

Mislabelled

by Stephanie Hutton

Crouched down in the stationery cupboard, the heaviness of the label-maker in my hand feels good. They will find me soon, syringes raised in the air ready to sedate my epiphany away. I stroke each label in turn. They criss-cross over my smock. My fingers read the bumps of those words that tell the truth of who I am.

For seven years, I created the patients' labels following each appointment with Dr. X. I detached myself from the content and focused on the artwork of letter formation. Hoping it brought a lick of relief to those judged souls. That curve of the 'D' for our most common - 'Depressed.' With a deep purple shade, I inked each letter into a dark shine to emphasise strength, let them know it lived inside them, covered over with shame and pain. For the 'x' in 'Anxious' I laid a kiss on that letter of so many meanings. I understood these patients the most. The answer to tyranny is to cower or be hurt.

It was Nurse D who first caught me out, spitting her fury at the label I'd made for their most despised 'Personality Disorder'. My delicate shading with Rose Garden Pink on the first six letters only was my mutiny. My unspoken message: you are you, don't come back.

It's been fifteen minutes. The ward staff are coming for me. In the dark, my fingers know how to find the right buttons to indent on the small plastic label. I add to 'Scared' 'Brave' 'Daughter' by pressing out the letters 'f, r, e, e'. As the stomp of boots shouts up the corridor, I place the word with its sisters in the middle of

my chest and let the label-maker fall to the ground. The only weapons I need are words.

Author Bio: Stephanie Hutton is a writer and clinical psychologist in the UK. In 2017, she was shortlisted for the Bristol Prize, and nominated for Best of the Net.