

BLACK BIRD

M A G A Z I N E

*Wake the
World*

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Inside:
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The Baby's Room Story by Brittani McBee
Plus Artwork by Mark Rothweiler, Michelle Morlan and More

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Faces Beneath the Surface

Drawn in pencil
Mark Rothweiler

The Ghost

by Andrew D. Wilson

There's a locomotive in my chest.

A powerful locomotive bearing down the rails pulling a dozen cars. A dozen cars with one lonely occupant, one lonely passenger: the ghost of Jack Kerouac.

It screams and steams and roars and screeches. Kerouac pleads for the ride to continue. "Don't stop, don't stop, don't stop!" He says. "Move with speed with fire, burn through it burn through the night!"

There's a locomotive in my chest.

Kerouac wants to take it to the edge; to the edge of land, light, and life, and he wants to get there fast.

It pushes my chest and it burns. It keeps going and keeps me going. It roars and screams and barrels on toward the edge...the edge.

There's a locomotive in my chest and the ghost, the poet, the wanderer pleads for the journey with no destination, the journey itself, the work, the pages, the ink continues on and on until it comes alive.

I'm a mad one until I reach the edge.

I write on.

Adam's Memorial

John Flather's



The Crow

by Tom Yardley

He was in trouble with his mother but he wasn't sure how much. He explained to her that Stephen and Jordan were behind it and he just kind of followed along.

She insisted on talking to Stephen's mother, Barbara, but she had a hard time getting hold of her.

"She doesn't answer the phone," Alex said.

"What do you mean?" his mother said, her voice still stern.

"I mean she sits there on her couch all day and lets the phone ring. I saw her the other day. Stephen invited us in and the phone rang and no one bothered to pick it up."

"They just let it ring?"

"They just let it ring."

"What kind of woman is she?"

Doesn't she work?"

"She sits there all day and smokes and doesn't answer the phone,"

Alex said. He added, "I know I know I know how I shouldn't hang out with him. His mom's just, just as bad as he is."

His mother stood up straight, tapped her foot with her hands on her hips.

"I should go see her."

"Don't," he quickly said.

"Why not?"

"She won't care."

"I'll tell her what you three boys did. Then she'll care."

"She won't, I'm pretty sure."

"I'll tell her you're eleven years old

and Stephen is, what is he, fifteen? and he's making my boy do these terrible things. A young boy."

"He didn't make me do anything," he said, but regretted it. I mean, yes, Stephen is responsible. Get mad at him.

"So it was Jordan who made you?"

"I mean, I didn't really do anything at all. It was all Stephen who did it. He didn't make me do anything because I didn't do anything."

"I'm going to see her. If she won't answer the phone, I'll just go over there and knock on the door."

"I don't care about it anymore," he said. "It doesn't bother me anymore."

She looked at him harshly, looked away. She had gotten so mad. He wondered why. She shouldn't be. Stephen was right, it was nothing. It was just a bird.

It was a crow. They found it already injured. It was flopping on the ground in the forest with a hurt wing.

They stood over it speculating what could have caused its injury—what about another bird? Like they were in some kind of fight, or maybe it clipped it on a sharp point of a branch, maybe it was a land predator, a bobcat or something.

After a while Stephen took off his jacket and turned it inside out and threw it over the crow.

The crow started to flop around more and then it began to screech. Alex covered his ears.

"What'll we do with it?" he said.

"Something fun," Stephen said. "I don't know."

"Yeah," Jordan said. "But what?"

Alex uncovered his ears and stared at the jacket, which fluttered around

the ground and messed up the pine needles and sent up dirt plumes in the air.

"We could let it go," he said.

They all stared at it.

"Yeah, but, it's going to die anyway," Stephen said. "This thing won't last a day out here on the ground with a hurt wing."

"He has a point," Jordan said.

"Well what're we going do?" Alex said.

Stephen thought about it. The pine trees threw an amber shadow on the three boys.

