



Script

2000

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Principles of Design

I believe that the painter always begins by expressing himself with line—that is, by the most obvious means; then he becomes aware that line, once so necessary, is in fact hemming him in, and as soon as he feels strong enough, he breaks out of its confines.

—Jack B. Yeats

The canvas caught my eye from across the room and drew me in to its mass of chaotic color mixed with thick paint, wild abstraction, shapeless obscurity.

It was then that I first learned about line—
(the primary means of defining form)

It may be easier to remain locked into the pattern of closed mouthed smiles and crossed arms than admit that the old man sitting nearby on the train was, like me, wearing black shoelaces, and his head rocked back and forth with the mechanical drone, the stop and go. I wondered at what point does the bread and wine sitting on the table reach the lips, and when does one fall to one's knees and when does the line become a frayed edge.

Recipe

Mom had a recipe for steak:
buy it, salt it, broil it.
The last year I lived at home
we ate this once a week.
A quick fix.
The meat was often tough,
crisp around the edges,
and left a taste of burnt gristle
in our mouths.

Windows

She was consumed by her binoculars. She moved a chair from the dining room table to the window so she could sit comfortably for hours. It was the wooden one with the pink flowered corduroy pad her mother made that creaked every time her weight shifted, and the left leg was just a sliver shorter than the others. Three weeks later she moved the dining room table over in front of the chair in the window. The three other room chairs still sat in their places on the carpet, around the deep impressions left by the missing table.

The man across the lake composed a concerto at his front table. His fingers moved across the tiny keyboard as if they belonged. He wore glasses and he only ever looked up at the right wall. She thought he must not wear a watch, but the screen covered his wrists as he typed, she could never see his bare arms. He sat almost as long as she did, but never looked out the windows in front of his worktable. He only ever took two sips of his coffee before standing to refill it. He took the first sip as he sat down, coming back to the table from the kitchen. After a couple of hours, he looked down at the coffee next to him, took a sip and grimaced at the cold stale liquid. He blinked a lot as he stood up. At least her work didn't make the walls turn pink after watching a bunch of letters hop around a screen all day. He took the first sip of coffee again as he sat down with his fresh cup.

A girl lived in the house to his left. She sat in the window upstairs, usually reading, sometimes with a notebook in her lap. She moved around a lot more than

her neighbor, like she lived in her home. Her cat was yellow and sat at her feet, or walked up her legs and sat right in the middle of her book. She didn't have a table in front of her window, she sat in a nest right up against it in a window seat. Her porthole was cushioned with seven pillows. Sometimes she stared out of her window for a long time, just looking. The binoculars followed her eyes to see what she saw. Water. Her eyes watched the lake.

He walked along the lake. The day was long, sitting for hours at the screen typing away to finish his book. He didn't feel fueled as he wrote today, he was coming to the end and instead of feeling the relief he should, his fingers cramped and his legs stiffened under the table. The walk would do him good, get cold air in his lungs, let his legs stretch. He walked around to the end of the lake where he stopped and turned toward it. The water was still tonight. Nothing made a wrinkle or crease in the surface. He thought about the ducks, migrating away from the chill, the boats pulled out of the water onto docks, the swimsuits hidden in the backs of closets. Everything was migrating.

He turned and continued his walk until the cold got into his nose and made him sneeze. He had to go home to his house and sit back down at the table. He would stay up all night to finish his story. That's how it was supposed to happen. Giving his whole being to his writing, it was the only way to work. He knew that, and followed the rule. He'd make a new pot of coffee and sit down by the front window and stare at the screen. That's what he'd do.

Three hours later, he spat out a cold sip of coffee and moved into the kitchen to make a fresh pot. It was 4:22 am. He'd stayed up this late before, but tonight was different. Usually he couldn't force his fin-

gers to stop punching the keys, even if every letter was deleted later. Tonight, his fingers sat silently while his eyes read. He hadn't looked at the first page since he wrote chapter seventeen. He had just finished reading chapter twenty-five. He fixed himself a sandwich in the kitchen. He forgot dinner tonight. Sometimes he forgot lunch or breakfast, other times, a combination of the three.

He carried his sandwich and fresh coffee to the table, took a sip, and set it down. He checked the clock, 4:37 am. Too late to write anymore. He sat down and placed his fingers on the keys.

