

Spring 2013

BeanSwitch



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BeamSwitch

Staff

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Adriana Irigoyen Home

4

rural idyllic beauty, gentle sloping hills
lush green fields and
a picturesque town square.
the glory of small town America

suffers from a blight
of poverty disease and deception.

broke farmers spit tobacco juice
and wait for desperate rains
the aged wither away in
shotgun houses and shacks

while
enterprising good ole boys put
chemistry lessons to good use,
bored teenagers escape
with sex and booze.

the unspoken racial divide persists
through the Hole and the Lakehouse
niggers, tomato pickers, and po' white
trash
scorn one another,
yet all are made equal through
WIC and Medicare.

malicious gossip
eases the pain of one's own
shortcomings.
relief and aid come in
the form of broken marriages,
addictive habits, and the
questionable sex lives of
your good neighbor.

pestilence ravages the crops
and the souls of the simple
folk.

according to the almanac, there is no
end in sight.

A flash, a quick burst of light
Strikes across the evening sky.
Lighting up the atmosphere
And drawing all attention to it.

The lightning did not ask for it
But it received it regardless.
It is what it is and because of it,
It is the center of attention.

I wonder if it is really shy
And that is why it is so quick
Instead of lasting forever
And illuminating endlessly.

I am like the lightning
I want to be seen
But only in bursts
And not for long.

I want to be remembered
Not for what people thought
But what I left behind
What there is evidence of.

Like the lightning....



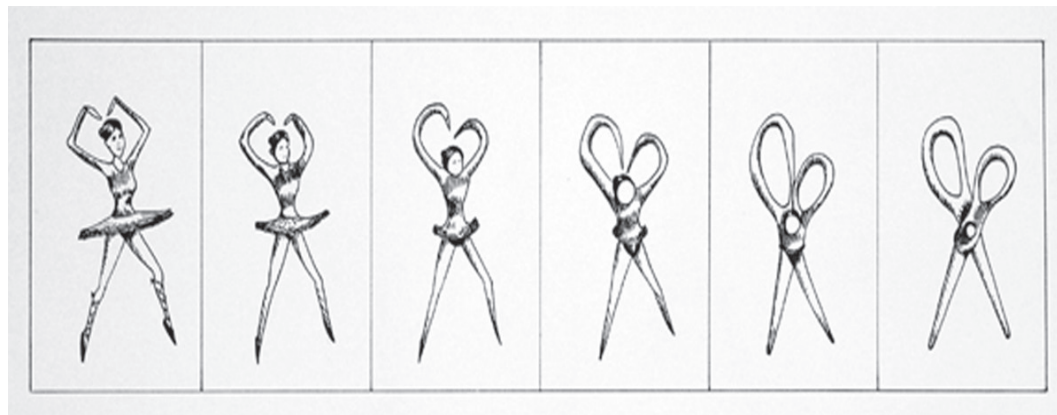
Kristin Brooks Lightning

5



Carly Christiansen Ballerine à Ciseaux

6



Permanent Marker on Paper
20 x 7

To successfully transfigure the ballerina on the left into the pair of scissors on the right, using only six frames.

Beyond.



Sarah Williams Balloon

7

the
into
it
carries

but

The helium is transparent

wish.
and make a
eyes
I close my

I tie the string.
balloon.
My hands grab the inflated





Belinda Barker Ode to the Visitor

8

She arrived one day to visit—
dressed in her Sunday Best.
I can only stay a while, she said.
With that, I might have guessed.

my dishes dirty—
my beds left unmade—
I didn't want Her here!
and so I asked if— maybe—
She could come again next year?

She never looked my way—
or offered me a Word.
She went about her Business—
as if She hadn't heard!

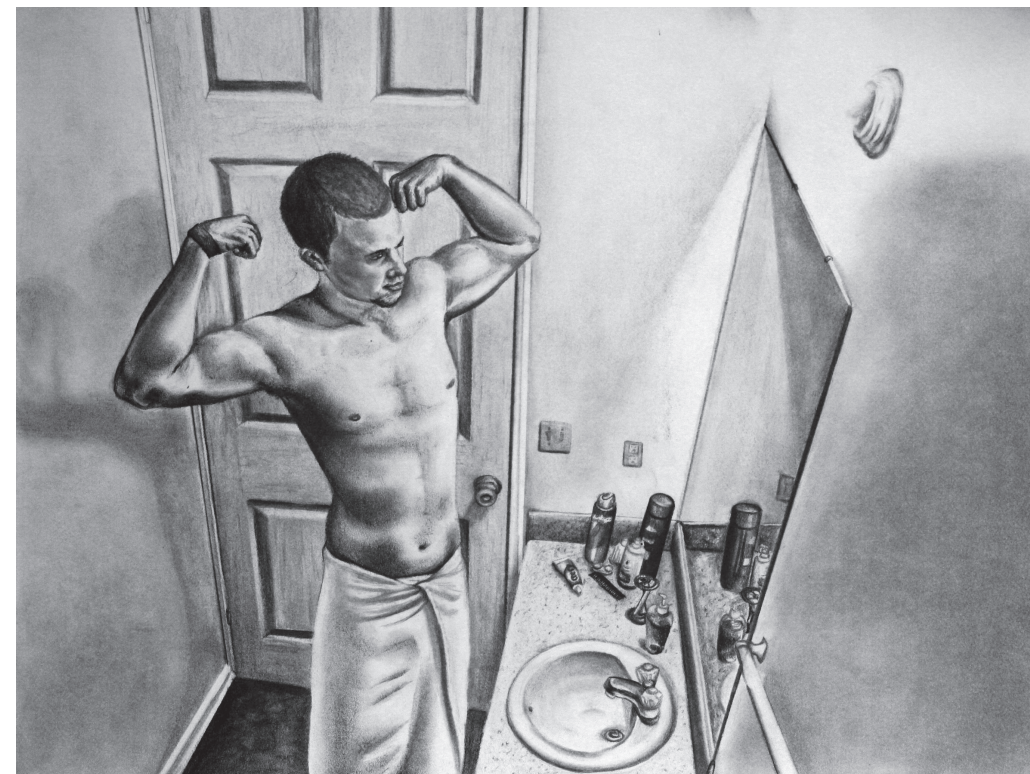
I hardly even knew Her!
Why would She visit *me*?
She read my mind and answered:
I Knew you would be Free.

my work waiting—
my words left unsaid—
I needed time to tell them!
and so I begged another day— if only
She could spare one?

She listened to me plead—
and took my hand in hers.
She led me to the Garden:
Shhh...Listen to the Birds.
I didn't want to hear them!
What good would that do *me*?
She heard my thoughts and answered:
You must Hear before you See.

She wrapped her shawl around me—
and held me to her breast.
She sang a tender Love song:
You are One with all the Rest.

She opened all the Windows—
and then she locked the Doors.
I can only stay a while, she said.
I could not ask for more.



Charcoal on Paper
24 x 18

To recreate a photo-realistic rendition of the classic image of a
young man flexing in the bathroom mirror.



Carly Christiansen Muscles in the Mirror

9



There was something odious, voyeuristic, Big Brother-esque about the way the small black camera—obviously stationed directly in front of my bed, in the angle where antiseptic hospital wall met antiseptic hospital ceiling tile—pointed down at me, demeaning and unmoving; the red light on the camera perpetually blinking, always working, sending transmission after transmission to the nurses’ station down the hall. I supposed they all stood huddled around one another. Their large round bottoms created a corpulent wall of blue cotton scrubs, endlessly watching me languish in the stiff mechanical bed that can be found in every hospital room nationwide; laughing at the stupid young man, alone, the emasculated little boy who had to have help removing his IV and help getting to the small metallic silver commode sitting in the center of the room. Everything that I did, a nurse had to be paged first.

Curtains, there must be curtains? Yes, there were curtains. Finally, safe from the omnipresent, all judging eye in the ceiling, until I noticed the thin white curtains, cheaply made of bed linens, were not tall enough to block the view of the camera. Strained bowel movements, from all the drugs—red light blinking-blinking-blinking—catching every minute of my biological challenge.

I listened to screams of people in the rooms which surrounded me, people much worse off than I was. I tried to watch *Growing Pains* through the wails and pleas of people who had to lie there, dissipating, waiting, watching death climb up their own mechanical beds, from their feet until they were both eye-to-eye.

Growing Pains was turned to max volume in my room: Alan Thicke’s hair, Joanna Kerns destined for Lifetime movies, and Tracey Gold destined for bulimia or whatever eating disorder it was; the sounds, sights and stories of my childhood. I hadn’t watched *Growing Pains* in years. Being stuck in the hospital is a great time to catch up on shows you never watch anymore. I, of course young, wanted to be Kirk Cameron at one point, and then I grew older and realized that no, it was Mike Seaver I wanted to be all along: troublesome but lovable, good-looking and charming; a fuck-up but only because he had not yet gained his focus, realized the nature of his inner self, then finally, by season six, or roundabout, tapped into his boundless potential. Kirk Cameron in real life is kind of a drag; this seriously depressed me as a child. My hero was a holy roller. Of course I would lean toward the more secular Mike Seaver. But lying in the I.C.U. with your shoelaces somewhere in a closet behind the nurses’ station, because they had to take them by law—“Can I borrow a pen?” It is the one cute nurse that I am talking to. She looked confused. “To write with,” I said. Nervous, she instinctively looks up into the camera. I wave and see our sad, comedic reflection in the lens. “I’ll have to ask the Head Nurse.” The cute nurse never came back—and

you begin to question if Kirk Cameron is right, or maybe he is partially right and the Head Nurse is God. She had the power to deny me a shower, unless you count the light sponge bath given by the thick, mean nurse with the carbuncular nose.

Growing Pains doesn’t last long enough figuratively and literally, and then it’s back to boredom, real boredom, alone with my thoughts the red light blinked the food from lunch got cold beef wellington I think but I drank the apple juice tasty delicious satiating so I asked for more that they brought me more of but just one and no more they didn’t like me I know it I can’t help my thoughts from racing I can’t cry. They can’t see me cry. They are watching all the time maybe even the camera is of some freak-ethereal nature and can actually see my thoughts I wished there was another episode of *Growing Pains*. *Growing Pains* always calms the nerves except for that faint hurt of nostalgia. I can’t help my racing thoughts, and then the doctor walked in.

“Mr. Seaver.” That is what I imagined she called me. She was a tall lady with cold eyes and an apathetic disposition, aloof bed manner. She didn’t even step two steps through the door; a distant assassin. She stared holes through people. She constantly took a tone. I had got into it with her once before, a few years earlier when I thought my mother was dying and I screamed at her to get off of her lazy ass and save my mother’s life. My mother lived, but I don’t give her much credit. The doctor said some words, words I didn’t want to hear. She is what most people would call a “bitch.”

“Why did you do it?” she asked. I knew she didn’t care if I answered or not. She said something about the law. I said something about staying close to home. She said something along the lines of NO, and I had the feeling that she enjoyed that, and I stared at the camera; the red light blinked. I said, “I want to stay close to home!” Not screaming, yet more forceful. She, with a smug coolness said, “(Mr. Seaver) you should have thought about that before you cleaned out the medicine cabinet.” I looked at the camera, holding back tears, but They were watching, if They watched at all, They were certainly watching this.

The doctor left. On her way out, she said something like good luck; always in her condescension, and I screamed several obscenities addressed toward her. She never flinched, never looked back; she had heard these things before.

It was all a cruel game. They were out to get me, those damn savages, especially the evil doctor who was sending me to a “special” hospital in Memphis against my will; Sunny Brook or Stoney Brook, something with a brook involved. All of them evil, all of them with hidden agendas, and They were all out to get me. My first, now ex, therapist always told me that my paranoia and my ego were my worst enemies, but he could be wrong. He also said that I loved myself too much to ever try and kill myself. He should know love has nothing to do with suicide.

