

The Coin

by Kara Moran

Sara sat, staring at the clock in her social studies class. The bustle around her quieted as Mrs. Brown began to speak.

"Today I have something special for you all. Say a number between 1 and 20. If you guess correct, you win a prize."

Sara raised her hand and waited patiently for Mrs. Brown to notice her. The teacher's tired eyes glanced over the sea of bobbing hands and landed on Sara's, "Your guess?"

"14?"

"Congratulations! You win, darling."

A student called out in protest. "I said 14 first! I should get the prize!"

Mrs. Brown ignored him, and walked up to Sara solemnly, almost ominously. When she stood inches from Sara's desk, she rigidly held out her open palm. Resting in its center was an old, rusty coin, green and red with age. There was writing on it in some strange language, and a figure of a grim faced man.

"Go on, you won!"

Sara gingerly took the coin from her teacher, turning the heavy weight over in her hands.

On the other side was a grotesque scene of torture, a man with his limbs spread out and broken. Sara wondered, *Why would Mrs. Brown give this out as a "prize"?* It felt oddly warm, its heat spreading over her hand in an almost liquid feeling, like warm water, no, something thicker, pouring over her hand. She shivered.

"What is this?"

Mrs. Brown smiled vacantly at Sarah, giving no answer other than confusion. "Go on home, Sara. I think you look a bit pale. God knows we don't want someone catching anything!"

Sara shakily stood up from her desk, knocking over a pile of books. She gripped the coin tighter, its rough edges grating against the soft pink flesh of her hand. "Leo will get that. You head on down to the nurse."

Sara walked down the echoing hallway, shaking without knowing why.

The coin, the coin, the coin.

She quickened her pace, reaching the nurses' office with the pungent perfume of rubbing alcohol slapping her alert. The old, friendly nurse, Ms. Laury, stared at her blankly. Her eyes were devoid of emotion, but her face smiled. "I've called your mother, she'll pick you up in 15 minutes." Strange. Ms. Laury was a big teddy bear of a person, emotional plenty of the time and never fake. She was a bit quiet sometimes, and she would have days where she sat mourning her dead husband, Bill. But this was different... she looked empty, a callous husk of a person. Sara felt cold. She did not want to stay in the room with her.

"I'll wait in the library,"

"Okay, dear. Go on ahead."

Even as Sara left the room she felt Ms. Laury's eyes on her back. Before she reached the library, she heard the crackle of the loudspeaker. All she wanted to do was go home. She swung open the door of her mother's beaten up Subaru and sat on the cracking leather. Her mother wore sunglasses, but beneath them she smiled warmly, genuinely.

"Let's go home, hon."

They chatted on the long commute home, and the reason for her coming home slowly crept up on the conversation like a cat to a mouse.

"So you feel sick, Sara?"

"Not really right now, but I got kinda shaky when the teacher gave me this coin."

"A coin? Don't be so superstitious."

"Look at this mom! It's so creepy!"

Sara's mother took the coin from Sara's hand, holding it up to the light coming through the windshield.

"I don't see what your point is, Sa—"

At this exact moment Sara's mother crashed into a semi truck on Route 56, at the speed of 70 miles per hour. A shard of glass from the tiny Subaru's windshield gave her a merciful death, slashing her jugular vein in half. Sara was not so lucky. A large metal beam aboard the truck smashed through the windshield and into her abdomen. She died slowly and painfully for an hour while the truck driver, uninjured, attempted to call an ambulance. By the time they arrived, it was too late. In the instant of the crash, a copper coin with a grim faced man on one side and a torture scene on the other flew out the window and rolled to a stop in the middle of the highway. The truck driver saw something shining on the ground and picked it up. It was a strange... coin?