It was quiet and they looked around and saw no one else and hardly any wildlife—a squirrel darted around under some leaves, a bird someplace far off sang its midday song.

"Let's get some string," Stephen said.

"And Jordan, get your BB gun."

"That'll never work," Jordan said.

"We could do it."

"It won't work," Jordan said.

"What won't work?" Alex said.

He budged in between them and got a better look at the flopping jacket.

"What won't?"

"He wants to tie the bird to a string and shoot it in the air," Jordan said. They looked over at Stephen. He stood considerately over the crow, rubbing his chin.

"You two go to Jordan's, quick, and I'll wait here and make sure he won't get away."

Be quick. It's going to be dark in a couple hours."

They left him there under the looming branches of the pine trees. Jordan's house was a fifteen minute run away, usually, but they made it

in about ten.

Both Jordan and Alex were excited. In between deep breaths they told each other it would never work, it couldn't, Stephen thinks of these things and he gets us into these things and they never work, it won't work.

A half hour later they were back in the woods and found Stephen in the same place. He had placed heavy rocks at the ends of the jacket so the bird had no chance of getting out from under it.

Jordan placed his BB gun on the ground and handed a roll of turquoise-colored string to Stephen.

"We need to be careful about this," Stephen said. "

What I want to do is lift the jacket just enough so that I can get hold of the thing's leg. Jordan, you'll hold down the bird while I search out in its feathers for the leg."

"Alright," Jordan said.

"Go ahead and hold it now."

Jordan crouched over the jacket and pressed down on the bulge of the bird. At first it moved frantically but it then settled down and it hardly moved but just screeched.

Alex took a few steps backward and watched.

"Hold it, hold it," Stephen said.

He removed a couple of rocks from one end of the jacket and then slowly rolled the jacket up towards the crow.

He lifted the jacket and peeked inside and looked in the black feathers for a leg.

Before he saw anything he put the jacket back down and grabbed the string, then he lifted the jacket back up holding the string between two

fingers, ready to tie it in a knot.

"This'll never work," Alex said.

"Hold him steadier," Stephen said.

Jordan pressed down harder on the crow. Stephen searched around until he found one of its legs, but the bird kept moving and it was hard to tie.

The bird wouldn't stop moving.

It took Stephen maybe thirty minutes to tie the string, until he felt confident that the crow was connected firmly to it, with little chance of the string breaking.

He smiled a little and said, "Holy shit," and he re-placed the jacket on the bird and crept away. Jordan kept holding it down.

At Stephen's bidding, they scooted the crow down the path a little so they could attach it to the tree at the end, where it would have more space to fly around in.

So they bent over the jacket it and shimmied along the dirt, pine needle floor of the forest. When they got to the right tree Stephen tied the string firmly to the end of a thick branch.

"Now Alex, you go get the gun and bring it back. And let's hope this thing can still fly a little."

Alex obeyed. Stephen took the gun. He told Jordan to let go of the jacket. Jordan did and he stepped away and as if strengthened by its imprisonment the bird swept in the air and started to dash around madly and it screeched and squawked and the boys watched with eyes opened wide, amazed. The bird couldn't release itself from the string.

It flew around, pulling it taut, trying to get away.

"We need to shoot it before it gets lame again," Stephen said. "It's just working on adrenaline now."

"You'll never hit it," Alex said.

"Not from more than ten feet away," Jordan said. "You might if you stand close."

"I'll hit it from fifteen feet," Stephen said.

So commenced several minutes of missed shots. They each took a turn firing the BB gun but not one shot was true.

After a while they got really good at hitting the branch. The bird flew around mesmerized by its plight.

"We'll hit it," Stephen said. "I'll be here until sundown trying to hit this thing."

Eventually Jordan hit it. He laughed out of astonishment. There was a minute or so of silence as the bird plopped to the ground and lay twitching there. They inched their way towards it.

"Oh man," Alex said.

Lying in a pool of its own crimson gore the crow let out a final few screeches.