By the last day in I.C.U. my grandfather was there, sitting in the chair beside me. He was the only one that came to visit, him and one girl, but she and I knew that our affection for each other



was unsustainable; a friend, a love. Truth was she was only afraid for me; afraid of the guilt, afraid it could all be blamed on her.

My grandfather is a Presbyterian pastor, not like Kirk Cameron. You can have a conversation void of God with my grandfather.

We both sat watching some show that we hadn't watched in years. *Boy Meets World* maybe or maybe it was *Wonder Years*; that inconsiderate show which ruined my childhood, my life. Kevin Arnold doesn't get Winnie Cooper in the end. A life lesson learned early but a life lesson I could have done without, especially at such a tender age.

The Pastor and I don't have much to say to one another. What can you say at that point? During commercials I would catch him staring up at the camera; his eyes puffed, red and blurry behind his glasses, all from the erroneous choices I've made. He is the one who found me; two in the morning, for some inexplicable reason lying on the cold concrete of the driveway, too stoned to make the proper striations up my wrist with the dull steak knife I held in the shaking hand that seemed to be anybody's but my own.

We sat. The day pouring on and on eternal, knowing what was next, this the last day of my stay, and then off to the next hospital, new armband with the same personal info, new nurses, the same scrubs, the same whispers, the same looks, some sardonic and some full of pity. "Bless his heart," they may say.

Kevin can try and try, but he never gets Winnie, no matter what.

An ambulance was set to come pick me up. It was protocol; all the drugs had nearly passed through and the haze of paranoia and disillusionment had lifted, for all intents and purposes.

A fat-faced young man named Adam, maybe thirty, the EMT, walked the ambulance stretcher through the halls, looking for (Mr. Seaver) or (Mr. Arnold). My grandfather and I gazed at the TV, basking in some odd sense of serenity; we never saw him coming. The red light over the camera blinked; They saw it coming, They saw it all coming.

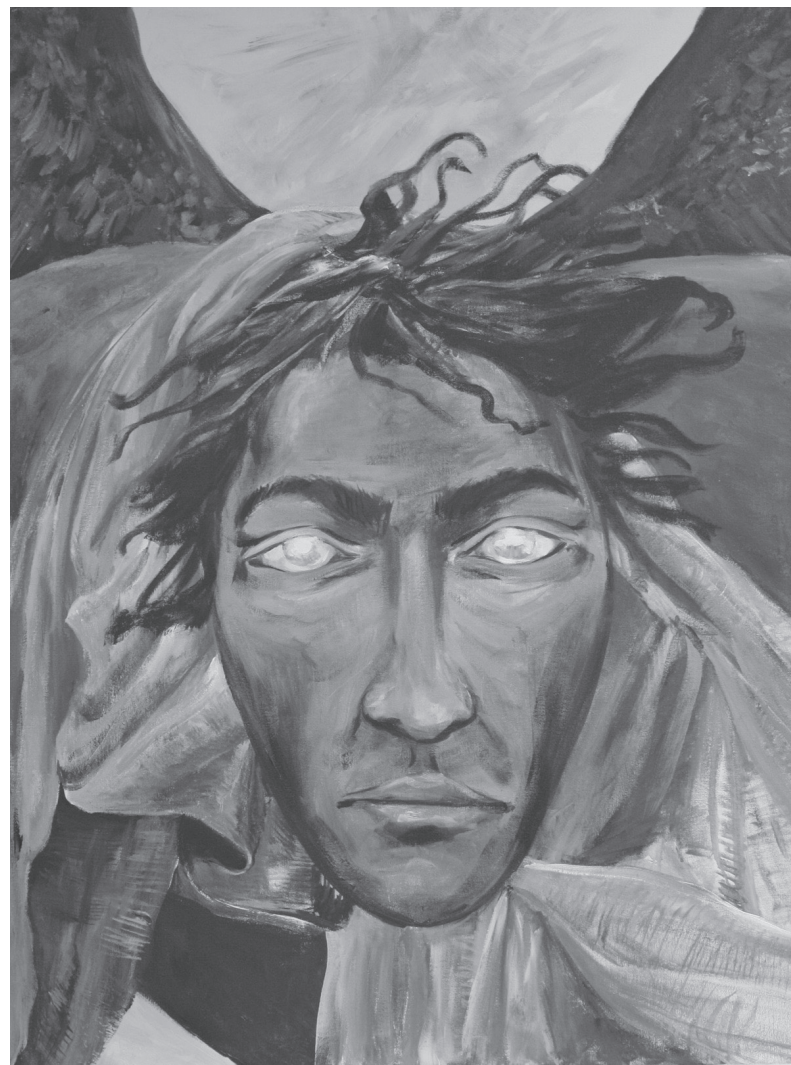
I had to be strapped down to the stretcher, and ride like this two hours, until we got to Memphis and gazed at the illustrious gates of Sunny Brook, Stoney Brook, or Babbling Brook. But this was only protocol, nothing else; it had to be done.

I wish I could tell you that my grandfather grabbed my hand and said something that one might hear Daniel Day Lewis say in an Oscar-Nominated film, but he didn't. The Pastor made one concise sentence; the only thing he said to me all day: "Never do this again." He wasn't angry. He wasn't sad. He was more precise than I had ever heard him; a tough man, an old man, a tired man, a holy man, a man who was fed up.

"Just tell me if you need to use the bathroom, and we'll stop." Adam said. "But please don't try to run...It's been too long of a day as it is."

"Yes it has," I agreed. Agreeing with something, I wasn't sure what, nor was I sure it mattered. Adam had not done the things I had done, I could tell by his voice, I could tell by his eyes, I could tell by his posture, I could tell by the way he looked me over at the nurses' station when they told him I was the one that had to go to Memphis. Adam would never know these things; never know what it was like to feel some ancient pain that never can be gotten rid of, never know what it was like to hurt someone, really hurt someone, and he would never know that sometimes you're wrong, and that sometimes you don't get Winnie in the end. Adam, like most, would never know.

And as we turned from the Baptist Memorial parking lot, onto Main Street, onto 51, I cried for the first time, first time in years. I was locked in; strapped down. Forced to reap the consequences of my life, and I could see my grandfather through the back rectangular window of the ambulance, following behind in his car like following a hearse. The old stern face was gone and in its place was a child's in the grip of fear, that creeping sensation of all-encompassing panic. And he followed, and I watched. He followed us until he couldn't follow anymore. I rested my eyes, and when I opened them, he was gone.



Acrylic on canvas
30 x 40

Giving a little tribute to my favorite book *Job*.



He held her as if she would slip away, as if only his strong grip held her to the world. She found it funny in a morbid sort of way. Whether he held her or not, it was inevitable. The two had always met in secret despite their feuding homes. She supposed that somewhere along the line she saw this coming.

(She saw the pain and desolation and grief that would follow their short time of peace and happiness.)

His face was twisted in grief, but he didn't cry. The rain fell, and it seemed as if the heavens were crying for him. He clutched her close and muttered into her hair, voice laced with desperation.

(I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.)

The smell of smoke was fading, and the fires were dying with her. Her blood mixed with the rain, making the puddle around her seem almost pink. That thought made her smile faintly.

(He had always said that pink suited her.)

(Was it a sort of cruel coincidence that she would die with that color?)

She lightly touched his face, and he looked at her. His eyes were painful and pleading. *(Pleasepleaseplease)*

(Please don't die!)

"Tal," her voice was soft, but seemed to cut sharply through the silence. "Aidan," he murmured in return, his eyes impossibly soft and sad. She whispered with her last breath.

("Meet me here when the world begins anew.")

.....
She remembers those words and is overjoyed when she meets a boy in that spot one day. She knows it's him despite the fact that he is now different.

(That she is now different.)

His eyes. That's how she could tell. Under all of the pain and distance that has formed in this life, she could see the gentleness that had only ever been his. He looked at her, and it caused her smile to falter. She was overjoyed to see him, but--

(He did not see her.)

--he didn't remember. Despite that, she befriended him, noting how he had changed in this life. He was colder and angry. Dry wit had replaced his silly humor.

("Hachiko, huh? Sounds like a name for a dog.")

("Of course it's not. It's not nice to make fun of someone's name, you know.")



She loved him as she always had because, despite the changes, he was still the same deep down. He even had a tendency of repeating things he had said a lifetime ago.

(He said that colors of fire suit her best: reds, oranges, and yellows.)

The words were different but they had the same meaning. When he said that, it made her think of the color pink. It made her think of a puddle of crimson blood being watered down and turned pink by the rain. She wondered if he remembered the extinguishing flames or the dying Aidan. In a way, she could see something coming again.

(She saw the pain and desolation and grief.)

He left silently one night. There was no particular reason, nothing to drive him away. He simply vanished during the night. It fits, she supposed, and she wondered if she ever told him that, in this life, night suited him like sunset had before. Star-speckled darkness and wit suited him now.

(Like how pink and wisdom once suited her. Like how fire and foolishness suited her now.)

She did not know what to do without him. She had never been particularly brave or adventurous. She was no longer very wise. She had a simple mind now with simple wants, simple needs, and simple skills. So, she waited.

(And waited and waited and waited)

She did not mind the glances of pity. She did not mind the rumors or the gossip or the whispers.

“Poor thing. Oh, poor thing. Why doesn’t she give up? Shouldn’t she know he’s not coming back?”

She waited in the same spot every day, waiting for him. But days turned to weeks, weeks turned to months, months turned to years, and years (and years and years and years) turned to *decades* of nothing.

It was winter again. How many winters has it been? Oh, but this one was especially cold. She had forgotten her jacket, but did not want to leave to get it. What if he returned and she wasn’t there to greet him? So, she stayed, sitting in the cold as it grew colder and colder.

(For him, always for him.)

The people wished they were surprised when she froze to death waiting in the dead of winter.

(But he would never know, for he never returned.)

She waited her life away.

.....

“Meet me here when the world begins anew.”

It took him until their third life to remember. He was not like his previous lives. He was not gentle chivalry and warm evenings. He was not star-speckled nights and cold wit. He was emotional and young, wanting so desperately for something to hold onto.

(He was like morning, hopeful and full of promise.)

16

He found her in that place, the place that they had promised to meet again. The place was well-known for a woman who had waited there for her love until she died. He heard that the woman was even buried there with a bronze plaque instead of a tombstone.

(Always Faithful. Always Waiting.)

He had smiled when she turned to look at him, but she was not like her previous lives either. She was not loving wisdom and the color pink. She was not fire and foolishness and faithful waiting. She was a woman who had been abandoned. She was caution and bitterness. Looking at her as she frowned at him, he couldn’t help but think--

(--that the green of the tree leaves suited her.)

He hesitated before asking, “Aidan?” She watched him silently, gold eyes holding the vaguest of recognition. “That was not my name in my last life. It is not my name in this one either.” He looks confused, and she thinks that it is as if they had both read the same book with him skimming the pages, reading the parts that he liked and ignoring the parts that he didn’t want to admit.

(And her having read the story so long ago that she hardly remembers the specifics.)

“But...it was your name once.” He doesn’t ask but his voice holds the slightest note of pleading. She nods. “It was my name once.” And, so, things progressed as if they had switched places from the previous life, him reaching out and her simply allowing it. In a way, it was peaceful, but not for long.

(Never for long)

An army of sorts was rising, acting to “protect” the rights of the people. Anyone with enough sense could see that there was no protection taking place. It was merely propaganda to gain more help in promoting their own agenda, but he really didn’t have that much sense to begin with.

“It’s for the greater good.”

