In Michael Jackson's case, the police gave a news conference during which they were reported to be laughing and joking. Child molestation is an extremely serious crime, and an extraordinarily destructive one. It's inconceivable that if they really believed he was guilty, they would be turning it into a game show.

Perhaps Michael Jackson's real crime is that he allowed a surgeon to mutilate his face to the point that his visage is now repulsive.

We predicted a year ago after the assassination of Jackson's character that there would be more accusations, whether he was guilty or not. In one of the best examples of the worst journalism, Jackson was made to look like a liar in his responses to questions that were no one's business and should never have been asked. Both the timing and the manner in which the case is being handled make it appear extremely suspect.

There is no such thing as a little bit of justice. There is either justice, or there is injustice. Using the courts to retaliate against people for non-legal offenses is an intolerable injustice as is holding someone in jail and giving them a break only when and if they agree to testify against another person. When prosecutors "give a break" to defendants only if they agree to testify negatively against another defendant, they are engaging in a form of torture, and torture yields invalid results. You can get almost anyone to say almost anything under torture.

Every trial in a nation puts that nation on trial. It establishes precedents and sets examples. Every jury deciding a case needs to realize that they are not only deciding the case at hand but are also deciding the course of justice for their nation from that time forward.

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The Robbery

by Charles Miess

3:58 PM, Outside of the Beauty Boutique, Irving, Texas – A young man stood anxiously on the sidewalk while glancing into the store and then up and down the street. He told himself to calm down, knowing that he was always jittery just before pulling off a job. He reminded himself that he had information from an accomplice who worked in another location of this chain of stores. Remembering her exact words reassured him: "They ain't lookin at Irving tonight—they're watchin the Dallas store."

Clifford Jackson considered himself a smart man. "I got inside information," he boasted to himself quietly, "I got inside information." After all, it was not more than a week before when he robbed another Beauty Boutique and got away free and clear. He even had a little fun with that old woman, making her strip and stand there naked in front of her co-workers. Clifford chuckled quietly. "What a trip," he thought, "the look on the old hag's face was better'n the take."

In just a few more minutes, he would be confident enough to make the hit. He reached into his pocket and felt the cold comfort of his steel revolver. Actually, it was more a feeling of power than comfort—power surging from his groin all the way up to his chest—power that he never had without a gun. So far, he had not had to kill anyone, but he knew killing goes with this kind of business, and it didn't bother him. "What good is packin heat if you can't use it," he thought with smug satisfaction. He looked up and down the street and quickly at the beauty shop—a little too quickly to notice the clerk inside cautiously reaching for the telephone.

4:01 PM, Inside a Drug Store (across the street from the Beauty Boutique) – Melissa Ann had just started her shift. She picked up her money from the office in the back of the store and was on her way to the cash register. She was a small, attractive woman with light olive skin and long black hair. Yet, her soft feminine outside deceptively hid an inside that was as tough as a Texas bobcat.

She was born in San Diego twenty-two years earlier to a beautiful woman with an olive complexion much like her own. Melissa's father was a sailor who returned from Vietnam a few weeks after she was born, only to find that another man had stepped in during his absence. Her father, fearing he would be a disruptive influence in her life, reluctantly packed his belongings and left.

While still very young, Melissa moved to Texas with her mother and stepfather. She grew up in a volatile and violent household in the toughest of neighborhoods. Yet, she

learned how to survive in that environment and developed her own sense of what was right and what was wrong. Melissa was a child of the other side of America that many only read about, but it was the only world she knew.

Melissa prepared her cash register while ignoring the sound of police sirens coming from the street outside. Clifford Jackson dashed into the store and went directly to her. He was intensely agitated and mumbled something that she could not understand. "The bathroom is over there," she said politely, pointing to a door at the side of the store. Suddenly he seized her around the waist and put the cold steel of his revolver against the back of her head.

"How do I get out of here!" he screamed, "where's the back door!"

"It's behind you, but it's locked—and I don't have a key—now let me go!" she shouted back.

With the same hand that held the gun, he grabbed a fistful of her long black hair. He dragged her to the back of the store. Melissa kicked and screamed. She clutched anything she could get her hands on to slow his progress.

"Drop the gun and let her go!" commanded a police officer as he bolted through the front door with his gun drawn. The policeman's hand was shaking so badly that Melissa was afraid he would miss his target and shoot her. During the standoff, Melissa reached into her pocket and pulled out a ballpoint pen. She extended the tip and stabbed it into the gunman's leg as hard as she could. The robber jumped and howled, then pulled her hair back with such force she feared it would be ripped from her head.