They stood over it wondering what they had just done. Stephen was more stoic than the other boys and he just looked it with a sharp eye and he didn't say very much at all.

Nothing in support of the endeavour and nothing to deride it; and Jordan looked at it sheepishly with something like regret and he thought perhaps it would've been better if Stephen had shot it instead of himself.

Alex shook his head and out turned his lower lip and felt like crying—look at this mess, blood everywhere—though he didn't, because he knew Stephen would get mad and he had to not cry and when they told him Don't go telling your mom he promised them he wouldn't and staring at the dead crow he told himself not to cry.

His mother was invited into Barbara Egner's living room. She had been called in, for Barbara was on the couch, indisposed to get up and answer the door. Alex's mother stood before the couch and looked upon Barbara angrily and waited for her to say something.

"Well have a seat," Barbara said.

She stepped back two paces but didn't sit down.

"You're aware, Barbara, that your boy and my boy are friends?"

"You're Alex's mother? The little boy with the sandy hair?"

"That's right—"

"I should of made tea or something. Coffee. Do you like coffee? Would you like some?"

She shook her head vaguely. "No, no, I—"

"It's a trouble to make anyway," she said.

"Excuse me, Barbara, did you know what Stephen and Alex and Jordan were doing two days ago in the forest?"

Barbara lit a cigarette. She sucked on it pensively, blowing the white smoke to the ceiling.

"What were they doing?"

"I can hardly even say it," she said. "They were, they were torturing this poor bird. They tied it to a tree, apparently, and then they tried to shoot it with a gun."

"They killed the bird?" Barbara said.

"Yes, yes. My son came home practically in tears over what they just did. You should've seen him, Barbara. He feels that your son, Stephen, that he kind of forced him into it."

Barbara looked at her; she smiled slightly and made sure to blow her

smoke away from her, towards the ceiling.

"They tied it to a tree? How did they get the string on the bird?"

"It was hurt when they found it, I guess." She looked worried. "I don't know, it just seems so incredible."

"It is incredible. Poor bird."

Alex's mother took a step away because the smoke was too much for her. The phone started to ring. It was sitting on a little end table at the entrance of the living room.

The rings reverberated in the tight space of the living room, it rang and rang; Barbara made a slight movement on the couch and seemed as if she would get up but then she changed her mind and returned to her normal position. She lit another cigarette.

"Let it ring," Barbara said. "At this time of day it's a telemarketer."

It stopped ringing.

"Barbara, what can we do about this?" she said seriously. "How are you going to punish your boy? Alex is traumatized over this."

"Traumatized," Barbara repeated.

"Yes. He's very distraught."

"I'll talk to Stephen," Barbara said.

"But, remember now, they're boys."

She shook her head. "This isn't the behaviour of boys, of good boys, this is behaviour which requires... conversation, chastisement, I don't know: counselling."

"Think so?"

"Of course."

"Stephen!" Barbara called suddenly. She cupped her hand over her mouth.

"Stephen! Stephen!"

Her frail voice echoed down the dusky hallways of the house.

"He must be out," she said. "I'll talk to him later."

"Do you care? You don't seem to even care what they did, Barbara, this is terrible behaviour. Our boys can't be doing things like this."

"I'll talk to him later."

"Will you? Will you?"

"Whenever he gets in from wherever he is, yes."

"You don't care."

"Boys will be—"

Then Alex's mother went to the door, striding there, shaking her head. She told herself, No way, No way will these boys be friends anymore.

The nerve of the woman. Does she know what they did? Does she? They killed a crow, a poor crow! Alex came home practically in tears, his face all red, he could hardly even talk...

She left without saying another word, shutting the door hard behind her. Barbara stubbed her cigarette in the ashtray on the floor beside her.

Sunlight threaded through the window and shined across her pale legs and she crossed one of them over the other and she felt very comfortable. She lit another cigarette.

"Stephen!" she called. "Stephen!" He wasn't there—or maybe he was, he could be, and he just wasn't answering her.