She stared at him, her eyes far too perceptive. “Greater good?” she echoed, looking into his face, looking for some sign that he was joking. His expression was earnest and his eyes were desperate for approval. She heaved a sigh. “Fantine,” she started, but paused. She shook her head. “Sometimes, I forget how naive you are.” Her voice was sad with an underlying note of pain. His face twisted as if she had said something horrid and painful.

(Painful like waiting and waiting. painful like dying. painful like the sharp sting of betrayal.)

“Naive?!” She stares at him silently. “I will not be here when you return.” He had gaped at her, eyes bright with all sorts of awful things. He seemed to want to say more, but the rest of the day was silent.

(She left during the night, gone before he had even woken.)

In the distance, she could swear that she could hear an angry, pained yell. She was sure she knew why. He was so sure that he would get a happy ending to this life just for the small scraps that he

17



remembered of the first. If he remembered it all, he would know that there was no such thing.

(Humans are so very selfish.)

Maybe her many lives had made her cynical, but the thought seemed so undeniably true. The army swept the country, and, when Fantine wasn't destroying in the name of "good," he was pursuing her with eyes bright with anger and hatred. She decided that morning and childishness suited him because even a good morning could end in a bad day, and children were--

(Quick to love, quick to hate)

(So very, very heartless)

She spent her life running, running until she was flying, flying until she was falling over the edge of the world.

The last thing she saw of the world was his angry, hateful eyes as they shifted to regret and remorse.

(I'm sorry. I'm so very sorry.)

She closed her eyes as she fell. She didn't want to see those eyes.

.....

A lifetime later, he was known as an evil man. A lifetime later, she forgot him. There was little chance of this life ending any better than the last; it was a familiar feeling. Things start to become hazy after the third or fourth life. He still remembered her while she was left with only the vaguest of impressions and emotions.

(She didn't want to remember anymore.)

Somehow, they both found themselves at their meeting place. She regarded him in the bright noontime sun. It rather fit him. He looked almost like an angel, but he looked at her in a strange way, like he knew her. She knew who he was--an evil man--and was unsettled. He found that she looked quite different from her past lives. She held herself in wariness, her expression blank and calculating. His lip quirked.

(She made him think of cool colors: blues and indigos and violets.)

He declared that he still loved her and that she still loved him too, because he was a brutal man now and did not know much of tact or how to properly apologize. She frowned at him, and looked to the ground. A rusted plate stared back up at her.

(Always Faithful. Always Waiting.)

A cold feeling gripped her throat and made her stomach feel heavy. She bolted. Without thought, he reached out to her, pulling her back to him as she squirmed and yelled.

"It's *me*," he said, and under all of the arrogance and childish heartlessness and cold wit there was the faintest spark of gentle chivalry that she felt she should have recognized but *didn't*. Her eyes held no trust or happiness or even the slightest bit of recognition. His face crumpled in remorse.

(A remorse that spanned many, many lives)

He released her gently. She stared at him a moment longer before dashing off. He sat on the ground and he wept.

He was known as an evil man, but he wasn't. He was a banished man, trying so hard to correct the wrongs of his past life.

(Because after a lifetime of being a child, he was a man now, if but a flawed one.)

He worked hard, though few saw his work as anything but traitorous. He was sure that it would be the end of him one day, but that would only be all too soon. He didn't know that it would be the end of her instead.

(He didn't know that he would be the end of her once more.)

A battle had broken out in an eerily familiar town. He and his men fought bravely, and it seemed as if they were winning. He was suddenly shoved to the side; the whistle of death passed his ear, and he turned his head to see who had shoved him.

(It was her.)

He slid and hit his head. The world seemed to fade as she fell to the ground just before him. He woke later and the town was oddly quiet. He didn't know how the battle ended. All he knew was there was a puddle of blood next to him, and it wasn't his.

("I'm sorry. I'm so very sorry.")

He didn't move from his spot next to her dead body and was taken in by the authorities. He was executed the next day at noon.

("I forgive you.")

.....

He smiled faintly as he stood under his favorite tree. It was always cool and shady, and he liked it that way despite it being sunset. He paused when someone ran into him, tumbling to the ground. A small girl, perhaps around his age, shook her head and stood back up. Her hair was tied up with pink ribbons, and he wondered why he even bothered to notice.

(He had always said that pink suited her.)

The girl blinked up at him. "Hi," she said with a smile growing on her face.

"Hello." He found himself smiling along with her.

"Have we met before?" She asked as she extended her hand. She couldn't help but think he sounded very familiar.

"I don't know." He thought she was familiar, too. He took her hand.

(And felt an infinity's worth of hatred and remorse and painful love and constant hurt.)

("I'm sorry. I'm so very sorry.")

(Always Faithful. Always Waiting.)



(A remorse that spanned many, many lives.)

“I forgive you.”

The two paused and blinked at each other, but the girl smiled despite the strangeness.

“I’m Aidan.” He smiled gently.

“My name’s Tal.”

This was their first meeting.

(A meeting he would someday remember.)

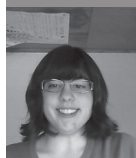
(A meeting she would someday forget.)



Photograph
To capture the art in the craft.



Melanie O’Neil The Artist



What is light without dark?
A body without a shadow
It's a balanced art
One can tell by looking out a window

What is a sun without a moon?
No day or night ever known
As separate but needed as midnight and noon
For light and shadows are all their own

There can't be yin without yang
No good without evil
On this delicate pendulum does life hang
It must be balanced to be civil

What more is there to say?
Except that we need night and day.

In the front lawn I lie belly up to the sun
An old dog now possessed with
That wretched curse of Janus—
The pitfalls of euphoric recall

Belly up
We all catch the sun

On this day, far removed from those days
When I once caught hell, but oh those
Valiant but sadistic efforts, which have
Now given up the flawed rituals of my
Past, those two-faced traditions sharp
As the rigged edges of the Southerner's
Complex: the problem of what to keep
And what it is we throw away. In
Dreams I return to a pompous youth
Take her away that Virgin Muse.
Incredulous, disordered, and crude
Unfamiliar to discretion I loved my whores
Bold and brilliant, lovely though only
As indifferent as me when singing
That Fire Sermon as ballad.

We are all post-something acute frag-
mentation living in the houses of our fathers
That his father and his brother built over the
Outlines of bones in the satiate soil that cries
Out at dusk, yearning for something lost
Something forgotten like long-dead Agrarian boys
And the Sweet southern wind blows across my nose

When an inflated ball is thrown at my un-
protected midsection by a small boy
Said to look a lot like me

Belly up
Catching the sun



Low Relief Clay Sculpture
8 x 11

Sometimes I like to drive on the old highway, the one between this town and the next. A new highway has been made since I was a little boy, a four-lane road intended to make the drive between towns quicker, but I still take the old one. Driving on that cracked, broken highway lets me think about memories that aren't my own. Time-worn houses and fallen-in sheds line the road, some of which still have a few planks hanging from stubborn nails, but most of them rest in piles of rotting wood. Old brick buildings lie scattered along the way, wild growth creeping up the sections of the walls that aren't gaping with holes. I don't know what those buildings were for, or the names of the men and women who lived in those houses, but somebody knows. Those are somebody else's times to remember and friends to know and miss.

In between places with three or four houses built closely to one another, wide open fields have always stretched as far as I can see. As I pass, I think about the nameless, faceless people that have always tended to those fields or farmed those crops. Whoever it is, or was, remembers the purpose of those battered, empty buildings and who called those abandoned houses home. The man who knows those people, those fields, and those homes has always lived in this town and known its struggles. He knows its history, and he tells its stories. Those are his memories, and they will never be mine.

When I'm driving that road, I slow down to take in the old drive-in theater. A small box office building just big enough for a couple of cashiers and ticket-takers still stands close to the road, its walls lined with the same creeping vines as the other empty buildings along the highway. Behind the box office, a large field of dead brown grass lies over the land that formerly functioned as the parking lot where first dates were had and true love was found. All I have ever known to park in that grass are broken-down tractors and semi-truck trailers, the placement of which I've never questioned; I always figured that's just where they belong. Remnants of a looming movie screen rise high above the field and tree line behind the abandoned machinery. The screen, once a clean cotton white but now a dirty grey, is peppered with small holes in some places and missing large gaps in others. It is certainly hard for me to imagine constellations of red taillights facing the road as the young Sean Connery or Robert Redford was cast majestically up on that screen, brightly illuminated in perfect contrast to the night sky. That is a memory for somebody else to look back on and smile. My past does not consist of Saturdays at the drive-in or nights spent staring up at that screen and the stars and into the



eyes of the girl whom I hoped to share those memories with forever. Those are somebody else's nights, and those memories are not my own.

On the farthest edge of that grass lot, safely away from the parking area turned trailer graveyard, sits a small country home. The house looks as if it can't have more than three rooms in all, but I can't be sure. What I do know is that a bedroom window opens out of the east wall of that house where the eyes of a growing boy could peek through the blinds and watch the silent images play across the drive-in screen. I also know that that boy's father went to work every day in a factory in the next town over and always came back covered in greasy blackness. The boy's father endured punishing work every day to provide for his wife and two sons, one of which had an illness that could and would take his life whenever it saw fit, because that is what it had to do. He went to work every day with the sights and sounds of fighting fires in the Korean War permanently burned in his mind's eye. He woke up every morning knowing that his only daughter, his sons' only sister, had been taken from them entirely too soon and there was nothing he or God could do about it. Those memories belong to my grandfather and my father, men who knew a South and a life that I do not and will not know. They have lived the pages of every sad Southern novel ever written and could tell stories to rival any other. Those stories, though it may not show on the faces of the men who tell them, are infused with memories of their sadness, their loss, and their pain. Those memories are not my own.



Be a good schoolboy; take in everything.
Remember it all. Be different though. Stand
Out. Drink alcohol—heavy booze,
Do it to excess.
Go to war, maybe because you want to,
Maybe because you don't.
Just know a great generation is not
Made without one. Don't write about it too
Much though, those people tend to burn
Out much more quickly. Come home. Passionately
Love a woman, who once was a girl you always
Wanted to love. Then leave her.
Go to Europe. Travel all over. Yet, set up
Camp around the West Bank. Drink—
Drink more—write—make love to
Your expatriate friend's wife. Make
Sure he knows; he maybe even joins.
Romanticize the sultry scene in an
Episode of your next novel, and/or
Ridicule them both, either way it
is Modernist genius.
Go to Spain—you must—witness
Death get confronted first hand.
See death lose the confrontation and
Then see death triumph. Enjoy it,
Or look away, be disturbed,
or both.
Then you come home, grow old;
Bald or white. Watch your prose
Disintegrate; the art of the gripping
First sentence dies. Your children are grown,
Bitter, full of hate for your vast shadow.
Call your first wife. Ask if she still loves you;

Ask her when everything changed:
Was it in Florence? Chamonix? Pamplona?
Live your last days in Big Sur, or Mexico,
Oxford, Mississippi, or Idaho. Accept
A Pulitzer Prize or Nobel, though you know
You deserved it when you were much younger;
When you were honest. When your pain was
Authentic. When the first sentence still stood
Strong, maybe for the novel wherein you
Ridiculed your friends...Drink...By now you're
Good at it.
Realize you always hated your father
Though you are possibly a more sinister,
More hideous form of him. Get a gun; one
With a long barrel. Practice pulling the
Trigger with your toe. Do the deed when
Your final wife is out getting the groceries.
Leave a note. Something poetic, or don't; it
Doesn't matter, your leading sentence does
Not carry the weight it once did. Either way you
Are a genius.

This is how you become a
great writer.