She didn't mind that her heater didn't work. She woke up early and sat in the window in her front room wrapped in her grandmother's wool sweater and a blanket. It was a cold morning, the lake was perfectly silent and the neighborhood was still asleep. The book in her hands was *Moby Dick*.

She held a cup of hot chocolate and Frankie sat on her feet. This was her favorite seat in the house, it was cold and cozy at the same time. She could look out at the water, and see the walkway up to her front door. The mailman and the neighbor's dog only ever came up her walk and the mailman only came about once a week.

Every house looked similar along the lake. Most had windows on the second story facing the lake. Huge windows that took up almost the whole wall. She could see forever across the lake. The water was so calming and still, it seemed like glass. If anything touched it, it would shatter and disappear. This is where she sat to read.

"How vain and foolish, then, thought I, for the timid untravelled man to try to comprehend aright this wonderous whale."

During the night, it had snowed. There was a thin dusting of white over the ground. Frankie got up and moved into the kitchen, reminding her that it was time for breakfast. If it weren't for him, she would probably miss the meal most mornings. She shuffled off to the kitchen behind the animal, leaving Ishmael and her cocoa in the window.

In the afternoon, she heated leftovers for lunch and took them to her table. She said grace, put her clean, folded napkin in her lap and took the fork from the place setting. She ate her chicken and salad slowly, taking sips of milk between bites. The binoculars were set aside during lunch, and she found herself staring out the window at the lake. Just looking at it. And the snow. The flakes were the biggest she'd seen and fell slowly, like feathers. Looking down on the ground, she saw the snow building, but on the lake, the snow melted as soon as it touched the water. The lake was not frozen yet, the flakes melted as soon as they touched the water.

She loved watching things move and fall. The snow was so pretty and perfectly white. It fell slowly and hit the ground so gently it made the whole world prettier. She noticed the movement of everything. She watched quietly and constantly, never missing her post, never forgetting her place.

The fork fell from her fingers onto the china, reminding her to finish her lunch and turn away from the window. Her lunch got cold everyday before she remembered to finish eating. When her plate emptied, she took the dishes to the kitchen, washed, dried and put them in the cupboard. Then, she walked back in, rearranged her cushion and sat down. Only then did she pick up her binoculars.

The girl across the lake ate her lunch later, in the kitchen, but the cat stayed in the window. Stretched

out as far as it could reach, the pillows and plaid blanket to itself. After lunch, she came back to the window seat and picked her book up again. Her book was fat. It was blue and hardback. She turned the pages carefully and bent her neck down toward the book resting in her lap. When the cat crawled up and laid right in the middle of her reading, she stopped and pet it before brushing him back to her feet.

The man living next door always wrote and never turned his head toward the glass. She wondered why he never looked out. When he stopped typing, he put his hands behind his head and leaned back in his chair and looked up at the blank, white ceiling of the room. He didn't even pause to notice the snow falling outside, layering the windowsill. This morning, he was not sitting when she picked up her binoculars. He looked tired when he did appear, in the same outfit he wore the day before, wrinkled and untucked. He came to his table with a new cup of coffee and pushed yesterday's cup back to the opposite end, toward the frosty window. But he still didn't see the glass.

He didn't notice the snow. He didn't notice anything at all. He just got out of bed and walked into his front room on the way to the kitchen for coffee and the heel of bread left with the crumbs in the bag. He brought his coffee with him to the computer, took a sip and placed his fingers on the keys. He was static. Nothing moved in him; his fingers, his thoughts. He was empty. He sat at his computer for forty-three minutes, looking up at the clock, counting each minute as lost. Nothing happened, so he went back to the kitchen and came back to the computer with a bowl of alphabet soup. He pushed his computer away from him and ate the words in his bowl.

He felt better. He didn't know it was so cold until he felt the hot soup drizzling down his throat. He walked into his bedroom and picked up his down comforter and the book on his bedside table. There was a layer of dust on the book. He didn't remember how long it had been since he'd picked it up. He carried them to his table, put the comforter on his lap and the book next to his coffee. The soup bowl aside, he pulled his laptop toward him and placed his fingers back on asdf jkl;. He sat for another 18 minutes. He needed one more sentence, then his book would be done. No new letters appeared on the screen. He began to stare at the cursor.

