

Life Goes On

The room smells like mud. Mud mixed with the scent of lavender coming from my incense. Light pours through the floor to ceiling windows of the studio. From the tenth floor of the building, you can see the variety of faces Brooklyn has to offer. Snow that was once clean and untouched is now crushed under the weight of thick soled boots. The wooden floors have a cold bite beneath my bare feet. My calendar book lays open on the large table in the middle of the room. Empty dates fill the month of December, the only square with any writing being the eighteenth, today.

“Okay, I’ve still got a few hours”, I say to myself.

I walk down the spiral staircase at the back of the room. The stairs lead to my two bedroom apartment. I enter the master bathroom and turn on the shower. Steam fills the small room as the water heats up and I undress. I look into the mirror before stepping under the stream. My beard is a little uneven. My eyes still clouded with sleep. I know I haven’t been sleeping enough. It’s been this way since March. Nightmares shake me awake in the middle of the night. Knowing things won’t be changing anytime soon, I step in the shower, hoping to wash away the residual bad thoughts.

As I step out of the shower and re dress in my wool sweater and denim overalls, I walk into my kitchen, seeing a yellow envelope on the countertop. An envelope that has been taunting me for months. Before I can pick it up to, maybe, through it away, there is a ringing from the intercom in the studio. I rush down the stairs, not expecting anyone to be here for another two hours. I hit the speaker button.

“Hello?” I ask.

“Hi! Is this ummm, Wren Atwood?”, a female voice asks through the glitching intercom.

“Uh, yes. Yes, that's me. Can I help you?”

“I'm Andrea. Andrea Rhodes. We have our first session today.” she says.

I look at my calendar and see her name in today's square. Right next to her name says “at 11”.

She is already here despite the fact that it is only nine o'clock.

“Oh, hello. I thought we scheduled this session for eleven?” I respond.

“We did, but I had to drop my son off at school just thirty minutes ago and rush all the way over here from the Upper West Side. It would really be easier if we could start now instead of me having to come back in two hours.”

“Um, sure, that's fine. I'll buzz you up. I'm in 10J.” I say and walk away to the corner where I keep my supplies. I take out gallon buckets of clay along with my sculpting tools. I dust the spin table and lay a large gray tarp on the floor when there's a knock at the door. I open the door to be greeted with a woman in a long fur coat. Her sunglasses block her initial impression from me. I have always been wary of people who wear sunglasses inside.

“Hello, I’m Andrea. It is so nice to meet you.” she says as she lets herself in.

“So nice to meet you, Andrea. I hope the trek over here wasn’t too difficult. I appreciate you coming out here.”

Andrea chuckles and lightly rolls her eyes, “Well, it’s been forever since I’ve left Manhattan. It’s nice to explore some more. Things have changed so much since I lived here.”

“You used to live in Brooklyn?” I ask.

“Yes. I met my husband here. I was working as a barista right after college and he came in one day. Ordered a medium chestnut latte with soy milk. It’s been fourteen years and that’s still the only thing he orders at coffee shops.”

It feels weird listening to a stranger talk about their love life. Maybe I’m just bitter.

“That’s lovely... Uh, I’ve set everything up over here. I have a stool for you to sit but please let me know if you prefer a chair. You’ll be sitting here for quite a while.”

Andrea removes her coat and puts her sunglasses in her purse. I see her face sour.

“Do you mind if we turn the heat up a bit? It’s practically freezing in here.” she asks.

I keep the heat low even in the winter to save money. I think of my finances this month. I suppose I could raise the heat for a little while. Just while she’s here.

“No problem,” I say as I walk to the thermostat on the wall, turning up the heat, “it should warm up shortly.”

Andrea sits on the stool and fixes her hair, fluffing it over and over again. She looks around the studio and sees a small canvas painting hung up on the wall across from the windows.

“Did you paint that?” she asks.

I look at the painting for the first time in what feels like forever. The painting features my wife and I holding our daughter in a field of marigolds.