Standing, peering over the radiator
Under the hood of the old '55
I am close to you
A rare moment to last my whole life

Hand you a socket
Get you that rag
Learning about carbs and horses
Reliving your last drag

Spark plugs and ponytails
Barbie dolls and grease guns
Daddy's little girl
Almost as good as a son

In the cold dark morning
You will be gone again
Until, long after I am asleep
You'll come trudging in

Your tank is on empty
By the time you get home
Before you can say 'cold-air intake'
I'll be grown

Time is racing by
Faster than your '69 Swinger on Mickey T's
Overworked, underpaid
Missing what I really need.



Mixed Media Painting
30 x 22

Friday night rolls around again and with it the premier outlet of escapism and adventure—a night at the movies. The newest big blockbuster, family film, or chick flick has made its way to your town. For only fifty cents more than you paid last week, you and your friend or significant other can purchase two hours of pure American entertainment. Whether you are forced into going as a testament of your love, or you are sneaking off by yourself to enjoy a film that requires being viewed during its opening weekend under penalty of death, the ever-hiking price of admission is well worth it; after all, everybody loves going to the movies. Shell out a few more bills at the concession stand for your large soda and extra-buttered popcorn, grab half a dispenser of napkins, locate the theater in which your film of choice is playing, spend a few moments deliberating which chair in the theater lies exactly in the middle, and you are well on your way to the optimal viewing experience.

After you spend fifteen minutes staring at ads for three different local photographers and asking yourself why you got there so early, the lights go dim and you remember exactly why you did so. Missing the previews is never an option for any serious moviegoer. Your sweaty palms grip the armrests on either side of your chair as you eagerly anticipate the one-and-a-half-minute glimpses of films to come two Christmases from now. That familiar lime-green screen blazes its way into your retinas as your mind goes on the offensive. Your mission: to guess the movie that the preview is advertising in as few seconds as possible (odds are you are easily able to do so due to your adamant internet trailer searching). Just to show off your upcoming film savvy, you lean over to whisper the title of the film to the person on your left or right. The current trailer ends and the emblems of your feature film's production and distribution companies play across the screen. Mumbles begin to roll throughout the theater as your fellow patrons realize that the rule of the "three trailer minimum" was not followed. You, however, are not concerned, for you have undoubtedly seen the probable trailers that could have been used. In any regard, the film you have all been waiting to see is about to begin.

The opening credits and title sequence have finally arrived. You begin to fully immerse yourself in the faux reality being presented to you onscreen, but you are at once interrupted. A group of thirteen-year-olds in the top row will not stop chattering to one another, completely oblivious to the fact that the movie that their mothers dropped them off and paid for them to see has started. Not wanting to appear crotchety before your time, you let it slide and inwardly rejoice when an older couple finally shushes the nuisances. Now you notice that the hairs on your arms are standing at full attention. This is not out of anticipation for the forthcoming film, but



rather because your body is attempting to adjust to the temperature of the theater that inevitably has its thermostat set fifteen degrees below the desired room temperature. Again you turn your attention to the feature presentation. The familiar insatiable hunger and unquenchable thirst that you only ever experience while nestled in a cushy folding theater chair have once again overcome you. Your arm is working at full steam to shovel the popcorn into your mouth before promptly returning for the next scoop. Fully enveloped in the movie at this point, you do not realize that you are quickly depleting your snack supply until your fingertips graze the bottom of the cardboard bucket to find nothing but half-popped kernels, crumbs, and grease. Cursing inwardly, you reach for the oversized drink in the cup holder to discover that its reserves, too, have somehow been exhausted. Your efforts to gently shake the cup in order to knock free the last spare drops between the remaining crystals of crushed ice are fruitless, despite the number of times you reposition your straw. Chastising yourself for not allowing your concessions to last longer into the film's progression, you slump down in your chair resigned to watching the remaining three-fourths of the movie sans sustenance.

Amidst your cinematic enthrallment, you are once again reminded that you are not the only member of the audience. Just as the plot jumps off and you are beginning to love and hate the various characters, a tinny, muffled reproduction of some hideous Justin Beiber song draws your attention. The song grows louder as its source is pulled from a pocket or purse, and the culprit is spotlighted for all to see by the bright white glow of her smart phone screen. To your dismay and utter disbelief, Miss World's Worst Moviegoer answers her phone to let the caller know that she will have to call her back, for she is in a movie. Your new favorite crotchety old couple comes to the rescue a second time, quieting the disturbance and restoring peace to the theater, for now.

Soon the halfway point of the movie is reached and several audience members grow restless. Somewhere in the front, a patron struggles with the cellophane wrapping on his box of sour gummy worms. Across the room, a child utilizes improper candy package opening technique as he yanks from both sides, sending the tiny chocolate pieces scuttling across the floor. The child's parent sighs loudly out of frustration over the wasted \$2.75 and rises to spend it again. Directly in front of you, a not-so-shy high school couple continues to make out, even though they have been doing so for ten minutes already. You force yourself to ignore all of these theater mishaps and return your focus to the film. However, you are soon confronted by an inward distraction, one that cannot be ignored. At this moment, you sincerely regret drinking your abnormally large soda so quickly.

Ignoring nature's call grows so painful that you cannot stand it. You are about to break the number one rule about going to the movies: never leave your seat until the film has ended. Hoping to play off of plot cues, you attempt to time your brief bathroom break at the most opportune moment. Leaping to your feet, you rush down the stairs, out the door, and into the bathroom. As

luck would have it, you encounter a father taking the least convenient chance to potty-train his toddler son. Standing by the wall with a forced smile, you grin through the pain and mourn over precious lost seconds of the film. The father and son finally vacate the facilities and you take care of business. After racing back to the theater, a sinking feeling hits your stomach when you return to your seat. The man has already gotten the girl, the bomb has already exploded, the killer has been caught, the cruise liner has already hit the iceberg, the team has won the championship, Private Ryan has already been saved, the rookie cop has saved the day, and the setup for the inevitable sequel has already taken place. Downtrodden, you rise from your seat as the lights go up and the end credits begin their ceremonial scroll. Maybe next time, you tell yourself, you will just wait for the DVD. However, you already know this will not happen, because, after all, there is no better experience than watching a movie on the silver screen.



Desiree Wheeler Rosaire

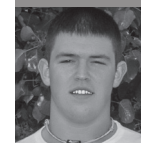


Mixed Media

18 x 24

To confuse the viewer. Is this a painting or a photograph?
If the viewer can't seem to decide, then I suppose that I've
done my job.

34



Kendrick Hardin Genteel

I love you with all my heart,
You're the piece that makes me whole.
And if only we did part,
I'd be lost without a soul.

For

The world is high above our heads,
With many things to see.
We'll travel 'fore we find our beds,
And then it's you and me...

I

Know the reason I was made,
And I know what I will do.
I was made to complete your soul,
And thus I'll marry you.

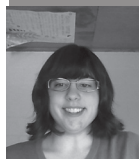
Love

Is what brings me home,
And the reason that I stay.
Because you complete my world,
You make my every day.

You

Within are true and gold,
So fresh and firm and real.
An angel in flesh to behold,
All your beauty and youth, genteel.

35



Please don't give into that dark song
That twisted voice you hear too many times
I know you can be strong, please hold on
Please don't give into that horrid rhyme

It may not be enough to help you
But know I will do all in my power
To let you know these words are true
Just please stay here one more hour

Spiritually, mentally, physically someone's there
Someone who won't scream or shout
Please let them show they care
Please extend a hand and reach out

Please stay a little bit longer
Because one day you'll become so much stronger.



Acrylic on canvas board
24 x 18

This painting is of an actual occurrence that happened to me.
I tried to capture that vivid detail that I remembered from the time.



Melanie O'Neil Smoke in the Water

38



Photograph
To be interpreted by the viewer.



Kait Scott Cascade Falls

39



Digital Photography
To demonstrate that beauty, like water,
cascades and falls at its own rate.



Danielle Osborne Ridin' Easy



Acrylic on canvas
18 x 24

This is meant as a portrait of a lifestyle. There is so much to be learned just by a person's shoes, no matter if they are boots, athletic shoes, sandals, etc.

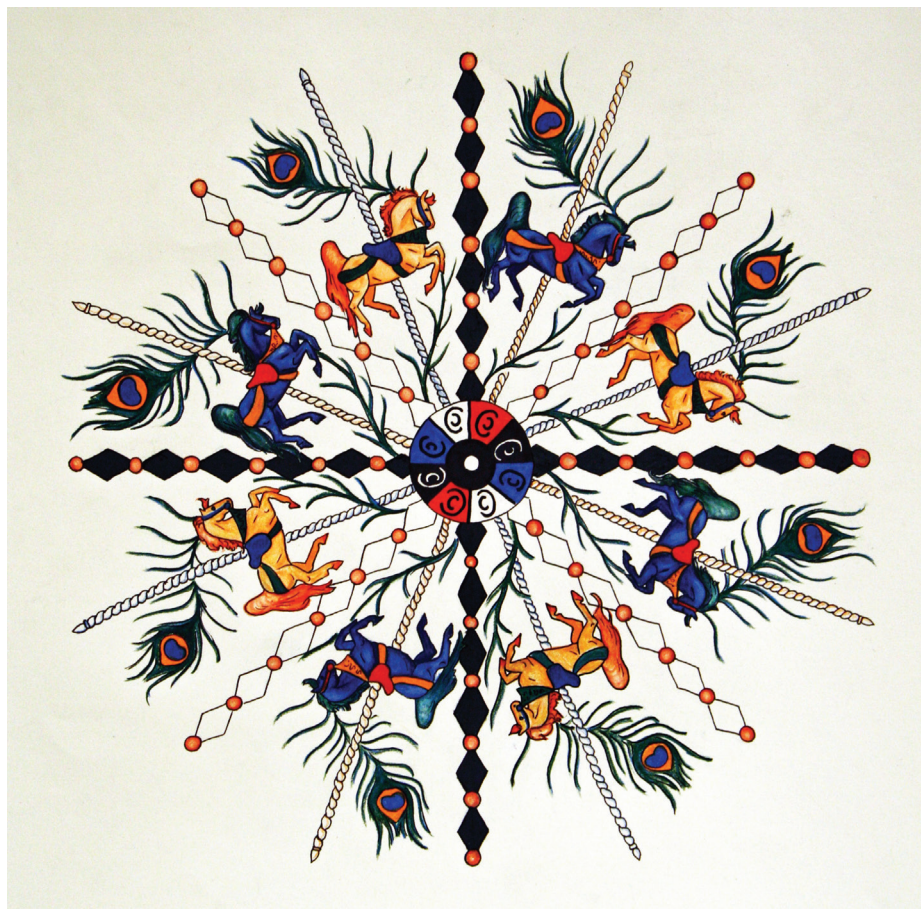


Photography

To display a chain that has been beaten by nature but continues to hold its ground. The bright rust shows that the chain is weakening, but will continue to hold for as long as it can.



