

1st Place, Non-Fiction

Facing my Enemy

by Dawn Brotherton

Copyright © 2012 Dawn Brotherton. All rights reserved.

The sun dares me to join him. The green grass and yellow daffodils encourage me to come out and play. The squirrels taunt me; they run and jump so freely in the trees. Butterflies dance between the iris and zinnias. I want to play with them, but something holds me back.

I take three steps towards the front door. My heart starts to race. My chest tightens. I can't breathe. My leg drags as I attempt to move closer to the threshold. There is no one to come to my rescue; I am on my own. Before my enemy takes me down, I retreat to my bedroom for safety.

Once I am no longer in danger, I consider the situation. My enemy is on the other side of the door. I can stay in this room, and let him win. My only other option is to face the threat. It would be easier to fight with him if he were a physical presence, but he is only a figment in my mind. His name is Gorrie, short for agoraphobia.

This is not the first time I've faced this enemy. He first introduced himself to me in high school; I had no idea what a deadbeat he was, and let him stay. To repay me, he became my nemesis, daily challenging me. He's much like a stray pet; feeding him only encourages him to return, but alas, I am too weak to beat him.

I brace myself to try one more time. Remembering the skills I learned to defend against him, I deeply inhale, and then slowly exhale. I repeat this ritual three more times. Somehow, this relaxes me, and gives me courage to fight another round with the monster. I open the bedroom door, and walk to the front door. A bluejay sits on my planter filled with herbs; I can't decide if he mocks or cheers me. My enemy comes out of nowhere, and begins to strangle me. I remember to relax and breathe deep. He releases his grip from my chest. I take another step and reach for the handle. My heart is racing; my palms are sweaty. Does he win and keep me from my duties? He tries even harder to prevent me from escaping my house. I take two steps back. The panic is real. I feel like I'm having a heart attack, but I know it's only the fear. I stand up straight, grab my purse and keys from the table, and walk quickly through the door, before he has a chance to change my mind. Today, I'm free of my mental prison. The sun shines on my face; the flowers nod with approval. I win.

--

This short piece has been previously published in Kaleidoscope (2010).

Having struggled with agoraphobia for most of my adult life and seeing the limitations that it brings, this piece helped me focus on my own healing. Agoraphobia is an unrealistic monster which can be overcome, but sometimes, it is a minute by minute struggle.