The Man Behind The Canvas:

Interviewing Artist Igor Nataliya Khalandovskiy



Having received his most significant Fine Arts training at the Kharkov University of Industrial Art and Design in present-day Ukraine (within the Soviet Union at the time), emerging artist Igor Nataliya Khalandovskiy graduated from his program in 1990 with an MFA. "I also took some classes toward my second Master's degree at the Iowa State University that focussed on digital art and animation," he explained during his interview.

When asked which people or circumstances had had the greatest impact on his artistic pursuits, he stated that his parents had enrolled him in a children's art school, where his interest began to grow. He mentioned that a few of his teachers also showed great enthusiasm for his work, compelling him not to quit despite the busy schedule involving all the after-school time he had to devote to his art. After some time had passed, it was "some of [his] art professors and

some fellow students at the university whose talents were inspirational" that helped him overcome the difficulties of life as a student and an artist. In regard to his following popular trends (or particular venues such as expressionism, post-modernism, etc.) in creating his works of art, Khalandovskiy asserted, "I don't particularly follow any popular trends with my art. I keep my own vision of the world and express it. It would be difficult to create something unique—



something of my own—if I tried to take after someone else, much less someone [who is] popular nowadays. If you ask about trends of the past, I certainly admire impressionists and post-impressionists for their courage and freedom of expression. Their paintings are so full of air and light. I don't have much to say about modern popular art. I do visit art shows and galleries on occasion, and once in a while, I see canvasses that speak to me."

When asked about how he would classify his own work, Khalandovskiy termed his answer as "fantasy blended with impressionism." He continued, "It is obvious that I use a lot of details and variety of geometric shapes. I like to experiment with color and make it work for me so that the end result looks nicely blended. Sometimes I like to leave a few white, unfinished areas on my paintings. I do not allow any symmetry on my canvasses, even when I paint faces; symmetrical art is boring. I realize that sometimes my paintings may look somewhat "busy;" however, people who take their time [to] view [them] make interesting discoveries. I cannot explain why I chose to work in this particular style. This is how I make sense of the world."





In speaking of his role models in the art world and how they influenced his own work, Khalandovskiy mused, “Since my very early years as an artist, I [have been] fascinated by [many] great Russian artists, [such] as Mihail Vrubel, Ilya Repin, Pavel Filinov; French impressionists (especially Cezanne); [and] post-impressionists ([particularly] Van Gogh). I [also] admire [the] works of Goya, Rembrandt [and] Velasquez . I [felt] strong connections to each of these artists. They [touched] my soul on a [deepest and inexplicable] level.”

Khalandovskiy plans to continue his artistic pursuits with passion, eager to use each canvas to celebrate intricacies of color, design, detail and harmony, hoping to awaken a curious imagination and appreciation in his audience.

—Mimi Chakrabarty



XAMHO 201



XAMHO 31

The Baby's Room

Brittani McBee

She was supposed to be happy; this was supposed to be the best day of her life. But for some reason she felt like crying. She stared out the window to avoid looking at her husband, who kept his own eyes on the road with a tight grip on the steering wheel. It was like he thought if he held it even a little looser the wheel would yank to the side and the car would go out of control. She put her small hand on her belly, that had just recently started to fill, and swallowed the lump that formed in her throat.

"Does it hurt?" She didn't know how he saw it. His eyes had never drifted her way.

"No, I don't know why I hold it. I think it's just natural." She took her hand away slowly, dragging over the white lace as she did. "I can't believe I wore white," she said quietly, her voice sounding so young.

"Of course you did. It's traditional."

"Everyone knows I'm pregnant, and I wore white." She finally looked from the window to Anthony. His eyebrows were pulled together but he still stared down the road.

