

Coagulation: A Tale of Leeches, Mummies, and Drag Queens

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The *Hirudo Medicinalis*, more commonly known as the European Medical Leech, is an invertebrate native to both Europe and Asia, reaching as far as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan within the latter. Fitted with three rings of saw-like jaws (affectionately paired with hundreds of razor-sharp edges), they are able to suck up to ten times their body weight in blood during a single meal. I have never encountered one, and as I do not live in either Europe or Asia, it is relatively unlikely that I ever will. Despite this, I can say with confidence that I have met a few leeches in my life.

My grade eight-year was (and I say this with no sugar in my tone) awful; this may or may not have been my own fault. I had walked into high school virtually friendless—the spider-silk bonds of childhood friendship are thin and delicate, seemingly prone to snapping under the barest hint of tension. I suppose friendships founded on the *excellent* common bases of being born within 365 days of each other and existing relatively near one another aren't made to weather the crushing force of time. At the very least, the timing was opportune. High school is commonly touted as a transformative point in an adolescent's development, a venue of friendships and excitement. Thus, I luckily managed to overcome my dilemma (crippling loneliness) within the first week. My new friend was funny, charismatic, and wanted to spend time with me— in other words, virtually flawless. What more could a girl ask for in a companion?

Unbeknownst to me, underneath a carefully laid disguise, my friend was little more than a leech. For an entire year she stuck to my side, the three rings of razor-sharp teeth characteristic to the *Hirudo Medicinalis* entrenched firmly in my flesh. She sucked everything good out of me for her own fickle enjoyment; I was mummified before summer. My friend had used me, treated

me like a means to an end. Things eventually came to a head in late August; my mom had finally uncovered what was going on with my friend from my zipper-tight lips. Words cannot describe how furious she was. Luckily for me, numbers can; my friend was 100% *never* allowed back in our house.

I spent most of my grade nine year in a hazy, miserable fugue. I had salted my leech, yet my wounds refused to coagulate. It's alarming how quickly my parasitic relationship had warped into an awful form of co-dependence. In almost every single class, I would extend a palm and request to be excused in a thin, tremulous warble. I would return no less than twenty minutes later, shuffling into staring classrooms with blotchy, red cheeks. I would isolate myself from the people that cared about me, telling myself that it was better to be alone when it was truly because I was scared of being vulnerable. How could others be there for me if I wouldn't even crack open a curtain for them?

My revelation arrived with little ceremony; It was a single quote, spoken by the ever-wise RuPaul, and went exactly as follows: "If you can't love yourself, how in the *hell* you gonna love somebody else?" He was right; despite what I had convinced myself, I was deserving of love, and I desperately needed to begin acting like it. Sunrises suddenly became an arduous affair. Every morning, first thing after I woke up, I would drag myself to the bathroom and say what might be the single most mortifying arrangement of characters in existence: "You are *loved*. You are *valued*. You are *important*."

For 365 days, I repeated the same three lines over and over and over. My improvement was not a one-day thing; each word initially felt like a thick sludge pouring out of my lips, slug-like and repulsive. However, as the days passed, the words became smoother and smoother, as though slowly sanded down by my vocal cords with each pass-through they made. Weeks

dragged by, and I started reaching out a bit more, my permanently muted phone now set to a tentative vibrate. By the half-year mark, I was sitting through full classes and laughing more than the entire six previous months combined. It was as though every time I spoke my nine magic words, platelets and plasma would pour to my old wounds. The stitch in my side was disappearing, silvery scar tissue taking its place.

I haven't once tried to reach out to my friend since that fateful August day. Forgiveness or closure was, and is, unnecessary; I have healed all by myself and possess no desire for reconciliation. It is ignorant to believe that recovery stems from forgiveness, and I am now able to see that I am worth more than any attachment to her. She holds no weight over me anymore. I am finally sycophant free, and completely and utterly loved; all it took was a man in a wig to convince me of it.