

## Chaucerian Character Sketch

Priya Subramanian

It was a warm beautiful spring day. The sun beamed down at the earth while the cool breeze dampened the heat. Mrs. Hatley and her mother-in-law, Mrs. Suttan , sat on the simple wooden swing on the screen porch of the red brick house drinking tea. As the sun began to set, they reached a mutual silence as they gaped at the beauty of the sky. All was still, not a sound to be heard except for the sweet lull of the wind. Bang—suddenly the silence was disturbed by the sound of Mrs. Hatley’s young daughter slamming the door. Sniffles and wails continued to erupt from the inside of the house, leading the women inside the house. “Maya, what’s wrong? Did you have a tough match?” Mrs. Hatley questioned with concern.

“NO! I’m like fifteen bazillion times better than them “She replied angrily, Mrs. Hatley’s husband, Mr. Suttan, lightly chuckling at his daughter.

“So, what’s the problem?” her mother inquired.

“I don’t know, my coach just hates me or something..” she prattled.

“Maya, come on now. That’s not what happened, is it? She’s just upset because her asthma was acting up again and since her coach was worried, he benched her in the second half of the game.” Mr. Suttan explained.

“Oh Maya, that’s tough, I know it’s annoying when your body doesn’t want to work with you, but you’ll learn to work with it.” Her mother advised.

“I don’t want to. I just want to be like all the other kids!” she whined back.

“That’s enough! You two can’t raise her to act like this. When I was a young girl, if I had talked this way to my parents, they would have given me a swift kick to the bum to remind to me grateful. I raised you the same way, and look how well you turned out.” Mrs. Suttan angrily complained to her son, causing his face to redden with frustration.

“That’s not how we want to discipline our kids, Ma. If you’re going to live with us, you’re gonna have to learn to keep your opinions of parenting to your...”

“If I’m gonna live with you!” she screeched. “Is that any way to talk to the women that raised you!”

Within a few more seconds, the bickering became even more heated, causing Mrs. Hatley and her daughter to go to the porch to resume talking.

“Look, sweetheart. Sometimes... life throws curve balls at us, but you’re gonna have to learn to push through it and play anyway” Mrs. Hatley advised Maya, whom responded to her statement with a rather puzzled look on her face.

“Ok, what I mean is, things aren’t perfect—life is hard, but it’s the way we push through it and overcome the challenges that make us who we are.” explained Mrs. Hatley.

“How would you know, what challenge have you ever overcome?” Maya questioned.

Amused by her daughter’s statement, she laughed to herself, and responded, “Did I ever tell you about the accident I had with my thumb?”

“No... Tell me!” Maya pleaded.

“Ok.. I was around your age... Wait,no, I was fifteen. It was the summer of 2011....”

\*Phat\* the ball flung through the air with an immense pace, landing on the baseline of the court. My opponent barely reached the ball, reaching to it in just enough time to make a weak shot back that went high into the air. My legs sprung forward, my eyes intent on the ball. As it came within my reach, utilizing all the energy I could exert, I shot it back, the ball hitting the sweet spot of my racquet, making the most beautiful sound I'd ever heard. I was so engrossed in the point that I hardly realized I had won. As an instinct, I walked up to the net, shook my opponent's hand and said, "Great match". I could hardly contain myself, my smile reaching all the way up to my eyes. It was one of the greatest feelings I had ever experienced--- little did I know that I wouldn't feel it again for a long time.

The next morning I woke up to the putrid smell of bleach and a cacophony of vacuuming and bickering in Spanish; it was Friday—cleaning day. As my eyes began opening, I saw one of the cleaning ladies, Maria, beside me, eagerly awaiting me to get up so she could take my sheets. I walked downstairs, still half-asleep, looking for my mother who as usual, was in a frenzy.

"I have a hair-coloring appointment in 10 minutes. You're sister went to Starbucks to study and your dad's at his tennis match, so you'll be home alone. Our flight to Dallas is at 6:00 ,so when you get some time, go ahead and pack. I love you, lock the doors and be safe."