Scott Francis Weather Defense

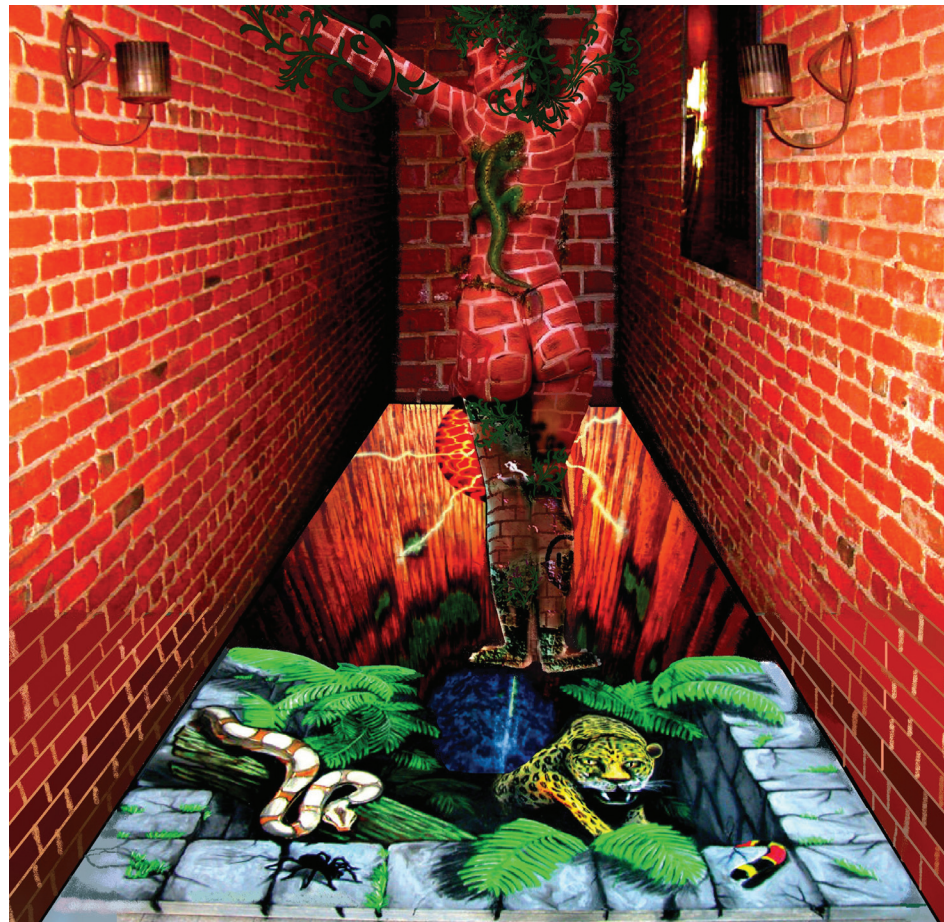


Colored Pencil and Permanent Marker on Paper
18 x 18

To create a self-representative Mandala that symbolizes my personality, character, and self as a whole.



Digital Photography
The lit up center reminds me of a sunflower.



Graphic Design

What seems real isn't what it appears to be. What was once a room now becomes sensation. Fantasy blends with reality.



Watercolors and Permanent Marker on Paper

14 x 11

To depict a whimsical, loose painting of a bushel of apples using exaggerated colors and contouring linework.



Alex Stover Drag On



Acrylic on masonite board
18 x 24
To redesign my dragon character.

46



Roy Cates FIRE & ICE



Digital Photograph
To portray that like the intense passion of forbidden love, fire and ice can coexist, albeit briefly, until one is consumed by the other.

47



Photograph
To capture a world of color in a bowl.



Quietly watching those who are sharing
their work with the room full of eager listeners
I sit and enjoy the beauty of the stories they weave.

Before long, as if from some other world
I hear my name and realize that I am being called upon
to share the work so brutally vomited on the page one night.

It had been accepted, published, and now I was to share
this private pain with my very own voice.
I shivered, borrowed a copy from the department head,
slowly made my way to the front of the room.

Smile plastered firmly on my face
speaking through gritted teeth I told my friend I had not realized I would read
that day.

Concern crossed her face as I assured her I would be all right
continuing my journey to face this room full of strangers
opening myself, most vividly, and without preparation.

Chin up, smile, nod, begin...
Three lines in, the nerves begin bubbling up to the surface
making me feel as though I am vibrating.

Six lines in, I am now beginning to visibly shake.
I've got this, just breathe...
Nine lines in, my whole body is quaking with the raw emotion of the piece,
my unpreparedness ripping open that wound so publically.

Then my head begins to jut and tremble
making it look as though Parkinson's Disease has just taken hold of me.



Pause, breathe, half way there...

She comes to me, this friend, and puts her arm around me
lending support when it seemed (probably to all) that I would shake myself to pieces;

as if limbs would, at any moment, begin to fall from my body
in the visible shudders reverberating through me,
leaving onlookers stricken, touched, and longing.

Reach out to me, they all wanted to reach out
touching the spirit that had bared all in such a visible manner.
And reach out they did as each person clasped hands, gave hugs,
thanking me for sharing my piece and giving a voice to a life they had lived.

*Thank you for giving me the strength,
this outpouring has renewed and kindled me...*



Acrylic on canvas

16 x 20

To present the idea of an alter ego through the use of simplistic figures
and values. The backdrop of this piece was used to further emphasize
the concept of separate but connected.



Beth Crocker Alter Ego





Maxwell stared at his hands the way he did every morning; convincing himself that they were not machines of war, but instruments of valor. It was flooding. He remembered what rain used to mean. It once meant holding his wife in his arms. But Amara was not here; he thanked God for that. In her last letter, she remarked that she had obtained a job at a factory designed to aid the troops. Maxwell was no soldier. Today, the rain meant more injuries. The enemy had been inching closer with every sunrise. His stomach no longer twisted when men walked in with infected chests and missing limbs. Maxwell had known for a while that his skills were needed, but it was not until the draft that he decided to follow through. He turned in his chair to see his wife standing there. He knew she was at home, but he welcomed the thought. He spoke aloud, "I miss you." She stretched her ruby lips into a smile and replied with "You've made me so proud, Max." He reached out to touch her, but she seemed to fade away. She shook her head. He sighed and walked through her. Retrieving his medical case, he walked out of his tent and into the hell of war. He checked over several bodies and ordered they be taken into the blood-spattered tent that only the lieutenant referred to as a 'hospital'.

Jacob stood with his hands behind his back. His cold blue eyes searched the horizon for any sign of the Americans. He had been leading his men toward an American base for what seemed like an eternity. His men followed like hungry dogs. He looked over his shoulder. The Man was there again. He hadn't left Jacob's side since this war began. "Will you ever leave me be?" Jacob's voice cracked with anger even in his native tongue. The Man responded with a sinister smile. Jacob knew the Man would not speak aloud, but Jacob knew what he meant all the same. Jacob slammed his fist down. The only words the Man had ever uttered aloud were when he first appeared, "Hello, Jacob." The Man had spoken just as if he'd known Jacob his entire life. He was there, and she was gone. It'd been two years now since the Man appeared. It was astonishing that his troops still followed his commands; they all believed he'd lost his mind. Loyalty must outweigh opinions in time of war.

Maxwell was treating a man with a broken ankle when he heard the call. Men were screaming. *All Men To The War Front. All Men To The Battlefield.* His heart shrank in his chest. He turned; Amara's smile had vanished. He heard the rain of gunfire. He clutched his tools and ran onto the field. His heart was beating out of his chest. He checked the unresponsive pulses of three men. He looked and saw Amara from the corner of his eye. Her eyes were stocked with pain. He looked up. "I can't do this any more." She gasped, "No, my love, don't give up! You can't give up. You joined this war

to help these men! You're a healer." Maxwell shouted, "I know!" His voice softened in realization. "I know." He moved on to the bodies of the other men.

Jacob stood with gun in hand. He commanded his men, shooting down any American that got in his way. He didn't have to look over his shoulder to see that the Man was smiling. His blood was boiling as his troops moved in on the enemy. "I will be rid of you," he chanted to himself. He could almost hear the Man laugh.

The men around Maxwell seemed to be falling around him. Then Maxwell saw him. He recognized him even from afar. His face had been plastered to the minds of every man who entered the army. His name was Jacob, the leader of the largest troop of the enemy's army. If that man were dead, none of this would be happening. His heart seemed to stop. Amara was loud. "No! Max! You vowed not to kill! You're a doctor, not a soldier!" Maxwell continued to ignore her. "Max! You can't kill a man! Come home to me as the same man you left me!" He looked down, picking up a rifle from one of the three lifeless bodies at his feet. "Maxwell! No! Stop! Don't become like them!" Maxwell marched forward.

Jacob's head was filled with the influence of the Man. It was like hearing a thousand voices at once. He couldn't think. He screamed in pain, and the voices stopped. He looked over his shoulder. The Man was gone. His burden was lifted. He turned and smiled.

Amara screamed for him to stop. Her voice was cracking. She was fading. Maxwell continued to march forward. He held the rifle as if he'd used it a hundred times before. He aimed for the heart. In a moment, he saw him smile. His fire consumed him, his finger pulled back without a thought. The bullet left his barrel as fast as it hit Jacob's chest. It was silent. Amara was gone.

Jacob lay there clutching his chest, still smiling as he stared into the majesty of a silent sky. He felt freedom. "I'm coming home," were the words that no one but him would hear. Maxwell turned to face the silent Amara. She was gone and in her place stood a man. Maxwell dropped the rifle. He looked into the man's dark eyes, but all he heard was "Hello, Maxwell."



Thomas Kendall H.A.Z.

54



Sharpie on drawing paper
18 x 24

Dim, flashing lights flickered across the plastered wall of an apartment living room and illuminated a mess of clothing strewn about an ugly brown-carpeted floor. The source of the lights, a television set out of an era where tubes were the standard, made visible a young sleeping man in his early twenties slouched on a worn sofa, his greasy, curly hair vaguely reflecting the electronic garbage that played before him. Even this late, he still wore his red work vest with a crooked nametag that read,

*“Hello, My name is **Ed Ford**. How may I help you?”*

An infomercial played a corny jingle that made Ed let out a snort and look around the room, confused. After rubbing his bloodshot eyes he looked at the VCR clock: 11:45. Amazed at how long he had slept, Ed sat up on the sofa and caused the springs beneath the cushions, cursed with a hundred years or so of rust, to scream in agony. Ed stretched every limb on his body until a subtle crack could be heard in each joint. He sat forward and stared blankly at a rerun of *The Twilight Zone*. It was the episode where a man returns to his hometown only to be sent to the past where he encounters himself as a child. Ed couldn’t think of the title of the episode, but he remembered it was the one he had watched with his father and shared a beer over in a happier time. A little smile began to form on his face as he reminisced on the days before the college bills and the job.

It struck him as odd, but Ed could not exactly remember the last time he had spoken to or heard from his family. His work had almost consumed him, drowned him. A day at the store, cleaning aisles and stocking shelves, felt like an inescapable prison, and it wasn’t just the work that slowly ate his soul. Most, if not all, of his fellow employees lost whatever made them human long ago. Drones is what they had become, nothing more than corporate drones. At least, that’s the best way Ed could describe them, perhaps the only way. But there was still something hard to single out. It was as if these people had nothing to live for. It was, in a sense, not evil but... it was nothing. They were neither good nor bad people. They were, although it frightened him to think about it at times, empty. This sense of alienation left Ed feeling like a flickering candle in the dark, wary of the least whisper of wind that would be his doom and make him dark like the rest. Indeed, he felt his own humanity slipping away little by little as he spent more and more time at the store. College, however, was not free five years ago and never would it be in the foggy, grim future he could only foresee in the form of bills being delivered weekly.

Ed’s mind had traveled immeasurable miles away from reality until his attention was broken by a muffled police siren somewhere in another world outside his apartment window. He made his way to close the window and realized the breeze coming in through the open space was oddly warm. Something about it was relaxing and brought on thoughts of pleasant times he never had. For this reason, Ed kept the window open



Todd Collins Betts Road

55



and decided to check the kitchen for junk food. A flickering bulb that tended to go out when you needed it revealed the fridge as having only a half-empty (as Ed would see it) bottle of ketchup and a pickle jar devoid of pickles. The night was young yet and he bargained that a trip to the store for some nourishment was the best choice. Besides his own personal hell, the only other store he could think of was far out of town, past a rural back road.