"Every bride wears white on their wedding day. No one follows that stupid rule anymore." His lips were in a tight line. She kept quiet after that. The window became her pass time again, just so she had something to do. She watched as cornfield after cornfield after bean field flew by. Maybe three houses along the way. And probably fifteen

silos. Four dozen cows. Typical beef stock in Iowa, mostly Simmentals and Herefords- just like the ones she grew up raising, the ones that she had just left behind. She was thankful for getting off that old farm. She hated it. She loved the animals and the outdoors but the farm just felt so wrong. She had always longed to live in town, in a city. She loved animals, but she loved people more. And on a farm like that there went people for miles.

They turned down another gravel road, and after ten more minutes of gold and green splattered cornfields coloring her window they pulled into the driveway of their new home, and it was as far into the country as any house could be. It was a small white thing that looked as if it had been built before the use of levels and tape measures. Anthony had said that the frame must have twisted as the foundation settled.

That's why it looked warped. 'Still livable' he had said. And the rent was only 350 dollars a month. He came around and opened her door, offering his hand as she clambered out. She smacked it away, "I'm not that fat yet." He shrugged and went to unlock the door. She was pulling herself up the steps of the porch by the railing when he finally clicked the lock over. The landlord told them 'you have to jiggle the key sometimes if it got stuck.' She sighed.

Anthony gave her a look. "What Ruth?" She cringed at her name. She thought it sounded like an old

farmer's wife, one that collects cats. She preferred Marie, her middle name. "Why'd you even lock it? It's not like anyone would rob this place." She was slightly out of breath, and groaned at how rude she sounded. It wasn't from being pregnant. Her feet hurt. She had worked a ten hour shift the day before. She needed the tips to pay the DJ that morning at the wedding.

"My tools are worth a small fortune Marie." He shook his head at her with a smile, chuckling at her silliness. She stopped herself from asking why they had borrowed so much from her mother and sister to pay for the wedding then. He pushed the door open and it creaked loudly. A quick "it just needs some oil" followed. He tossed his coat onto a folding chair at the kitchen table, which used to be her sister's card table. "So your mom and dad should get here in about two hours with all of our stuff, you wanna celebrate out matrimony?" he waggled his eyebrows.

"Why didn't we help them tear down everything?" she slid into the other chair, the metal cold against her back, the dress not covering it. It was a beautiful dress, with a lace v-neck top and silky skirt, beautifully crafted train, and a low cut back. Her mother had made sure she got the dress she had always wanted. It was the kind of dress she had always imagined herself wearing on her wedding day.

"Because it's our special day and

we need to celebrate it," he said as he leaned down, pressing a warm kiss to her forehead. She leaned forward, not wanting him to pull away.

"Okay," she said as he pulled her up from the chair, taking her through one of the plastic folding doors that were in almost all of the doorways in the house, reminding her of accordions. He slipped her straps from her shoulders and soon they were on the bed, more warm kisses and tender touches that reminded her of how they used to be.

"Don't you carry a darn thing!" Her mother lightly smacked her hand back from the open hatchback. She bumped her out of the way to grab another box full of small gift bags and presents wrapped in white and silver.

"I'm only five months along. I can carry a little box." She rolled her eyes.

"No you won't. My grandson is not gonna come out lame 'cause you wanted to carry a dumb box." And her mom pushed past her. Her mother was a nut when it came to pregnancies. Can't eat custard because of the egg yolk and no caffeine and all that.

She followed her mom into the house and quickly dodged out of the way for her dad to come out. They were machines, her mom and dad. Bringing in all of the gifts from the wedding, unpacking, dusting, rearranging furniture. They never stopped moving. She went into the living room where she saw her mom disappear to. She was standing in front of the window, just looking out. Marie stepped up next to her, the

warm light washing over her skin bringing a smile to her face. She would not waste a small break with her mother. "That will be a perfect spot for a garden." Her mother said softly. Marie's smile fell from her lips. The last thing she wanted was a garden. Working in the dirt again. She had hated always having to scrub at her hands because dark smudges would color her palms, calluses cracked and filled with dirt after a day of digging fence posts holes, or shovelling out the cattle stalls. Girls at school had made fun of her for that when she was younger. One time a group of girls was playing I Spy at recess in fifth grade and the leader of the group had spied the color blackish-brown. Everyone thought it was so funny when that color was found under Marie's fingernails.