As she left, I suddenly became very aware of how hungry I was. Without thinking, I pulled out onions, spinach, green chilies, and eggs to make an omelet. It was routine, a habitual action I had been doing for almost two years straight. I opened the drawer to look for the knife but found that all the usual ones were in the dishwasher. Out of the corner of my eye, I realized there was another *new* knife in the back of the drawer. Pulling it out, I got the onion and cutting board and chopped the onion in half.

Expecting to see the usual white inside, I found it had become slightly rotten, encompassing a murky, brown color. My mother had always told me to never waste food; she said it was best to throw away the bad part and use the rest. Cleverly thinking I could get rid of the bad part by coring the onion, I began cutting it, trying to get the same action as one gets when cutting a strawberry. However, the fluidity of the motion was not present; it wouldn't cut smoothly. I exerted more pressure, a little too much pressure. The knife went straight through the onion into my thumb. Everything suddenly became irrelevant other than the fact that blood was gushing out of my thumb like a faucet. I looked down, the floor covered with blood. "HELP!!! MOM, DAD!! HELP!!" I forced out, choking back tears. Suddenly I remembered no one was home, Maria came to the kitchen, confused about all the yelling and saw what happened. "Maria, what do I do? I don't.. I... it's bleeding too much" I sobbed.

"No te preocupes." She murmured, handing me some paper towels, looking at me as if I were some melodramatic spoiled princess.

"What? That's not going to..."

"Si ,si,"

"Si, si what" I thought.

She kept handing me tissue after tissue until the entire roll was gone. I remembered that holding pressure helps, squeezing my thumb the entire time. Using my other four fingers, I dialed my mother's number. The phone rang and rang, as if no one would ever pick up, then finally, I heard a click.

"Mom!! Come home, I was chopping onions and I cut my thumb REALLY badly. It's deep mom, I can't ..." but I couldn't finish the sentence.

"Oh, oh, don't worry, I'll be there as soon as I can, hold pressure on it and take deep breaths." she said, trying to soothe me.

“Ok, come quick!” I blubbered. Flustered by the situation, I ran to the porch to sit down and relax. After four years of watching a culmination of medical shows like *House*, I had convinced myself that freaking out would catalyze the effects of my cut. I took deep, elongated breaths, telling myself I was going to be fine and God was looking out for me. Finally, after a few minutes, I managed to stop crying, realizing for the first time that the whole experience hadn’t inflicted any pain upon me whatsoever. The adrenaline that had pumped through my veins prevented me from feeling anything—too bad it couldn’t prevent me from seeing anything, the memory of the blood on the floor haunting my thoughts. Suddenly, the door flew open, my sister running to me with eyes full of concern.

“Shhh, shhh. It’s gonna be ok. But, you need to let me take a look at it... If it’s really bad, we need to take you to the emergency room. I’ll be gentle don’t worry.” I slowly released my grip, experiencing the entire full three-sixty view. My stomach quenched, the mere sight making me want to regurgitate. I could see the white of my bone, my thumb hanging to the side as if it were a limp petal, ready to fall off. I couldn’t handle the sight much longer, turning away.

“Ok, well.. It’s more than a little cut huh?” she joked, trying to bring a smile to my face. “Come on, we need to go the hospital.” Without a word, I nodded, and walked back into the house. As my sister picked up the keys my mom came bursting through the door, a salon cape wrapped around her upper body and hair coloring coating her roots. Despite the terror of the entire experience, I couldn’t help but laugh at her.

“Oh.... my poor baby. Let go of the tissue so I can see it. Holding my breath and looking away, I released the tissue once more, hearing a sharp gasp release from my mother’s mouth.

“Oh lord, you poor thing. I have to wash this dye out of my hair... apparently if you leave the dye in to long, the chemicals will burn your scalp... Take her to the emergency center at Emory, her medical information and insurance is in the drawer where we keep the passports.” She instructed my sister.