The crisp October air swept through him and made him shudder, mostly due to the fact that he hadn't felt weather this pleasant in a while. Ed began walking down the balcony of the third floor at Shady Valley Apartments. Along the way, he may have heard another police siren or two but was far too busy thinking to even notice or care. He continued to look down at his feet while deep in thought, but was forced to raise his head as he reached the parking lot and spotted his car by the cedar tree where he left it. His blue '74 Chevy Nova had some surface rust and took a few beatings over the years, but started up on cue as always. A few unimportant remains of a gas station's idea of a hearty snack lay strewn across the soiled brown carpet of the floorboard. They were only brought to mind when Ed was forced to shove them aside just to reach the gas pedal. He would contemplate throwing them out the next time he drove the old Nova. Of course, it would always be next time. After all, this was the car of a man trapped in a middle-class purgatory. There was no time to stop and clean a car that only carried out the function of getting him to work; no time to have fun even.

At times, especially times like these, his mind was forced to stay on one track. The track it sped down now ended in food and sleeping in on a Saturday morning, a rather comfortable destination in a world of five-hour nights. He pulled the column shifter into reverse and backed into the empty street beyond the parking area. A quick shift into overdrive and the faded piece of American muscle sped into the night, the dual exhaust pipes emitting the roars of an angry bear, hell-bent on speed and gas consumption.

Ed found the drive to be rather relaxing, especially when he left the city limits and was treated to the sight of farmlands and a waning moon contrasted against a star-lit sky. Both windows were down and the breeze felt strangely calming. Whether he would actually find something to snack on for the night or not, the trip was well worth it. There was something about trips like this that made a man think, and Ed like most young men his age, certainly had a lot on his mind. He rested his arm on the door and rounded the curves with a subconscious turn of the leather-bound steering wheel. No other cars were visible on the two-lane country road and he welcomed the loneliness. Thoughts ran circles in his mind, things that were, things that could have been. Perhaps a woman was present in those thoughts. She might have been there at least once or twice, possibly in all of them. He seemed to have forgotten her name. The constant thinking continued for Ed. He contemplated every aspect of his current situation in life.

It seems like that's always when it happens; just when you thought you were going to come to some grand conclusion, when something catches your attention. For Ed, it was one of those things you never

really think much about, but when you do notice it finally, it somehow seems like you've always had it on your mind. The thing that broke his concentration loomed in the distance, a lighthouse signaling a desperate mariner to its mysterious shores. The halogen bulbs crept onto it as he slowed the car down, and suddenly, there it was: the wooden sign that read, *'Betts Rd.'* The Nova came to a complete stall as he looked up at the sign. Covered in dead vines and leaning slightly inward toward the ditch it stood over, it stuck out severely when compared to cotemporary road signs. It was constructed entirely out of wood and was, at one time, painted white, but only a few paint chips gave hint to the fact. Ed had seen this sign several times, but didn't bring it into consciousness until this very night.

The car's idling engine rumbled on as he thought to himself. He wasn't hungry anymore. A new need had to be met. A quick shift into drive and Ed found himself slowly creeping down Betts Road. Gravel crunched under his worn tires as the Nova made its odyssey into the dark. Some part of Ed's mind thought it strange to travel down such a path this late, yet another part seemed to be taking over, the part of his mind that grew tired of the depressed thoughts about working too much and getting nowhere this young. That part of Ed's mind wanted adventure and opportunity, and, by God, there it was knocking: a road that time forgot, a road older than the invention of asphalt.

Indeed, it felt like Ed had entered a different time all together. There were no power lines or telephone poles in sight and the forest around him only got thicker and thicker. Something about the atmosphere of the place exhilarated him. Sure, it was unsettling in one way, but in another, it was a change of pace for Ed. What the hell was down this road? Why wasn't it paved like the others? Curiosity had full control by this point, curiosity and... what was that other emotion? A painfully confusing feeling of familiarity crept into his disturbed mind. He allowed the car to speed up slightly, but not so much that he couldn't stop fast enough when necessary. As he turned a corner, there was a hilly clearing with what appeared to be an old abandoned church dead in the center. Ed slowed down as he passed the Church, an ominous object looming in the dark, perhaps as ominous as God himself, or the devil. It was covered with poison oak vines and the roof had caved in in several places.

While staring at the church and not paying attention to the road ahead, something in the corner of his eye stopped his heart. He immediately looked forward and only caught a glimpse of a black figure barely missing the front of the car and running off into woods on the left. Ed let out a "Jesus!" and slammed on the brake. The vehicle slid through the gravel and the rear end fish-tailed into the grassy area beside the church. His heart was throbbing out of control and sweat beads began to form on his forehead below his unwashed hair. The position the Nova was facing allowed the head lights to shine on the wooded area where the figure ran. Ed, breathing heavily now, scanned the area frantically. That's when the engine died and the lights went out. "Shit!" He turned the key over and felt a lump in his throat when nothing happened. The battery was deader than his social life. The only sound detectable was that of his heart fluttering now. He opened the glove compartment and found a flashlight he had put there in another life. As if being remotely surprising, it, like the car, was dead. Ed's only solution



was to hike back to the main road and flag somebody down who could jump off the battery. He looked out the windows at his surroundings. The church was about forty feet away, illuminated only by the waning moon. The outside had a bluish glow that showed its wooden exterior while the inside, veiled in darkness, seemed to house some unknown hell. It wasn't something he was dying to do, but Ed opened the car door and stepped out onto the grass.

He made for the road, hoping to avoid the church if at all possible. It was so silent outside that he almost cringed at the sound of the gravel crunching under his shoes. The sound echoed through the trees and the corpse of the church. He couldn't help but turn and look when he was in front of the former house of God. The windows were busted and the front door hung wide open on its last hinge, exposing its dark and unsettling interior. He couldn't help but marvel at the architecture of the building, despite the feeling of desperation that had grown within him. Ed could only guess that the church must have been erected sometime in the 1930's. Maybe it was fear, but a sick feeling came over him and he knew he had to leave. He began moving fast up the road but stopped short when he heard a telltale snap of a twig somewhere in the wooded area across the road.

"Hey!" he cried with a quivering voice. "Anybody there?!"

No reply.

"Please, my car has broken down, and I think I almost hit somebody."

Ed moved closer to the other side of the road and peered into the woods. The sick feeling returned and his skin felt like it was on needles. He slowly turned around and looked back at the church. He nearly died when he saw a figure standing in the doorway. It was too dark to make out any definite facial features, but Ed could tell the man was wearing a fedora and a raincoat.

"Sir! Can you help me please? My car battery is dead."

The man gave no reply. He just stood there, almost like a prop in a play.

"*Can you hear me?!*" Ed raised his voice but it only came out in a raspy pant.

Ed's body was covered in sweat and he began to hyperventilate from fear. At that moment, a flash caught his eye's attention, and he turned to see the Nova's lights on. He had left the key in the ignition and the battery must have kicked back on somehow. Amazed and slightly relieved, Ed turned back to face where the figure stood. As if he was a torn seam in the physical world that had been repaired, the man had disappeared. Ed ran frantically back to the car, got in, and immediately locked the doors and rolled the windows up. As always, the Chevy cranked up and let out a welcoming crackle from the exhaust pipes as only its eight-cylinder engine could emit. Ed put the car in overdrive and sped out of the grassy area, causing the low-tread tires to throw mud behind him. He pushed the car to a dangerous speed for such a road and didn't let off the gas until he reached the intersection that brought him back to the smooth asphalt-covered roads of rural civilization. Never again did he want to return to that damned place. Hell, he found his job more comforting. It wasn't just the fear he had experienced;

there was something about the old church on Betts Road that made Ed's head physically ache when he thought about it. Still feeling frantic, Ed felt some coffee would calm his nerves.

The old clock at Frank's Diner read 1:15 as Ed sat at the bar sipping coffee from a blue mug. He couldn't seem to calm himself down after what he had experienced, and the coffee tasted like shit. Looking to take his mind off of the strange incident prior, he gazed at his surroundings. The atmosphere in the restaurant was relaxing compared to what he had previously witnessed. Behind the bar was a window to the kitchen where he could hear the clanking of pots and sizzling from meals being prepared. The door that led to the kitchen flew open and the waitress for the night stepped out, a large middle-aged woman with too much makeup on. All these things seemed to help Ed regain his sanity and feel like he was back in the normal world where people didn't disappear when you spoke to them. Frank's Diner also had an assortment of old black and white photos hung on the walls to give a sense of the small town's history since at least the early 1920's. Ed believed staring at these for a while would help ease the tension.

He saw people with new cars, young couples, and other things one would expect from the greatest generation. The waitress handed him his check for the coffee and he got up to go to the restroom. The black and white pictures continued down the hallway that led to the restrooms. Ed viewed them as he walked along and stopped quickly after seeing one in particular. It was slightly worn, but he could still make out a church. The church was fairly new in the photo and painted white. The top of the church had a large sign that read, '*Betts Baptist Church.*' While he would normally be surprised to find a relic from the past he had experienced in the present, the church wasn't what caught Ed's eye. There, in the doorway of the church stood a tall figure wearing a fedora and a brown raincoat. The figure stood under the shade of the church's awning and was barely noticeable, but he was the first thing Ed saw in the photograph. Ed choked on his own spit and backed away from the picture immediately, hitting his back against the other pictures on the wall behind him. Sweat began to form in his armpits and under his brow. He ran back to the main dining area. The waitress was cleaning a table. Ed spoke loudly, "I need you to tell me about one of these pictures in the hallway."

"Kid, I can't help you much; I only work here," she retorted.

"Please, just take a look. I need to know something important."

"I'll help if I can but no promises." She sounded slightly annoyed.

Ed brought the waitress back to the photograph of the church. "What can you tell me about this?" he said, pointing to the worn picture.

"I can't tell you how old this is, but that's the old church on Betts Road."

"Can you please tell me who this man is?!" Feeling agitated and shaky now, Ed pointed to the man in the coat and hat.

"Well I be damned! I never noticed that man before. I'm sorry, kid, but I don't know nothin' about any of these old pictures. They just put 'em in here for some kind of aesthetic purpose."



"I need to leave," he said quietly, not even realizing he was speaking his own thoughts. Ed walked quickly toward the entrance, dropping a handful of change on his ticket for the cup of coffee along the way. He let the door slam behind him, and the old muscle car could be heard pulling out of the parking lot as a penny of the change he left rolled off the bar and hit the floor. The waitress, confused by the young man's reaction to the old photograph, made her way to the bar to collect the money. As always, there was no tip. On her way to the cash register, she stopped by the window to the kitchen.

"Carl, there somethin' wrong with that kid."

Carl, a bald-headed man with only a couple of teeth left behind his cracked lips, looked up from the grill and said, "It's these damn teenagers. They're all smokin' pot these days."

"I don't know, Carl. It was somethin' else. Almost like.... almost like he was... empty somehow."

Carl let out a chuckle that eventually broke into a coughing spell. "You's somethin' else, Velma!"

Ed pulled the Nova into the parking lot of Shady Valley Apartments and parked near the cedar tree. He went up the balcony to the door of his apartment, unlocked it, and stepped inside. Relieved to be home after the night's ordeal, he clicked on the light switch to the left of the door. A shock went through him as he peered at the empty room before him. Everything was gone. There was no furniture. There was no television. There was no refrigerator. There was simply nothing. Ed felt like a mariner surrounded by nothing but empty sea. The albatross around his neck would have been the road sign to Betts Road. Ever since he had gone down that damned road, this night had turned upside down.