She turned from the window when she heard her dad cough behind them. It was a hacking noise, scratchy in his throat. "Dad you okay?" she stepped toward him but he held his hand up to stop her.

"Just a little hay fever, it's fine." It was not just a little hay fever. Hay fever was an allergy to rag weed or it's pollen or something like that. But Don had allergies to weeds, dust, pollen, animal dander, just about anything outside. He developed it a few years after spending the small amount of money he had on the farm, his dream. A dream to be a farmer in Iowa. Too bad it became miserable for him to do anything outside. The last twenty five years were spent tending to two herds of cows and about 200 acres of tillable land that brought misery and nasal congestion to her dad and they had

only barely stayed afloat.

"You'll be able to keep my spaghetti down won't ya?" she smiled at him and he returned it. It would be the first meal that he ate that she made. At home her mother did all of the cooking. And it was now her turn, as the woman of her own house it was her time to cook a meal for her family. And she chose to make spaghetti. She didn't really know how to make anything else on the stove.

Anthony came in behind her dad, wiping his hands on his jeans. "Sorry sweetie, but I don't think your parents can stay for supper. I work at seven tomorrow, and I need an early night." He stuck a hand out to Don, who shook it firmly.

"Alright then. You two have a good night." He turned to Marie. "I love you honey." He smiled at her, but it didn't feel very warm.

"Love you too dad."

He stretched his hand out toward her mom. "Come on Marry, we best be heading home." Her mother walked by and lightly put her hand on her shoulder, as if to say 'goodbye and it's okay', with a smile that reached her eyes. She always seemed so content. "I left a bible on your night stand sweetie. Take care of this house the way God wants you to okay?" Marie nodded.

In no time she heard the car start up. The tires crunching on the gravel could be heard through the walls as they turned onto the road. Anthony was taking a seat at the table with some mail in his hand. "Why couldn't they eat with us?"

He looked up from the envelopes surprised. "Because they would have stayed after eating and I need to go

to bed early. Why?"

"I wanted to see them," it was her first day in this house, officially. She had come over. Stayed the night even. But after work yesterday she had moved her stuff in. This was her first day actually living here and she wanted her parents there for it.

"You can see them any day. I don't know what's wrong but we can talk about it more over supper." He went back to rummaging through the papers.

"But I wanted to see them today." He pushed himself up from the chair. "This is my house Marie. I have to work early so that I can pay for this house." Marie flinched at his loud tone. Anthony sighed and ran his hand over his short cropped hair. "I'm sorry." He said quietly. "Why don't you start making that spaghetti and I'll go change the oil in your car, okay?" he was out the creaky door before she could even blink.

Marie microwaved him a bowl of Raman Noodles and left it on the table. She then went to the small bedroom and crawled under the covers, sliding toward the wall. After trying to lay straight for a minute she decided to move to the middle of the bed and curl her legs forward. She had always liked to use the whole bed when she slept. Her eyes became heavy and her blinks more difficult. Finally she couldn't drag her eyes back open and she fell asleep, in the middle of the bed.

Marie stared at the cream colored walls of the nursery room. It was originally a closet. One that Marie had liked when she had first seen it. It was big compared to the house, and she could imagine all of

her clothes and shoes filling it. But then she got pregnant and Anthony knocked one wall down and moved it over, turning the walk in closet into a small nursery room. She tried to imagine the walls painted, full of baby furniture and cheesy blankets and stuffed animals. At first yellow walls with white designs came into her head. Then green with blue circles. Then white with splashes of color. She didn't know what she wanted. Anthony had said he'd like baby blue, like his nursery room back home.

Once at the local hardware store Marie tracked down an employee. "I'm five months along, can I paint my baby's nursery?"

