

## By Chance

by Samantha Mae Yson

The fresh air outside the Museum of Fine Arts was so much easier to breathe compared to the stale air in the dusty basement where the lecture slash demo slash workshop was held. For the last two hours or so, I squatted, sat on the floor, leaned on the wall—anything just to keep the circulation in my legs going—all in an effort to hear whatever new style or technique this famous artist will impart. The fact that the heating controls were broken and the AC not working didn't help at all. Every time the museum personnels were asked why the AC isn't on, they would just ignore the question. Everyone in the room was soaking in sweat, which made it difficult to focus on what the artist was saying.

“Worth it, I suppose,” I thought to myself. It is, after all, a once-in-a-lifetime chance to watch a great artist at work. The lecture was followed by a short Q&A and when that was over, many of the attendees rushed toward him like lions to gazelles.

I had wanted ask him how he came up with his technique and how he got into art, but by the time I made it to the front of the line, he was already preparing to leave, apologizing to everybody, saying he had to go and catch his plane.

Feeling frustrated, I started to make my way up the stairs and out of the building. I walked towards the bench across the museum, sat down, and let out a sigh of relief. I pulled out my journal to review the activities I had planned for the day.

It was at that moment, as I was deciding what to do next, that I saw a flash of color out of the corner of my eye. It resembled a bright rainbow pattern popping out against the backdrop of sepia-toned colors. I shifted my head towards the direction of the colors

expecting to find its source. What I got instead was the setting sun shining directly to my face. I shielded my eyes from the sun's blinding glare with my left hand as I searched the crowd for the colors I just saw.

It was a rainbow tote bag belonging to a girl wearing a pair of dark blue denim jeans tucked neatly inside her knee-high boots. Her dark green winter jacket made soft swooshing noises as she walked, her bag bouncing up and down her sides ever so slightly with every stride. It was as if she was rushing to get somewhere but her movements indicated a sense of being lost accompanied by a hint of hesitation.

Her sudden appearance in the crowd reminded me of someone I knew in sixth grade, someone I have since lost touch with. I remember her as being the kindest person in the world, very independent, always smiling, always ready to lend out a hand. But it was the unique bag that she carried everywhere that I remember the most. No one can separate her from that bag, not even the end of the world. It was like she carried all her secrets inside that bag. Perhaps it was this sense of déjà vu that mysteriously drew me to the girl I saw just a moment ago. I stood up to look for her but she was already gone.

I sat back down and reached for my journal. I stared at the pages, the words blurring. I couldn't focus, her image stuck in my mind. I opened my journal to a new page and tried to recreate the scene onto the paper starting with the background. The museum building way in the back and the tourists taking photos, walking across the plaza in groups, chit-chatting, formed the background. Then I drew the girl exactly as I remembered her, starting with her curly brown hair that went down to the middle of her back, the green winter jacket, the skinny jeans, the knee high boots, and the rainbow colored tote. Why I started with the background instead of her, I don't know the reason but as soon as I had a

decent sketch, I wrote on the page some notes about the scene and a reminder to redraw it in my sketchbook.

It was already dark when I got back to my hotel room. After a quick shower and a fresh change of clothes, I took out my sketchbook, and using the drawing and notes I wrote in my journal earlier, I started to redraw the scene, this time making sure to color it properly.

Starting with a hastily drawn rough outline, I shaded the museum building in dark black. The tourists closest to the museum was shaded a slightly lighter black. The tourists after that slightly lighter still, and so on until I reached the girl. I started with her jacket, then her jeans, then her hair, coloring them as faithfully as I can. The last thing to be colored was the rainbow tote. I took my time coloring it, taking care it was shaded properly, making the colors vibrant but not too flashy, obvious yet subtle. It was to be the centerpiece and the highlight of the drawing.

I woke up the next morning much later than I planned and decided to go straight to the café next to the Museum where I plan to spend a couple of hours exploring paintings by the Dutch Masters.

I walk past the cobblestone paved plaza hoping to see the girl I saw yesterday. But it was all wishful thinking, and so when I got to the café, I promptly told the waitress what I wanted.

“Je...Je voudrais une crêpe au caramel. Et une café, s'il vous plait,” I said to the server.

I set my elbows on the table, still thinking of the girl with the rainbow-colored tote. I want to see her again.

In my day-dreamy state, I imagined the girl walk past by me. I sidestepped around the table, hurriedly trying to follow her. She walked briskly on the sidewalk and into the street. I followed her as she disappeared into the crowd, still hoping to catch her. But I couldn't see her. She was gone.

The waitress arrived with my order and I began eating my brunch. I paid and went to the Museum where I spent most of the afternoon.

There was a festival on the west side of the plaza so I decided to check it out. I passed by vendors who were selling keychains, clothes, and trinkets of all sorts. The place was extremely lively—men on stilts taking photos with children, face painters and clowns that made balloon animals, illusionists performing street magic. I had hoped to see the girl with the rainbow tote once again, randomly in the crowd. But there was no sign of her.

The next day, I woke up to the loud chime of my phone from across the room. After a quick shower, I decided to skip breakfast and head straight into town. It's my last day, my last chance to find her.

I walked back to the plaza. The festival was over and all the stalls were gone. I was impressed that they could pack up that quickly. I sat on the bench across the museum, the very same spot where I first saw her, hoping that she would walk through here one last time. I stayed in that spot most of the day, only leaving to eat lunch, but she never appeared. I waited until the sun had set, until I was certain that she wouldn't come. And then I left.

As I boarded the plane the next day, I was still thinking of the rainbow tote and its owner. *Will I really never see her again?*

School starts in two days and I needed to get used to the time zone once again.

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Mr. Smith stood in front of the class, cleared his throat, and waited for the class to be quiet.

“Welcome back everyone. I hope you had a great winter break, ” he began. “We have a new student transferring from Europe. Let’s all give her a warm welcome.” He turned to the open door. “Please come in, Caroline.”

The first thing I saw as the new student entered the room was her rainbow-colored tote.