"No way, man," he said to the policeman. "If you don't want to see this girl dead, get me a getaway car—no—a helicopter—RIGHT NOW, man!"

Melissa felt herself being pulled to the storage room in the rear of the building. "Let me go, you sonova bitch," she screamed as she butted the back of her head into his face. But try as she might, she was no match for his strength.

Using her as a shield, the gunman pulled her into the narrow room. He slammed the door and frantically piled cartons of store merchandise against it. Melissa broke free for a moment and scrambled over boxes and up shelves to an uncovered florescent light. She yanked the long bulb from its socket. He grabbed her by the hair and pulled her down. She swung around with the bulb and smashed it on his head. The paper-thin glass shattered harmlessly but increased his rage. She stabbed at him with the shard remaining in her hand. Then she felt the cruel smack of the gun against the side of her head.



Sharpshooters now surrounded the store from the Dallas, Irving, and Fort Worth police departments. Every few minutes, someone called to her, "Melissa, are you okay?" She knew as well as the gunman that the police would charge in, and both might die, if she failed to answer.

✕

Several hours had passed. The police had turned off the air conditioning some time ago, and the room was unbearably hot. The standoff, however, continued with no resolution in sight. The gunman refused to surrender and the police negotiators kept stalling on his demands for a means of escape.

Melissa knew she might not get out of this alive and as most people would do in this



situation, she thought about her life. She thought about being robbed of her real father when she was still a baby, and the stepfather who beat her with a table leg. She thought about the man who kidnapped and molested her—then left her for dead when she was only nine years old. She remembered how she had to live on her own when she was barely thirteen—how she



went to school by day, worked at McDonald's in the evening, and slept alone in vacant apartments at night. She thought about how, despite the odds against her, she fought her way up to a respectable life and a good job. And now, this man, this punk, was not only threatening her life, but robbing her of her last shred of human dignity. A wave of anger twenty-two years long swept over her, and it was all focused on the man who held her hair in that deadly grip. She no longer feared for herself, she just wanted him to die.

"Melissa, are you okay?" she heard from the other side of the wall for the hundredth time.

"Why don't you just shoot him! Just shoot this filthy animal!" she screamed.

"Habla usted espanol, Melissa? Habla usted espanol?" shouted someone from outside with frightful urgency.

"Si! What the hell do you want?" she replied hysterically in the same tongue.

"Do not make him angry, do not antagonize him!" the outsider continued in Spanish. "He is a very dangerous man!" Melissa silently wished they would tell her something she didn't already know.

"Melissa, can you get away from him for a minute?"

"No, I can't, he's too strong! Can you shoot him if I bend over quickly?" she asked.

"Too risky, no, no, we need to think up another plan."

"That's enough of that Mexican talk," said the gunman as he struck his weapon against her skull once again. He dragged her by the hair to a corner near a small sink. He sat on the sink and pulled her to his lap. "You just sit here and keep your mouth shut and maybe I won't kill you for a while," he said.

Melissa felt herself slipping into a trance as she listened to her labored breathing alternating with that of her captor. Sweat dripped off the man's face onto the back of her neck, and she felt it coursing down the curves of her back. She could smell his acrid body and his rancid breath. But most of all she smelled his fear—fear so thick that it hung like a pall over the narrow room. Melissa wondered what it would feel like to die. She wondered how her family would get along without her. She wondered about the father whom she had never met, and she wondered if he even cared.

✕

One Month Later — Holiday Inn, Irving, Texas — A middle-aged man sat alone in the lobby of the hotel. "They're twenty minutes late," he thought as he drummed his fingers nervously on the tabletop next to his chair. He saw his reflection in the glass entrance doors of the hotel and tried to reassure himself that the years had not been unkind. Yet, he wondered if she would recognize him. He alternately focused his eyes between his image and the flat, unfamiliar Texas landscape outside. The opening to the hotel bar was off to the side of the lobby, and he considered going in for a quick rum 'n coke to settle his nerves. But with his luck, they'd come through the door the minute he walked away.

After what seemed an eternity, he saw two women timidly approach the glass doors from the outside and enter the hotel. The older one was first and was followed by a young lady of striking grace and beauty—so striking, in fact, that the half-dozen or so men in the lobby stopped and stared. He watched the older lady scan the staring faces until her gaze rested upon him. He stood as they approached.

"Yolanda?" he asked anxiously.

"Charlie, you haven't changed a bit in twenty-two years," she lied.

"Nor have you, Yolanda," he lied right back.

He turned to the young woman by her side. "My God," he stammered, "you can't be—you can't be Melissa." Her dark intelligent eyes met his, and he saw the fear and apprehension slowly melt away.



"Hello Daddy," she said quietly.