The young man glanced at her stomach and then smiled. "Yeah, just keep it well ventilated and I'd use a latex only paint." He walked with her over to the right section and showed her the different colors. He then carried it to the counter to mix it for her and send her on her way.

"I have strawberries and whipped cream," Marie pulled the bowl from the fridge and set it on the table in front of Beth. She immediately grabbed one.

"How was your first night in your house?" Beth asked innocently, only to scrunch her face up in disgust. "Never mind, I don't want to know." "Nothing like that," Marie laughed. "In fact I slept alone in the bed." "Why?" Beth asked confused.

"I don't know. I fell asleep in the bed, and Anthony slept on the couch. Said I was hogging it." Beth laughed. "You probably were, you always did at home!" "Yeah, I like to stretch out." Marie

laughed too.

After a few moments she asked "So how was the wedding?" "Good," her little sister said around a mouth full of pink mush. After swallowing she continued, "I think for the low price tag it seemed really classy." And another strawberry disappeared from the bowl. "Yeah, thanks for everything." Beth laughed it off. She was so giving. She acted like she barely did a thing when she paid for a ring, Anthony's vest, the rental fee for the community center they held the service in, and did all of the makeup and thirty table pieces (small bowls with betas in them, colored marbles, and tied with colored ribbons). "I mean it, I couldn't have done this without you Beth."

"Ah it's fine. I messed up the exit anyway." She had. Marie's mother had told her how after her and her newly made husband left that Beth just stood there twiddling her thumbs. Mike, Anthony's brother and groomsman finally came over and grabbed her hand to tug her toward the exit so that everyone else could follow.

"Yeah mom told me about that. Good going kiddo!" she playfully punched her sister's arm.

"Hey, not my fault you didn't have a rehearsal!" Beth laughed back. Her older sister frowned, and then the moment was gone. There hadn't been time to organize a rehearsal, that was the way with shotgun weddings. "I mean it though," Marie said while swirling a strawberry in the cool whip container, making a pink spiral. "Thank you. I'll pay you back soon." "It's fine Marie. Pay me back whenever. But don't go stressing

out about it right now. You just got married yesterday. Relax a little." Beth put a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"I can borrow the money from Anthony's friend and pay you back. I don't like owing you." Owing Beth of all people hurt the worst. Beth, who had always been there for her and would always be there for her. She was the one Marie wanted to always stay good with. Beth would always be the one Marie could count on, and she wanted Beth to feel the same about her. "You'd borrow money to pay me back money that you borrowed from me?" Marie nodded and Beth laughed. "Two wrongs don't make a right Marie."

Marie looked down at her right hand, which had unconsciously made its way to her belly again. She put her left hand over her right, her simple silver ring shining on top. Marie nodded to herself. "Sure Beth." Beth put a hand on Marie's shoulder, saying comfortingly, "Marie, its fine. I swear. You're my sister and I will always help you." Marie nodded with a frown on her face. "Don't feel bad that I helped you, okay?" Beth shook her shoulder playfully. "Yeah okay," Marie laughed.

"I never expected this." Beth said absently. "I always thought that you would be a suit. You know, break the Bartles family mold? Who knew you were a housewife at heart?" Beth blabbered as she toyed with the greens of her eaten strawberries, pushing them into a smiley face on her paper plate. "Well, I always did look out for you.

Maybe this whole nurturing thing is in my nature." Marie took her hands away to play with the red paint that was peeling from the metal chair. "Yeah I suppose. It's weird how things turn out huh?" she was right. Growing up Beth had always been the one with boyfriends, falling in love at first glance and dying on the inside at the breakup, only to find love again. Always so dramatic,

"I always thought that you would be a suit. You know, break the Bartles family mold? Who knew you were a housewife at heart?"

so theatrical. Marie was the one who made honor roll in high school. Who had plans for college. Who wanted to move to LA to become something. Who didn't have a thought of love or family in her determined head. "Yeah, but this is what I'm meant to do." Marie stood and walked to the window, looking out to where her mom had said would be a nice place for a garden. This is what she was supposed to do. "Hey, let's go start on the baby's room, yeah?" Beth came up behind her and patted her shoulder. "Sure," Marie said and followed her out of the kitchen.