Looking at me, eyes filled with concern, she said, “Don’t worry, just say a prayer and keep calm. You’re so brave. I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

When we got to the emergency room, someone was in a cardiac arrest, so we had to wait two hours until the doctor came. The entire time, my sister tried to soothe me, telling me I’d need some stitches and that’s it--that we’d be able to make our flight tonight and this whole experience would become nothing but a funny anecdote I could tell people. I’d forever more be the die-hard chef, literally and figuratively putting my blood, sweat, and tears into my work.

“Hi, I’m so sorry for the wait... I’m Doctor Maubry. So, we’ve had quite the accident haven’t we?” he said, trying to break the tension. “Don’t worry, you’ll be fine. We just need to run a few tests.” He said, my mouth simultaneously molding into a frown.

“It won’t hurt, I promise.” He told earnestly. It was the standard lie, told my every dentist, pediatrician, podiatrist, etc. that I’d ever encountered. I nodded, at him, staring at my mother and father the entire time.

“Ok, I’m going to open up the bandage on your thumb for just a moment, alright. Now, very slowly, bend your thumb towards me.”

“Wow, that’s it, that’s nothing to be afraid of.” I thought to myself, a sigh of relief releasing from my mouth. Only, I had nothing to be relieved about. As I tried to move my thumb forward, nothing happened. I pushed and pushed with all the strength I could exert, frustration building up inside of me, but it wouldn’t move, not an inch, not a millimeter.

Noticing my expression, he told me to stop. “What kind of sensation are you feeling?” He asked, touching my thumb.

“Uh, I don’t know. It feels like... well...” but that was just it. It didn’t feel like anything--no feeling whatsoever. My thumb was acting as if had fallen asleep and become numb. Only, unlike usual people, it didn’t regain sensation once more “I can’t feel anything,” I gulped.

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It had been two days. They deferred us to another doctor, one who had diagnosed my situation with more clarity, telling me I had cut my tendon and nerve, both of which would have to be surgically repaired. In efforts to become healthier and a more athletic tennis player, I had spent the last year turning my body into a machine—strong, lean, invincible, able to withstand any challenge in its way; but as I lied on the hospital bed, I had never felt weaker. They explained to me that the tendon would most likely repair well as I was young and strong, but I’d have to go through rehab for two months after the initial first month of healing, in which I’d have to wear a plastic cast. The nerve was a different story. Whether or not I’d regain feeling in certain parts of thumb was uncertain. A -50-50- chance they called it. At the time I thought nothing of it, joking to my sister “So what, my future husband will touch my thumb and I won’t feel anything... There’s the rest of my hand.”

Those three months were hard, my parents watching my every move like a hawk, as if I was a glass vase destined to fall and break. I couldn’t do anything I loved—piano, tennis. My only solace was that soon enough, I’d be able to do it all again, as if nothing had changed. But that’s just it--- something had changed. I had been perpetually altered. Even after the grueling sessions of therapy, I lacked normal sensation. I could move my thumb, but that was about it. For weeks, I spent hours at the piano trying to get my left hand into synch with the right, but it was never right. My backhand shot in tennis was useless, as I hadn’t the ability to grip my racquet properly. Everything was different; I couldn’t pick up a textbook, couldn’t hold a glass of water, and couldn’t type. The list went on. I remember crying out of pity for myself, questioning God for his cruel actions until epiphany came to me in the oddest form.

I had been sitting at the dining table working on homework when I heard my dad's voice oohing and ahing from the computer room. "What's going on?" I had curiously asked.

"You've got to come see this, it's incredible!" he said ushering me in his direction. As I came closer, I was awakened by the sight of a legless and handless man swimming laps in a pool. As the video progressed, capturing all the other extraordinary things the man was able to do, a wave of guilt hit me like a rock. This man lost his limbs when I still had all my toes and fingers. The list of things I couldn't do was long, but there was an end to it. The number of things I could do was indefinite. I had been so blinded by my one disability that I failed to realize all the ways I had been blessed. After months of I had complaining to God, asking him why he had punished me so, I had realized the accident was not a punishment but rather a character shaping experience. Life is full of obstacles; some of which may seem near impossible to overcome but without which, we wouldn't be the people we are. It's the way we handle our challenges that make us different.