

Dear X—

Without further ado:

I really think "X" has got lots of potential. It's an interesting piece because it works with something that is not often dealt with, psychological disorders. I think you got something really good here because you nailed the internal monologue of the character quite well. I feel it is a bit off in some sections, for example, I thought the psychiatrist down the hall was a bit contrived and unnecessary for the piece. You could do much more, and have a far more effective piece if you just show him in the lab. There's, in a sense, nothing gained by having him there answering questions in fact it's a bit disorientating.

At one point I thought you may be heavily influenced by Cortazar (blow up and other stories) if you haven't checked him out, do that. He has a wonderful story where someone becomes obsessed with watching an animal and then becomes the animal. I only bring this up because you do a lot with that and the rats in the maze. It's good. It's a strong motif to run through. I think you can do more with it by describing his setting, the ways the cages are set up in the lab, the various lefts and rights he has to take, the hallway snaking around in circles, the road he travels on. All of this could be blown completely out and used to strengthen the story.

Also, I will suggest (humbly) that you consider looking at switching this story to 1st person or you exploit the 3rd person to a fuller, richer level. I only say this because you do the internal monologue well enough that you could really exploit the entrapment of this story well if it included more up close paranoia and frustration. The 3rd can be used as a break to that paranoia and OCD stuff.

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I'm going to give some line by line comments now:

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A red rose lay across the patient's palm as he sat on the edge of a leather chair and held himself upright; his leg twitched to an exacting rhythm. He fingered the rose petals, trying to arrange them perfectly.

\* this is an interesting, odd opening. You state the rose and then state the detached petals as they are being arranged. Why the unclear opening? Does time pass between the sentences? Could you, perhaps, make this setting a bit clearer – patient connotes hospital immediately... a couple of words will really tighten this.

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Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, he thought. October Charlie David, O..C..D.. How True.

\*And then, how does this connect with the opening? Waiting to see...

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When the doctor called it OCD, like naming a lump cancer, the patient shut down and repeated October Charlie David in his mind. A rose petal fell from the stem and spiraled down to the psychiatrist's floor.

\*Whose mind are we in? What's the POV here?

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``Nothing." the patient declared, but the doctor waited; leaning his head sideways slightly, a delicate curve and roll of the top vertebrae - the way you might look at a dog you had just caught pissing.

\*Is the he, the doctor? Or is the he someone else?

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The doctor finished writing down his notes and stood up from his seat; his arm stretched out to the patient. The patient winced slightly as he met the doctor's hand. Is this man not a doctor? He thought. Does he not know about communicable diseases? About communicable Diseases, A..C..D.. - October Charlie David, O..C..D.. How True.

\*name the thing... is the doctor the he? I'm unfortunately confused.

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The patient scrubbed his hands in the sink and soaped away microscopic germs that he could not see.

\*A close 1st may work better here, I'm not so sure you're using third person to the fullest way here.

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What does she think of you? He thought. She must regret marrying you? Damn ridiculous man?

\*Statement or question.

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But he could not bring himself to.  
Finally the janitor entered the bathroom and whistled his way into a stall. The patient

quickly wedged his foot between the exit door and the frame. Balancing the rose in the crease of his arm, he stretched over to the sink and washed his hands once more before leaving.

\*This is interesting but I'm wondering the direction of the story?  
You may want to launch the anniversary thing earlier to set this moving.

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``Or your anniversary." She warned.

\*or (or) on?

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He moved over to the cage cautiously marked `Bubonic Plague' and slid open a thin pin that held the cage door shut, letting the small things run out onto a table. The table sat beneath a heat lamp, and the mice scurried from one end to the next. At each end of the table the mice would come against a wall and turn. Two of the mice ran steadily, searching and moving systematically.

\*I think this may be the core of your story. This I like... a doctor that is trapped with paranoia over diseases. I'm not quite buying the "shrink down the hall" it seems too easy to me for a writer to get away with. You know? It solves too much for the story. Just show what he's feeling and start it there.

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P..N..T.. - Sick little Cancers, S..L..C.. - Lord knows lunatics, L..K..L.. - About Communicable Diseases, A..C..D.. - October Charlie David, O..C..D.. How True.

\*I don't quite get this rose bit, I'm not sure what it adds to the story. This other stuff is great stuff.

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The patient thought this through, like he did each day, careful to announce each word for fear he might have to start over. He would never get home that way, having to repeat it over and over until said perfectly; he might stand there in the hall, just outside his lab, all night long.

\*I like the metaphor of being a rat in the cage and a cage to himself. I get it. It's cool, very Cortazar of you and all but I'm a little reluctant to feel that it is enough.

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His heels clicked along the linoleum floor and moved him in the direction of the front door, but his thoughts stayed back in the lab:

\*clicked – how did they click? Manically, does he have a habit when he walks down the hall.

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The patient doctor gripped the wheel tighter, his knuckles a bloodless white. In a single motion, he popped the clutch, slammed the gear shift down a notch, and turned the wheel a hundred and eighty degrees. The rose tumbled from the passenger seat onto the floor-mat and stayed there.

\*Quite depressing, yet effective.

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Final thoughts:

I think there's a real gem in this story and I urge you to keep working at it. As I said before the core of the story is something you need to focus on. This is a psychological piece that needs to be centered on the character here. The strength of the piece needs to be focused on his quirks and the contemporary tragedy of being unable to be connected with others because of the disorder.

Continue on - your writing is quite strong!

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours,

The Staff