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The modified steel bed is wheeled into our shop, and while the staff and office supervisor bicker, joke, ridicule and shrug at the large object, only me & my fellow inmate coworkers can fully appreciate exactly what we see. This is a death bed for a woman condemned to die in prison, an LWOP who has been bed ridden for over a decade post-stroke. She has respiratory issues and now must be confined to an upright welded bed fabricated in the facility, for some reason this made more sense than buying a hospital bed, even though the cost is about equal between parts and labor to build this.

We take care in our work to prep, prime, and paint this bed. The majority of my coworkers see their potential futures, as LWOPs and lifers. There is something cruel in this, but too much to easily pin down. So we work.

We resist by meeting the ignorance of staff ~~with~~ with easily overheard nonchalant conversation about our own sentences, and how someday this could also be our fate. We humanize it; we openly communicate exactly what this is, what its purpose is, how personal that is.

The staff get quiet, they no longer speak on this metal elephant in the shop. Reality is hard, so it's ignored. My peers and I understand this, but the undercurrent of contempt never fully goes away. I fight to redeem myself, and this cold bed silently screams, "no, you never get to live past the worst thing you've done. You are condemned, you are beyond hope and help."

I can't grasp this; I've stolen a life and I know now how this act is not up to a fellow human being to make. If you choose to take a life, quickly as I did or slowly

as courts do, at least stick around to watch the lights go out of the eyes. Let the act sink in. Feel the terrible responsibility as it destroys a part of humanity you can never regain.

Then ask yourself if it's worth doing again. I know now it's never worth doing at all, and here I'm touching a part of another woman's death. A slower, "cleaner", quieter death, out of sight out of mind.

I meditate and pray as I work on this death bed. I focus on putting loving kindness, peace, forgiveness into this bed. I hope the condemned woman can feel the contemplation I've given her condition.

As the finished bed is driven away, I look on in sadness. I never used to grasp what it means to look at a situation and know immediately where "us" and "them" lies, but I get it now. There is no peace in this understanding.