Epilogue

Clifford Jackson M**** surrendered to authorities after holding Melissa Ann ***** hostage for ten and a half hours. He was convicted of armed robbery and kidnapping and is serving a life sentence in a Texas state prison.

Melissa is now happily married and is the mother of three beautiful children. She and her husband live in their own home in a suburb of Fort Worth, Texas. Melissa has put the demons of her past to rest. And finally—she knows her father.

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Test Day

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by Gary Earl Ross

Did you get enough sleep?

Yes, Mom.

What about number two pencils? How many do you have?

Four. Don't worry, Mom. I'm gonna do good.

*You're going to do **well**, Todd. And I will worry. I have to.*

The waiting room was long and windowless, its yellow walls lined with molded plastic chairs, most of them occupied. In the corner opposite the air conditioning vent stood a tall wooden magazine rack. Beside it was a serving cart with stacks of styrofoam cups and stainless steel drink dispensers marked COFFEE, HOT WATER, and APPLE JUICE. At one end of the room was a frosted glass door behind which purposeful silhouettes moved back and forth. Affixed to the solid metal door at the other end was a large poster populated by men and women of various hues, dressed to represent a cross-section of professions and occupations. The caption at the bottom read, "National Testing Service—Certifying the Quality of Your Life."

Seated four chairs to the right of the coffee, Leah Rashida kept her eyes on the glass door. Several hours earlier, she had watched Todd, along with the dozen or so other children in his cluster, pass through that doorway to endure Test Day. Her last memory of him was of his amber face split into a wide grin. He had not wanted her to worry, bless him.

Now the flat digital clock above the door told her that she and the other parents—most of whom were only half reading the glossy magazines open on their laps—had just over half an hour left to wait. But she knew from past Test Days that the last few were the longest minutes of the entire year.

Leah rose and walked back to the coffee cart to fill a cup with juice. Sipping her drink, she studied the other parents for nearly a minute. There were twice as many women as men, and single parents outnumbered couples by more than two to one. Briefly, Leah wondered whether the makeup of this waiting room was typical of the others throughout the building. She had heard that N.T.S. was very particular in its groupings of test subjects and wondered if that particularity somehow included such considerations as the parents in the waiting room.

Though she recognized most of their faces, she knew only three or four of the other parents by name. She remembered being introduced to raw-boned Carla Wallace, now seated near the air conditioning vent, at an awards program last spring; Maureen, Carla's pale wisp of a daughter,

had won a medal for something Leah could not now remember. Mr. and Mrs. Nakamura lived in the apartment building next to Leah's; their twins, Akiko and Akira, had been in kindergarten with Todd. And Mr. Miklos, who had lost his wife two years ago and whose son Gregory had been in little league with Todd, fixed Leah's refrigerator once or twice a year.

Then there was Mrs. Butterforte, beside whom Leah had been sitting. As she downed the last of her juice, Leah again contemplated switching her seat. But that would be rude, especially now that there was so little time left. Dropping her cup into the waste basket, she returned to her chair.

"It will all be over soon," Mrs. Butterforte said.

Leah almost said, "Until next year." But after nearly a whole day of listening to the woman's voice, which sounded like an infinite number of fingernails drawn across a blackboard of infinite length, Leah knew that any response would only encourage Mrs. Butterforte to talk. Leah held her tongue and hoped that the other woman would do the same.

Mrs. Butterforte, of course, needed no encouragement. "Tonight we'll have our traditional Test Day celebration," she said, beginning to tick off the menu.

Mrs. Butterforte was solidly built and wore a stylish green dress. She and her husband, a craggy-faced, baggy-suited little man who sat to her left, were new this year to Shadow Oaks School. Earlier, Mrs. Butterforte had, singlehandedly, killed any chance of ongoing small talk. Anyone's attempt at conversation somehow resulted in Mrs. Butterforte's cheerful recitation of her daughter's academic achievements. Occasionally nodding in agreement with his wife's most passionate pronouncements of Antonia's abilities, Mr. Butterforte remained silent, paging through one magazine after another. He seemed bored, as though his presence in the waiting room was simply a fulfillment of paternal or spousal obligation.

Leah couldn't help thinking that their lack of seriousness meant the Butterfortes just didn't understand Test Day. But that was an absurd notion. Test Day was the same everywhere in the country and had been since well before Todd started school.

She winced at the memory of the parent conference after last year's Test Day. In a suffocating blue room, seated at the shortest side of a triangular table, she had faced Dr. Gilchrist, chief administrator of Shadow Oaks, and Dr. Hawkes, a saturnine analyst from the local N.T.S. office. The whole conference had lasted no more than five minutes. Her pouched eyes gleaming, Dr. Gilchrist had opened by saying how pleased she was with Todd's progress at Shadow Oaks. But, she continued, his COMP scores were cause for concern.

