

Secrets of Philadelphia

by J. Bradley

Dr. Mattheson walks through the ICU ward of Re'em Hospital. The unicorns are held upright by their hospital slings. Neighs of various tones fill the room. Bruce Springsteen begins singing from the loud speaker he was bruised and battered and couldn't tell what he felt.

"Dammit it, Nurse, I specifically asked for 'Secret Garden' not 'Streets of Philadelphia'. This is the last thing these patients need. Change it." The night nurse huffs toward the stereo. The Boss sings about her letting you in if you knock late at night, letting you in her mouth if what you say is right. Dr. Mattheson walks over to Sparkles Le Fleur. His backside is covered in purple goo. Le Fleur's tail is gone. The names of all the children who believed in him are on the tile, slurred.

"Doctor, what's the diagnosis?" Helena Cather, the head of Re'em Hospital, says between the smack of her heels.

"I thought it was Rowling's but then she has a fine bestiary so I had to rule that out. Rice has become too obscure. I'm starting to think it's Meyers' Syndrome."

"Is there a cure? If we can't find a cure, I calculate the unicorn population will be extinguished in three, maybe six months tops. We have to save them."

"Helena, I know, but how? How."

* * *

The blood coats the left side of my head like a New Wave haircut.
The third letter of each word from the t.v. dies in my left ear.

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Dr. Mattheson sets the rifle on the rock. He licks his thumb, holds it to the wind. He twists the knob on the scope to set it right. He's glad that bullet and rifles made from unicorn horns are undetectable by metal detectors. He is thankful the TSA does not believe in using children as security screeners. "Helena, sometimes you have to shoot cancer in its face." Dr. Mattheson mumbles to himself. He's grateful that Utah is pleasant this time of year.

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All the names of the children who believe in me melt with my skin.

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Dr. Mattheson walks into the ICU with a black eye patch on his left eye.

"Mattheson, I thought you shoot cancer in the face, not the other way around." Mattheson shakes his head and walks over to the stereo. Bruce Springsteen begins singing from the loud speaker he was bruised and battered and couldn't tell what he felt. He breaks the knobs, seals the tape deck shut, and aims a unicorn bone pistol at Helena. "What are you doing? It will kill them."

"It has to. It's the only way. It's the right thing to do."