The book sitting next to him was a mystery he'd been reading before he began writing. It sat at his bedside and waited for him to pick it up, but he never did. He was too consumed in words and writing to give time to murder. Not until he finished his own book. Then he would read, but he couldn't finish. Those damn last words his fingers didn't understand. He stood up with his comforter and walked back to bed. To sleep.

She was still in the window. The moon was almost full tonight and Frankie was pacing impatient for his night walk around the lake. She pried herself from the pillows and tripped down the stairs to open the door. Before sitting down, she made cocoa in the kitchen. She wrapped up in her plaid blanket and watched the moon's reflection on the lake. The lake was calm, the reflection was perfect in the water. She closed her eyes tight and when she opened them, she thought she was looking at the sky.

It started snowing again that night. Millions of flakes draped the lake, shrouding it, like death. She sat with her head back against the window frame. She picked one snowflake out of the sky and followed it down until it landed in her yard. When she was looking down, she

noticed two small primrose blossoms along her walkway. She had never noticed them before. Now the purple stood out against the white and she saw it.

Moby Dick lay beside her, the bookmark had moved forward, nearing the end. Tonight she would finish. She went downstairs and called Frankie indoors. The pair took their places in the window and read together.

She picked up her binoculars and turned toward the window. He was sitting at his table, dressed in different clothes than yesterday, typing away. He would type just a little bit, then lean back in his chair looking at the computer for a really long time, then type a little bit again. All morning he went through this new ritual. She didn't understand.

His neighbor was still in her window. Early this morning, she was asleep, in the same place as last night. Now her cat was outside in the yard batting snow off the bushes that separated their lawns. The girl was looking out the window again, but not at the lake, she hadn't looked at the lake all morning, she was looking straight down, with her forehead touching the glass. She could see the girl's breath on the glass.

She was looking at the primroses. This morning she got the mail and stepped outside in her socked feet. Her toes, wet with cold snow, froze as she stooped over and brushed the night's snowfall from the purple spring. The snow she brushed off built a wall around the two blossoms. Keeping them alive in the cold. She didn't finish the book the night before, she and Frankie fell asleep before "The Chase-Second Day." She spent all night in the window with Frankie and Ishmael.

“It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan.” She closed the book and looked down through the snow at the growing flowers.

His cold cup of coffee still sat by his computer getting more and more stale. The room was stale. He just needed that last sentence, then the book would be done and on the editor's desk, not his front table. All morning he wrote a sentence, looked at it for ten, sometimes twenty minutes, and pushed delete until the button screamed at him. Then he wrote another and started the cycle over again. It was nine hours before he found the words. “Ain't everyone a slave?” He pushed ‘save’ and looked up. Out the window.

On the edge

I stand on the edge. The river
flies fast.
I watch,
thirsting to join
that rush of molecules
holding tight.

A Night Gone By

He stood blinking a little stupidly in the pre-dawn gray, the orange eye of the clock radio coolly insolent in the darkness. It felt so God-awful to stand, but he finally did it because he had to. Actually there had been times when he didn't have to. So drunk that to sleep in vomit was no bother till late the next day, or perhaps not even until that night when he returned to bed. He moved languidly to the bathroom of the motel room, which was new to him that night, but somehow all motel rooms were the same and to find the bathroom was no great challenge. So he was almost surprised when he entered the water closet only to trip over a folded ironing board upright against the wall and -then puke all over the hot water heater that broke his fall. He wasn't cleaning that up.

The bathroom was the other door he hadn't noticed before, just to the right of one of the cheap bed-stands that sat at either side of the motel room's queen size sandstone squares they call "comfortable" and "clean". He stumbled across the room in the direction of the boys' room, noticing a gargantuan figure and a savage grunt only enough to reflect on it later as he observed the green-brown grime on the underside of the lip of the toilet. Composing himself enough to sit on the tile floor of the shower, he wondered how he had gotten here, who and what was that thing on the bed, and why had it taken him till now to think of all this. Your immediate surroundings were usually pretty important things. Under the wrath of a massive hang-over, though, who cares about silly stuff like location.

Or if you happened to sleep with a hippo last night.