"As we indicated right after the test," she said, "his scores were in the lowest passing percentile—again."

Dr. Hawkes cleared his throat. "Such a ranking is, of course, dangerously low."

Leah, who did not fully understand what Comprehensive Omnimental Maximization Predictor meant, felt ill-equipped to defend her son against its assessment of him. "I help him with his lessons each day," she said. "But I'm divorced and I work. I can't spend as much time with him as—"

Dr. Hawkes interrupted her with an uplifted hand. "Single parenthood is not the issue, Ms. Rashida." He narrowed his eyes. "Neither is income nor race nor ethnic background. All those variables are factored into your son's scores, and the scores are still too low."

Leah bit her lower lip hard, bit back the anger and struggled to keep herself from trembling in front of them. "He doesn't take tests well," she said slowly.

Dr. Gilchrist smiled as if trying to soothe her. "We all want what's best for Todd," she said, "and we all know the importance of the testing program..."

Leah nodded.

"Good," Dr. Gilchrist said. "Now if you'll agree to strengthen your efforts at home, I promise you that the school will do everything it can to help Todd improve."

Leah had spent nearly every free evening of the past year working with her son to raise his COMP standing. She had purchased several test preparation books and computer programs so he could practice at home. She had given him a list of fifty books he must read over the next year and a stack of blank report forms he must fill to prove he had read them. She had gone into debt to send him to weekend preparation classes. She had gone into deeper debt to take him to concerts, plays, exhibits, and other events to broaden his cultural horizon.

She had done all she could and now prayed that it had been enough.

Mrs. Butterforte was shrilling across the room at another parent, something about a geometry joke her daughter had devised to win a creativity contest in her old school. Burly Mr. Miklos, silver curls piled atop his head, smiled politely and nodded as Mrs. Butterforte laughed at her own retelling of the joke. The instant her eyes left his, he looked away. Momentarily, his gaze met Leah's, and an understanding of mutual contempt for Mrs. Butterforte flashed between them. Then Mr. Miklos turned his attention to the glass door and the clock above it.

Carla Wallace coughed, repeatedly cleared her throat.

"It's the air conditioner," Mrs. Butterforte volunteered. "You're too close to it. It's not good to be right on top of it like that all day. When Antonia's too close to one for just a few minutes, she gets sniffy and headachy and can't think straight. If I were you I'd move."

Carla Wallace slapped her magazine shut and glared at Mrs. Butterforte but said nothing.

Before the strain of silence could build and take shape, Mr. Miklos leaned forward to speak to Leah: "Hey Mrs. Rashida, the shop hasn't heard from you in a while." He smiled as if to say, Let's give small talk one more chance. "How's that old Frostomatic holding up?"

"It's okay, Mr. Miklos. Noisy, but okay." Leah returned his smile. "This morning I was amazed to see how much your Gregory had grown."

Mr. Miklos sat up straight and spread his hands. "He's just like his Pop—"

Leah half expected him to thump his chest.

"—a big eater. But your Todd's no slouch either. With those arms and legs, it's gonna be basketball or track."

Leah and Mr. Miklos talked for several minutes—rapidly, to deny anyone else (translation: Mrs. Butterforte) access to the conversation. He told Leah of his new young wife, who was home studying for the Refrigeration II Licensing Exam she would take next Saturday. "She's gonna come into the shop with me," he explained. "Just like Rita did. It'll finally be a family business again." And Leah told him of her recent promotion: "I just couldn't believe I scored higher than kids who were fresh out of school."

Despite the pleasantness of their exchange, there was still an undercurrent of uneasiness, between them and throughout the room as well. Leah felt a quiver in her own throat and detected a thread of uncertainty in Mr. Miklos' voice. She stole a glance at Carla Wallace and saw that most of the tension had seeped out of her face. But the sliver which remained was palpable and unsettling. Among the others were additional indications of nervousness: fidgeting, rapid gum-chewing, nail-bitten thumbs, finger tirelessly twirling defiant shocks of hair. Mr. and Mrs. Nakamura silently held hands, their eyes riveted to the digital clock.

The testing session would be over in ten minutes.

"They must be finished by now," Mrs. Butterforte said, wedging her way into the conversation. "They must be waiting in line to feed their scan sheets to the scoring computer."

"Sometimes," Leah said softly, "I can't help thinking we put too much faith in all these tests."

Several of the others looked at her with expressions that ranged from uncomfortable to shock.