“No, actually. That was my wife.”

Andrea looks as if she’s happy to know that I’m married. Perhaps she thinks I’m lonely. Perhaps I am. I’m still not sure.

“It’s beautiful,” she’s right, “Do you and your wife share the studio?”

We did. “We did.”

“Oh. And what about your daughter? Is she an artist as well?”

I don’t know how to answer her without using the past tense again. Yes, she was an artist.

“Evangeline. Her name’s Evangeline.” I say as I get out my sketchbook and pencils. “She was meant to be an artist. Just like her mother.”

Andrea looks increasingly upset as I continue to answer her questions. I try to ignore her furrowed brow as I sit down across from her.

“I’m just going to do a small sketch first. Just sit and let me know if you need any breaks to move around.”

Andrea nods as we enter twenty minutes of silence. Twenty minutes to think about our conversation. A conversation which just barely scratched the surface on that piece of my life. I’m almost done with the sketch when Andrea speaks up.

“My sister went through a divorce too. It’s so hard to get through.”

I don’t want to laugh, but it’s hard to feel as if the world isn’t joking with me.

“I’m sure it is.” I respond.

“There are people who specialize in divorce. Therapists, I mean. People who predominantly work with those who have gone through divorce. Have you thought about that?”

Here is a complete stranger in my studio recommending therapy to me after having known me for twenty minutes. I thought I concealed my emotions a little better than that after all this time. I

debate telling this woman my whole story, using this time to vent about all the sadness that has built up in me. I think about it... but I would prefer if she kept coming back for our sessions, and I don't want to scare her away. No matter how much she seems to be interested in my life.

"I'm not divorced, Ma'm." I leave it at that. I grab wire to create a supporting structure for the bust when Andrea speaks up again.

"I'm so sorry... for your loss." She looks about as awkward as I feel at that moment.

"Thank you. It's been just about nine months now," I know exactly how many days it has been, "and I'm still adjusting. Life goes on."

Life goes on for some. For those who are deemed to be lucky when they narrowly escape death. It feels unfair. Why I was granted a second chance when I was the one behind the wheel, I'll never know. I don't want to think about it. I never want to think about it. All I want to do right now is work. I work the wire into the proper shape for the bust.

"Now we can finally start sculpting." I say as I grab a handful of clay from the bucket. It seems as if Andrea is okay with silence now, which I appreciate.

We don't speak for another hour and a half. The room filled with the sounds of clay being broken and washcloths being dipped in water. In the middle of the silence is a loud ring from Andrea's phone.

“I’m so sorry. That’s my husband. I’ll just see what he wants.”

Andrea walks to her purse and answers her phone. I try not to listen too much to their conversation but I do hear her saying, “I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“I am so so sorry but I need to leave. Apparently my husband got on an earlier flight without telling me and he has just landed at JFK. He’s been in London for a month and says he wants to see me as soon as possible, so I need to go pick him up. I’ll still pay for a full session.”

“Of course, it’s no worries. When would you like to schedule the next session?” I ask.

“Are you available this Sunday?”

I look at my calendar book despite knowing that it’s been empty for months.

“I am. Does eleven work?”

“Perfect! Thank you so much,” Andrea collects her things and puts her coat back on, “I hope you have a wonderful day, Wren.”

I tell her the same before closing the door after she leaves. I look at the clock and see that it is only now eleven o’clock. I grab what I have so far of the bust and put it in the damp closet.

Amongst it are a handful of unfinished pieces. Pieces that haven't been worked on in months. I walk back downstairs to my apartment and see the envelope on the kitchen countertop. I pick it up and observe the writing on the back. 'To: My Sweet Evangeline From: Daddy'. I open the envelope and see the birthday card I had picked out all those months ago. Images of us in the car on the way to her birthday party flash in my mind. I close the envelope again and place it in the drawer next to the kitchen sink.

"One day at a time."