He peeked out the door of the bathroom to see what figure lay on the bed he had shared that night. The light from the bathroom seemed to disturb the beast, and he quickly shut it off only to wait for his eyes to adjust. Man, even small physical efforts like pupil dilation made his stomach churn. His eyes weren't adjusting. This sucks! he thought.

"Hiiii" said a deep groveling voice with only enough femininity to ensure that she was a she. That was at least a relief for the poor college dropout, truck-stop driver sign-in, very straight heterosexual, homophobic, highly erotic, man of his prime man. The lamp came on with the unmistakable haggled frustration of chubby fingers too big and too soft to get a good hold of the rotating switch, only to be further held up by a forearm that simply did not fit between the ample space of lampshade and lamp-neck. The figure, now silhouetted by the light from behind it, was still difficult to make out, but the olfactory senses were in good enough shape to tell of the hideousness that stood before him. Even over the rancid, overwhelming odor of his own vomit he could smell her. It's that smell of hardworking obesity; it rang of your typical b.o. combined with a mesh of urine, ass, and old saltines. She had been working earlier, and hard, too. Memories, or perhaps just sick imaginary projections, induced another projectile splurge that stuck to her T-shirt covered breasts and ran over the satirically intimidating cartoon duck under which read the phrase "I'm the Boss". His eyesight was now in enough focus to make out figures and words. Looking up would be too dangerous, and luckily the opportunity didn't present itself. For the tenderhearted girl could find no fault in him vomiting all over her best jammies, and she pulled his head into her armpit, carrying him back into the bathroom.

His neck was too limp to hold his head up, and

she tenderly wrapped her chubby hand around the right side of his cranium. He felt the remaining cramped blood vessels under his chin where, when he had thrown-up earlier, all the weight of his head had been placed. She didn't talk, and he rolled back to lean against the wall as she rose up to strip off her soiled shirt.

Oh man was it ugly. She turned her back to him when she lifted the shirt and a mass of varicose flesh was exposed. The unattractiveness of her sporadic vascularity that spotted itself all over her back was horrendous. It seemed to have at one point existed only in a deep purple concentration on her right shoulder and then exploded into the star map that now existed. Despite this unsightly mess it was not her worst feature. Two main folds existed on this beast; there were of course many rolls that kept them company, but that's to be expected. The true repulsiveness of this woman was in the stretch marks that were so bright red and greasy on the upper fold. Stretch marks typically exist on the lower fat pocket that was now slopped over a gargantuan pair of light pink panties. The upper fold, if one existed, was usually a simple doubling up of lard, but this particular one had stretch marks.

This image now firmly planted in the mind of the hung-over drunkard could not keep him from thinking of the antiquity of the fat. New fat is fresh like the pudginess of a toddler, but this fat could date its owner with all of its yellow-liver age. He heaved himself over the toilet once more and vomited. It was dry; his well was empty and the retching was painfully acidic in its aridness. This pain angered him, and he glared at her as she turned only enough to see, too shy to expose her half-naked body. Her reluctance to offer the affectionate care she had before over the privacy of such a horrid figure only incensed him further.

The door of the bathroom was cheap and hollow, not like the doors of a home, and when he thrust it open it swung quickly to a smack against the wall. His

steps to the exit were mad, but comedic in their fumbling over the waves in the carpet. He stepped outside and it burnt his eyes so dreadfully bad. It must have been at least noon, and with the lunch time traffic of Broadway, it was no time to have forgotten to dress. He quickly leaped back in and shut the door behind him.

His clothes were on in moments and she was still in the bathroom looking frightened. How can a bull like that be frightened of a small malnourished man like this? He once again stormed out for a successful second attempt. Spotting his car across the lot, he paced rapidly toward it. Then he heard the noise, the one he had been hoping he wouldn't hear, of the motel room door opening behind him. Now, if she had stayed in the room to face the inevitable it would at least have given him the rest of a good afternoon, but she was one of those chasers. He hated her now. He fastened his step, and as he turned to enter the driver's seat he made yet another fatal mistake: eye contact.

"You said you loved me. You said it in your sleep last night." She cried with portly tears welling up, just perfect for her overweight body. "I watched you sleep last night."

He turned the key and sped away.