He made his way into the bedroom to check whether his belongings there had been taken or not. As he expected, everything was gone. The bed had even been taken. Confused and, by this point, infuriated, Ed turned back to the front door which he had left open. His heart sank when he saw the man in the fedora in the doorway. This time, fear had turned into anger. The strange man was a prime suspect in this mess. Ed knew he held the answer.

"Who the hell are you!" Ed didn't even try to hide the anger and hatred in his voice. The man turned and walked away from the entrance and out onto the balcony. "Wait!" Ed chased after him. That son of a bitch wasn't going to pull off a disappearing act this time. Ed stopped at the edge of the balcony and searched frantically for the man, but he was nowhere to be found. Ed ran out into the parking lot and spun around, still looking in every direction. The figure had eluded him completely. Gathering all the sanity he had left, Ed made his way to his car at a normal pace. Questions made laps around his brain, and he knew where to find the answers. It was the last place he would want to look for anything.

The Nova's headlights pierced through the forest of Betts Road at about 40 miles-per-hour and pulled into a patch of dirt and gravel next to the old church. Ed got out of the car, this time armed with his flashlight. He had bought some batteries from a gas station on the way there. The flashlight shone brightly, but compared to all the darkness that surrounded him, it was like taking a pocketknife to the Battle of Gettysburg. He stepped inside the church and looked around. There were only three pews left and a large wooden cross on the wall, which, as if to complete some demented symbolism, was hanging

upside down. Ed sat down on one of the pews and stared out of one of the many-busted windows that lined the walls of the building. He laid the flashlight down on the seat next to him. It shone on the upside-down cross.

He shouted, "I'm here." He waited a few seconds and spoke again, "You've been following me. Well, here I am! What do you want from me?" A minute passed with no reply. The warm air had turned cold, and Ed began to wonder what time it was.

Suddenly a deep voice broke the silence, "I've been watching you carefully, Edward."

Ed jumped in his seat and grabbed the flashlight. He spun around in the direction the voice came from and saw the man standing in the doorway.

"How did you get my name?" Ed's voice was barely above a whisper. His hands shook violently.

"I know all, Edward. I see all."

"What the hell do you want with me? *Did you rob my apartment!?*" Ed was trying to shout but it came out as a cry. Tears were beginning to slide down his cheeks. He still couldn't make out the man's face, and if he wanted to attack, Ed was backed into a corner.

"Don't be frightened, Edward. I've been watching you since you returned here."

"What do you mean returned? You were watching me the minute I arrived. I nearly hit you with my car. Is this some sort of sick revenge?"

"Revenge is not in my nature, Edward. I carry out the tasks of my master, and since you returned to your place, you have been of interest."

"*What are you talking about?!*" Ed began crying uncontrollably. Everything felt wrong somehow, as if he had forgotten who he was.

"Do you like your job, Edward? Working among those ghosts? Those empty people? I understand though. They always make their own realities."

"*Tell me who you are!! Show yourself already!*"

The man began walking slowly toward Ed. Ed tensed every muscle in his weak body and prepared for the worst. As the man got close, Ed tried but still couldn't make out any facial features. He soon realized why. The man in the fedora and raincoat stood five feet away from Ed. He shone the flashlight on the man's face and let out a gasp. He wanted to scream badly but couldn't find his voice. The man had no face. There was nothing but blackness, a strange and hollow blackness. Despair gripped Ed with a tight, bony fist and squeezed him till pain was all he could feel in his brain. He could not put into words what was happening. Reality and sanity had left him long ago.

"I think it is time you knew, Edward. I think you are ready to stop living the lie." Ed couldn't speak. He felt as though he would throw up. "I want you to close your eyes."

Ed couldn't help but follow the man's orders. After all, an answer to all this madness was the only thing that would make him sane again. Ed closed his eyes slowly and felt a strange shift outside of him. He opened his eyes to find himself outside. He looked around. The waning moon still hung over the



world and the stars were as bright as ever. He could see the church steeple loomed over a hill in the distance. Ed gathered that the man must have taken him farther down Betts Road.

He turned around and found himself at the edge of a deep ravine. The road curved around the ravine and there were no rails to protect unlucky drivers. There, on the edge of the road, sat a wooden cross with a bouquet of plastic flowers beneath it. He slowly walked up to it and, after reading the name written across it, knelt down on his knees. It read, “In memory of Edward P. Ford.” A lost memory flashed through his mind. He was in the Nova. He turned onto Betts Road. He had that sense of adventure, and it was only heightened by...drunkenness. An empty whiskey bottle sat on the floorboard. He felt like driving fast that night. The vision went dark, but suddenly Ed remembered how long it had been since he saw his father and his family. He remembered he had a girlfriend. He had lots of friends. He had a life. He could remember his greatest fear: wasting time.

Ed had stopped crying. He remained on his knees. The strange man approached him from behind.

“You returned, Edward. You broke the cycle and returned based on a need for change. You remembered who you were. The dead do not often make that decision. They live in a twisted reality fueled by their fears. Since you returned, you deserved to know the truth. Now that you know the truth, are you ready to ascend?”

The man put a hand on Ed’s shoulder. The hand felt cold and lifeless. Ed simply stared forward into the ravine and nodded. In an instant, they were both gone.



Charcoal on Paper

24 x 18

To create a photo-like resemblance of the subject matter: a rose, cow skull, glass vase, deer antler, etc.



Carly Christiansen The Rustic Romance

63

62



Ivan sat on a log in the middle of the empty, dry Mississippi River. He glanced about and spotted a raft stuck in the crusty mud on the side of the bank. It had been a long time since Huck and Jim had been on that raft, and Ivan wondered if they would ever ride it again. The sky was grey—almost to the point of being black—and everything around him was either dead or dying. This was the mighty wasteland. This was where stories came to die.

Ivan heard a distinctive flutter of wings overhead as a raven swept down from the sky and perched on the log beside him. This was one of Ivan's oldest friends who had come to pay him a visit. The raven could travel back and forth between the land of living stories and the land of dead stories. He came to visit Ivan often, and, though he wasn't much in the way of conversation, Ivan enjoyed the company.

"Well, my friend," Ivan said to the raven as he held his arm out, allowing it to hop along his jacket sleeve and take rest on his shoulder. "People just aren't reading as much any more." The "Ode to the West Wind" started to blow, sending a brief chill down Ivan's back. "Are things picking up in your realm yet?" he asked the raven.

The raven gazed forward at the dry river and said: "Nevermore."

People had gone through long dry spells of not reading before, but this one was different. Ivan feared it would be permanent. People were still reading Poe—his more popular material at least—but the raven's realm was becoming increasingly filled and overrun with forgettable stories. They would be living and thriving for a short while, ending up in his realm shortly thereafter. Most of the characters that came to his realm to die were flat and one-dimensional, having been a part of sub-par stories. Ivan had hope that someday one of these new characters would be something more—something compelling enough to inspire the people to read again. That some of the better stories would be resurrected through this inspiration and the classics would stop making their way to him in droves.

Ivan stood up with the bird on his shoulder and began to walk the dry river, passing the graves of those who had passed into his world. Every so often, a new character was chosen to be the guardian of this realm and the realm of living stories. Ivan could never figure out why he had been selected.

Ivan had been created in a man's typewriter in the 1930's but had only existed for about two paragraphs. The author had given up mid-page, crumpled up the paper Ivan was on, and thrown him in the trash. He never wrote of Ivan again.

Ivan had no back story. It had never been written. He had no idea who he was or where he'd come from. All he'd known was that on a dark and stormy night he'd been sitting in a bar in Seattle, drinking a glass of scotch, and waiting for the woman of his dreams to walk through the door. The woman had never shown up. Ivan didn't even know her name. But the author had described her in Ivan's thoughts; she was gorgeous, and Ivan would always love her.

Ivan stopped in front of her unmarked grave. He paused, only briefly, and was overcome with grief. Ivan continued his stroll with his small feathered companion and stopped in front of Guy Montag's grave. "You know," Ivan said to the raven. "Bradbury was frighteningly accurate in his dystopian prediction. Except the government never had to censor literature; the people willingly gave it up." Ivan continued his walk through the graveyard that seemed to stretch an eternity. "I believe your world is lost, my friend."

One last time the raven replied, "Nevermore," and took flight, leaving Ivan alone in the graveyard in the middle of the Mississippi.

Suddenly, the ground below Ivan's feet began to vibrate, and there was a low rumble in the distance that sounded like thunder. Ivan quickly ran to the great Mississippi's shore just as a wall of water crashed down behind him. In the blink of an eye the Mississippi River was alive again and flowing towards the land of living stories. Ivan looked in the distance and could see Huck and Jim on their raft floating towards adventure. A smile slowly grew and spread across Ivan's face as he watched them pass. A young boy of nine-years-old, living in Farmington, New Mexico, had discovered a dusty copy of Mark Twain's classic on his grandfather's bookshelf. Ivan knew that the boy was about to embark on a great adventure with old Huck Finn that he would never forget. Ivan felt a happiness and joy stir in his heart, thinking: *Perhaps there is hope yet.*



Mary Kathryn Day Decisions

66



Digital Photography
To capture her essence in black and white.



Jennifer Parrish Academia

67

Zombies walking to their next destination -
some swiftly, some slowly, as black
plumes float across the ground
in the descending sunlight.

Weariness has set in
where once was enthusiasm
to devour the knowledge of
the brains available.

Joviality has gone
and smiles with it -
just lumbering and the blank
staring faces of those
who bide their time.

Half-way
just about half-way through
at least this time around -
though they will be tested
before being released from this state.

Existence beyond
this restless pursuit
bears down as well -
it is in their faces, their
eyes, their sluggishness.

Moments pass
like hours with mind-numbing
clarity as cramming becomes
the latest buzz word.

Some will fail in this endeavor;
most of them will succeed -
at least enough to pursue
another round of the game.

Relief as the game
comes to a close once
again and the living stride
down the sidewalks
once more

Talking of plans for their break,
and the next round of the game;
forgetting for a while how taxed
they had really become.



Belinda Barker The Crash

68

no fuel, no wind, no wing
no safety in her sky
she braces for the final crash
the countless combat missions have left her

no safety in her sky
the earth rising up to meet her
the countless combat dives have left her
the jagged-edged memories of a cracked looking glass

the earth rising up to greet her
she braces for the fatal crash
the jagged-edged memories of a cracked looking glass
no fuel, no wind, no wing



Graphic Design

To capture the feelings of wanting to be free from a deep sadness
but always being trapped by self-doubt.



Zachariah Dickson Tree Woman Universe

69





Daniel had almost fallen asleep staring through the sky and passing smoke ribbons of Memphis at Octavius when his older sister, Virginia, started puking off the side of the boat.

"Here sweetie, try and lie down and close your eyes," their mother said, wrapping Virginia in a blanket and laying her down on the polypropylene-carpeted pontoon floor.

"How much longer until we get there?" she asked her husband almost bitterly. They had left the duck blind six days ago. That morning a teenager with a shotgun tried to break in. Howard shot and killed him before he took a second step through the door.

"Another hour or so," Howard said, steering the boat into the channel. They had been going down the river for hours. Howard had found a thirty-acre island on a state park map and hoped it would be a safer place for the end of the world.

Virginia, with her eyes closed and half hysterical, rocked on the floor of the boat and mumbled prophetic psychobabbles about limbo and Cody as her mother watched over her with sunken, watery eyes. Virginia lost her virginity to Cody when she was fourteen, she had been in love with him ever since and always would be. Cody had been her boyfriend for three years, but six months ago he attended the Mt. Zion Church suicide service with his parents. The congregation of Mt. Zion, like nearly all of the other endtime churches, believed they needed their spirits to leave the planet before it was eaten so that their souls would remain free and not become a part of Octavius. Before the suicides of all the members of Mt. Zion, they would go door-to-door with pamphlets and exit bags as community outreach. Many souls were saved.