Mr. Miklos shrugged. "They say we gotta take 'em, we gotta take 'em."

Mrs. Butterforte shrugged. "A test here, a test there. How else are we going to know if they're learning what they need?"

Carla Wallace snorted.

Mr. Nakamura looked at length at Leah as if she were a heretic. "Every component of the N.T.S. program is validated," he said, "only after the most exhaustive studies imaginable."

"I know," Leah said. "I know all about the studies. The academic assessments and career predictions. The social adaptability scales and psychological probability profiles. I know what they tell us about the studies but I'm not sure I truly understand any of it."

Mr. Nakamura shook his head. "Understanding the mechanism is not essential. You must understand only the necessity. In a nation as technologically complex and socially and ecologically problematic as ours, the testing program is a necessary alternative to nepotism and chaos. That is what you must understand."

Leah parted her lips as if about to reply. But she realized she could say nothing that would change anyone's mind and kept silent. Perhaps Mr. Nakamura was right. Perhaps tests were as indispensable as N.T.S. claimed. But in her parents' day, standardized testing had been done without a lot of fanfare. There had been no preparation seminars, no practice books, no obsessions with scores. As her mother had once explained it, tests were simply given and the

results filed somewhere.

Testing had been somewhat more important during Leah's schooling but not nearly as all-consuming as it was now. Somehow, it seemed obscene that terms like standard deviation, predictive validity, and percentile rank should be in both her son's vocabulary and his dreams. But they were, and reality demanded that they stay.

Legally sanctioned to do so, the National Testing Service held tests for everything, from grade school to graduate school, from corporate law to cosmetology. No educational path and virtually no career could be pursued without an N.T.S. transcript. Success, whether in a brightly colored preschool classroom or the highrise boardroom of a multinational conglomerate, depended upon passing not one but an endless series of examinations that assessed, classified, predicted, profiled, projected, qualified, certified, licensed, rated, or renewed. To survive, one had no choice but to test, and test well.

The frosted glass door swung open and the first of the children appeared. The first one through was a red-haired boy with long freckled arms. Score report in hand, he grinned at his parents and shot across the room to them. He was followed by a chunky girl in a rumpled yellow dress. Hair sticking out at odd angles and umber face glistening with sweat, she moved toward her mother as if in a daze: "I made it, Mama. I made it." Next came the Nakamura twins, boy and girl, holding hands as their parents had held hands during the waiting.

Leah caught her breath as the children filed in and triumphantly collapsed into waiting arms. She did not see Todd. Her heart began a slow, murderous crawl up her throat. But then she spotted her son at the end of the line, behind Gregory Miklos and Maureen Wallace, looking whipped and happy and somehow older. She relaxed, felt the air rush back into her lungs, felt her own face stretch into a grin that matched his.

"How'd you do, sport?"

"Five percentiles higher," he said.

Leah wanted to scream her joy. Todd was more than just safe; he now had a margin of safety. But she dared not scream, not in the presence of the tall N.T.S. proctor who now filled the doorway. Instead, she spread her arms and Todd rushed into them. For a long time, they stood there, mother and son, trembling and squeezing each other with a relief that suppressed the tingle of fear in their skin. "I knew you could do it, Todd," Leah whispered tearfully. "I knew you could." As they turned to follow the others out the metal door which bore the poster, Leah was suddenly aware of a voice, small and weak amid the din of congratulations and shuffling feet.

"Antonia? Antonia?"

Leah craned her neck to see Mr. and Mrs. Butterforte staring up at the N.T.S. proctor in wide-eyed disbelief. Leah knew she wasn't supposed to look, wasn't supposed to witness as official pronouncement of failure. Yet she looked anyway, for a second or two. Surely she would not be fined for so fleeting a curiosity.

"Was she sitting near the air conditioner?" Mrs. Butterforte asked quietly.

"Did she..." Mr. Butterforte fumbled for words. "Did she..."

But the proctor was unready to answer. He leveled his gaze at Leah, and his ice blue eyes warned her to leave, leave now or face a severe penalty. The last thing Leah heard before she closed the door behind her was the proctor's grave reassurance that Antonia Butterforte's termination had been swift and painless: "As you know, all our intravenous technicians are tested and duly certified."

In the corridor, Leah felt a stab of sadness for the Butterfortes, especially for the woman she had grown to dislike during this year's Test Day. But then she clutched Todd to her, and her sympathy dissipated into her own tangle of emotions. She clutched him to her as if he were a life preserver and she adrift on an endless sea. Next week meant the resumption of third grade, but she told herself she and Todd could worry about that later. For now, she was content to shudder with gratitude that he had made it through one more Test Day.

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