

The MSPress Journal

Vol 9 | No. 1 | 2022

Creative
Writing

The Cruelty of Empathy

Narjis Mhaimed¹

1. Cornell Medical School

“When I grow up, I want to be a doctor,”
You said, with a twinkle in your eyes.
The admiration was seen in your high arched brows,
The corners of your smile.
You wore the stethoscope during Halloween,
Maybe even threw on a white coat a few sizes too large.
You liked its heaviness,
It was a different kind of burden,
One that allowed you to fly,
A cape of some sort,
As you knew you would be able to set others free.

But twenty years later,
You have undergone a tumultuous metamorphosis.
Twenty years later,
you put the stethoscope on, but this time,
it was just heavy.
You never knew that’s all you would be: Doctor.
Your first and last name stripped of you.
The white coat masking any color of who you are.
Doctor: A mind made of steel. A hardened heart.

This is where the problem lies.
You can no longer feel
Within yourself
Or others.
This metamorphosis it seems
Was not from a human to a healer
But from a human, To the lack of one.

Yet you are told about the the value of empathy.
“Empathize!”

We are commanded.
It is the chant that lives beneath our feet.
The hymn of our hearts.
Empathy for all, but none for yourself.
That is the cruelty of empathy.

So I am not here to teach
But rather,
to unteach.
Unteach you of all that has hardened you into this mold you were forced into
Unteach yourself of all you have believed the words physician and patient to mean.
You must Give them your own meaning.
Liberate And Reform.
You must put on the stethoscope and white coat and maybe this time,
It will be like the first time.