Daniel watched his mother cry from the back of the boat. She had been like that since the last time she had seen her mother, father, and brothers. This was right before they all lay down and passed around bottles of Nembutal until they all slipped off into oblivion, dead on the living room floor.

Daniel was almost asleep watching his mother cry when the boat slid onto the soft bank of the island.

"Get the tents and follow me," his father told him. Daniel followed through the thick brush and wild thorny vines onto the island.

"I'm setting up the tent. Go get the blankets and bring your mother and sister here. And watch out for snakes." Daniel did what he was told. Daniel knew how to talk fine, but he never spoke with anyone, he listened. Daniel thought about his father shooting the teen-aged boy on the way back to the boat. The teen shot the knob off the door and walked right in, not expecting Daniel's father to shoot him in the chest. Daniel remembered the teenager firing a shot into the ceiling before flinging his hands tight to his chest and falling hard onto the plywood floor. His screams turned to howls, then to squeals, and then drowned in a thick gurgle as his legs kicked hard against the floor for a few moments.

Howard was clearing a spot for a fire when they returned.

"I think Virginia and Daniel probably need to eat something," Kathy said, dropping sticks and dry leaves for the burn pile.

"We need to save the food we have," Howard answered, breaking a branch into pieces over his knee. "Besides, we are surrounded by food. Just give me a little while and I will catch us something to eat. Get the fire started and keep it going. And keep an eye on her."

Kathy and Howard were radicals. They chose to have children, in a world on a path of almost certain destruction. Ten million women died during the sixty-five million abortions the same year Daniel was born, he was one of the last children on Earth. Everyone was political and leaderless in those years, and abortion was the only way. Loopholes were found in religious texts and the doctors lined up to abort or kill the fetuses, children, and women.

Everyone was a doctor. They called it playing doctor. You could play lawyer; the courts were a riot of a joke. You could play police officer; uniformed and masked vigilantes unflinchingly shot, beat, and killed anyone who stole something or pissed them off. If you had enough goods they would kill a 'suspicious family,' a 'pest,' (male teenager) or an 'arsonist' and send you a video as confirmation. The arsonists would scale the walls of upper-class estates and burn them to the ground. Money circulation worked like a junior high baseball card trade. Housing was cheap, everything was a 2-week timeshare run by a growling slumlord with red eyes and a shotgun for a mouth. The doctors were cheap and dangerous, but there wasn't any medicine. Food was very expensive, all of it jarred, imported, stolen, and questionable. Most people played something for other people to make money. Howard played a paleontologist, a musician, and an educator. People didn't have to play something for money, because you could always make money; cleaning someone's house, delivering a message or package, dumping toilets, and there were always old women who would pay for someone to talk to and old men who would pay for someone to suck their dick. Kathy played a forest ranger, a dancer, and a children's doctor. They were poor.

Howard and Kathy were followers of Bobby Wildflower, who was a community leader in their area. He told his followers that the planet wouldn't get eaten; it would pass us and eat Mars. There were videos sped up a thousand times that did show its head tilting slightly, theoretically watching Venus for several hours a day. He said that the only thing we must worry about is that it turns around. He said that the Earth was not going to end, not now, not from this. He said that the world needs children or mankind would not survive self-destruction. He said this because everyone was too scared to face themselves living on a planet while it floated into a mouth of blue-bolting-magnetic flames; so they didn't have kids and they killed themselves at the end of a bad enough day. They started about ten years ago, the suicides, a thousand the first month, five thousand the next, ten thousand the next and then back to a thousand. Repeat. The last time the family had seen a newspaper there were thousands of them every day. Half of them were already dead.

"Now you have to pay attention to all of this. It's important that you know how to do this so you will never run out of food," Howard said to Daniel as he was rigging up the fishing poles. Daniel watched his



father catch three bream and a crappie. He watched him dress them, he watched him cook them, and didn't say a word. The whole time his hopeless and heartbroken eyes would stare into the eyes of the eater in the sky. Forty years ago astronomers discovered that COROT – 7B, a planet of the Monoceros constellation, had disappeared from its orbit. Howard and Kathy were born the following year and the world was still normal. Whatever that means.

Over the next few years pictures were taken of a free-moving mass in space. It was believed to be something of a larger orbit that hadn't been conceived or scaled, but in those days they were taking pictures of undefined masses, and the masses of people were completely oblivious to its existence. But a handful of people were already spreading the word about how it was the end of the world.

The first clear images of it were taken seven years after COROT – 7B disappeared. It looked like a giant water bear in space, rapidly getting closer to the planet every year. They called it Octavius. The orange harvest moon passed slowly in front of it in the night sky as the family watched and ate fish. It was easily two hundred times bigger than the moon, and dominated the sky. Octavius had been visible for the last 16 years, from a speck to a face with slow expression, closer and closer each day. Daniel had been staring at it, whenever he could see it, day or night; he felt like it was looking right at him. He felt like he could understand it, he had felt that way since his fourth birthday. They were all lying on blankets in the yard staring at the sky. They were all smiling and happy; Virginia had the biggest smile, with her arms interlaced between her mother and father. Daniel was lying between his father and a jar of lightning bugs, watching the candle flame licking at the wind at the foot of the blanket. He looked out to Octavius, who had been there as long as he had existed, so it was nothing strange to him. But that night, even though it was smaller than the moon then, he saw a tear burn down and off its face. Daniel believed it was crying. He believed that it was watching him, that it was watching everyone and crying, for us. In that moment, Daniel felt the love of a family for Octavius and he believed that someday he would miss it. He suddenly felt the pains of losing a loved one for the first time in his short life. He rolled on to his side; there was a new pain in his center. He released the lightning bugs from the jar and quietly cried himself to sleep.

Howard had to get back to Virginia to keep an eye on her. He wanted to make sure she was ok and not hurting herself. He wished that she would get on board with the world not ending, but she knows it will. She is quite possibly the saddest girl on the planet. She hadn't been sad all of her life; Howard and Kathy sheltered her from the likely possibility that the world was going to end for the first six years of her life. Virginia believed that no one was going to die any time soon and that everyone would get old and have babies that got old, but then she met Cody and learned that the future is fiction. Howard and Kathy were ok with the relationship, because they had been friends and contemporaries with Cody's parents back in the Bobby Wildflower days. But then Virginia started wanting to go to church.

Both Kathy and Howard forbid it. Howard also forbid Virginia to see Cody from then on. She saw him though. She would sneak out at night or early in the mornings and would stay gone for days at a time. She went to church, but Howard and Kathy told her "No," and locked her in a closet for good measure.

She missed the suicide. She lost the people that she loved most, without saying goodbye, and she was still alive and certain that the world would end. She hasn't said a word directly to anyone since. She picked up a pistol, put it to her head and shot herself with it a few days ago. It was unloaded, but she did it. Click. And during one of the last nights they lived in a house, they were awakened in the middle of the night to the engine revving in the carport. Virginia was all crying and snotty, rocking up and down on the gas pedal trying to poison herself. Octavius ate Saturn the next day and everyone went crazy.

The family sat around the fire and ate fish. No one said anything; they all stared at the ground, only occasionally looking over their shoulders except for Daniel, who stared right at Octavius, whose toothy smile was taking up almost a quarter of the south, stretching and fading to the other side of the world.

"We should be able to see it pass around sun up," Howard said casually, "I say we get some shut-eye so we can be fully awake when it does pass."

"There is no way, no way, I am going to sleep. I do not want to wake up after we have been swallowed and you have no idea when that thing is going to be here. You don't know anything, so stop pretending!" Kathy snapped, bursting with tears and sobbing fits.

"Please..." Howard moved to her like a pouting child, "let's not fight. You're right, I don't know, this could..."

"Shh."

The wind blew in long and isolated gusts that came from all directions. They heard gunshots, near and distant, the loud lake waves slapping the banks of the island, and the trees popping and snapping apart in the twisting winds. The sky flickered with magnetic storms in waves of brilliant red, blue, purple; and green clouds of streaming light passed over them. Then they saw it. Darkness moved over the Northeastern skies. It seemed to be the roof of the mouth. They looked around at one another and came together to lie next to one another on the blankets. They cried together.

"I'm sorry," Howard said, with his palms pressed to his forehead. Virginia sprang from the blanket.

"There's still time!" she said pulling a pistol out of Howard's bag. She put it to her head and pulled the trigger. Click. "Just give me the bullets, there's still time."

"I'm not giving you any bullets!" Howard said desperately upon receiving a sense of agreement with Virginia from Kathy.

"But don't you see it? They were right about it. They were right about everything. And if we don't get out, our souls will be trapped in here forever. You can't keep me here!"

"That's not going to happen! Don't be ridiculous, this is not the time or place!"

"Fine, you won't tell me where they are, so I guess I will just have to find them." Virginia said dumping out bags and throwing them in the fire.

"You're not going to find them." Howard said as his hands jumped into the fire to retrieve a bag of fabrics.

"Ah ha," Virginia said, reaching to take it from him.



“No, Virginia! I can’t let you do this,” he said, backing away from her, holding the bag close, welling up tears, “please don’t do this, Gin. Please, please, please, don’t do it to us.” Howard clumsily fell against a tree and Virginia quickly snatched the bag from his hands and started fishing for the bullets. Darkness was rapidly engulfing the sky and the four winds were swirling all around them. They felt like skeletons. Virginia placed a bullet in the chamber shaking violently and murmuring. Howard and Kathy screamed and looked away.

“Look!” Daniel said, pointing up at the Octavius sky.

The Sun was rising and stretching its wonderful and warm rays across the western skies as the trees waved in turbulent joy. Octavius was floating over them; it was passing them by leaving behind a trail of tiny blue, green, orange, yellow, and red comets that rained down from above. A large and slow-moving bright white meteor with a gray and black tail was among the last to fall. It shook the ground when it struck. Virginia ran to her father. It had passed them, they were going to live. A new world was beginning.

They lay on the blankets, eating the food they were saving, and watched Octavius pass by. It was growing smaller and smaller with every hour, and soon enough Octavius would return to a little speck in the dark to planet Earth. For the next three days on the island the family smiled, laughed, and ate all of the canned food they could stand. One day, while his family was sleeping, Daniel watched Octavius like he did every morning. He was saying goodbye. Octavius rose next to the sun, long ways, four times its size, and it was spitting green light onto the sun.

Octavius’ mouth opened and the sun went inside of it and disappeared. There was light for a few moments, but it started getting darker rapidly and in a matter of seconds everything had disappeared. Daniel couldn’t see anything, less than zero plus nothing, so much nothing that it pained Daniel’s mind to hold his eyes open. So he closed them. It was worse than being blind because he could actually see all that darkness. He thought about waking his family, but he decided to let them sleep. Daniel felt the earth tremble beneath him and then felt nothing below him at all. He had left the ground. The air began to feel heavy and thick. Daniel had almost fallen asleep looking at the distant blinking stars when he heard his mother taking deep and panicked breaths, trying to speak.

“It’s ok,” Daniel said to her.

“What time is it?”

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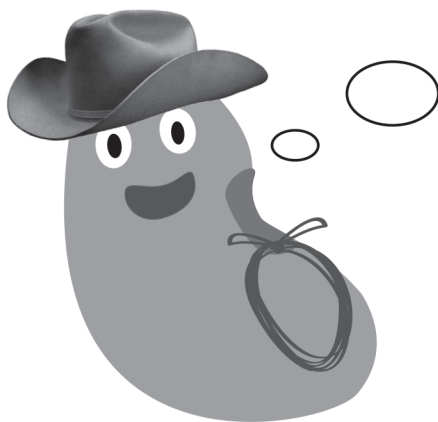


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