Anthony came home around six, covered in grease from the shop. He came in determined, confident, smiling. "I applied for a supervisor position today." Marie was doing the

dishes. She put down a plate that she was hand drying to turn toward him.

"Yeah? Do you think you'll get it?" "Yeah I do. Only one other guy applied and he's from another company. We promote from within, I know almost everything there is to know about trucks, and I've been there five years. I'll get it." He plopped the mail on the table he had brought in, and started shuffling through it. "Four years." "What?" he asked as he tore open an envelope. "You've only been at Peterson's since you were eighteen. Four years." Marie turned back to doing the dishes.

"Okay, four years. Point is you can quit waitressing." She dropped a glass and it broke in the sink, pieces that looked like diamonds skittering across the steel before jumping down the drain. "Shit." She started to pick up the bigger pieces of glass when Anthony stopped her. He scooped up as much as he could with a rag and threw it in the trash. "I don't want to quit waitressing." She said after Anthony had settled back into his chair. "You're pregnant, and you'd have to quit once we had the baby anyway." "I like working, and we need the extra money." "Not if I get this position. And you don't need to work. You need to look after the house and our child." His voice was loving but firm. "Okay." She dried the last of the dishes and put them away. Anthony went to the living room to watch TV.

She started to clean up the table, putting away the can of beer he had gotten out when he got home and picking up the mail. She noticed that her bank statement had come, and it was open. She pulled it out. Everything looked normal, and there wasn't anything bad that she would want to hide. But she was still upset. "Why did you open my mail?" she asked as she came into the living room. Anthony glanced at her before shrugging.

"We're married. It's our mail."

"But it has my name on it. It's to my bank account." She put her hands on her hips.

"Yeah, but now your bills are my bills and mine are yours. Your money is mine and mine yours." Marie just stood there, unable to retort. "So why don't we close your account and just share one?" he put his feet up on the coffee table and leaned back. "I guess that makes sense." She slumped against the doorway.

"Good, come sit down babe." He patted the seat next to him. She sat beside him and flipped open a magazine, not interested in watching the fishing show he had on. She came across a picture of woman in a pencil skirt and white blouse in front of a bunch of men, apparently giving a presentation. She ripped the picture out, folded it up, and stuck it in her pocket. Then she read an article on important women of today.

After the show was over Anthony left the room. Marie was still skimming the pages of her glossy magazine.

"Hey sweetie?" Anthony called from another room. Marie sat her magazine down and went to where she had heard him, the baby's room.

"Yeah?" She asked as she came

to stand beside him in the green room. Light green with white and light blue circles.

"I thought we were painting it blue, like my old room?" Anthony's brows were furrowed and his voice was laced with confusion.

"Oh, I thought that this would look nice, modern." Marie shrugged.

"Oh, well okay," Anthony kissed her cheek and left the room.

The next day Beth was back. The two sisters were sitting on the couch talking about things that used to be so important. High school teachers, brands of makeup, little tricks to make your hair thicker. It didn't feel the same, and Marie missed the days when this was how it was supposed to be. Beth then started rambling about how fun college was going to be. In less than a week she was supposed to pack up and cross the state line to Minnesota. Leaving Iowa behind to go be a Maverick. "I'm going to love it. It's no big city, but compared to Renwick it's huge. College town ya know?"

Marie looked up at the light hanging from a cheap chandelier to keep her eyes from watering. "Yeah that'll be awesome." Her voice cracked.

"Marie?" Beth leaned toward her.

"You okay?"

"Yeah," she lied. "I just can't believe I'll never go to college." The light wasn't working. A tear slid down her cheek.

"Marie you can still go. You're pregnant. Not dying."

"Yeah you're right." Another tear slid a shiny line down her cheek and chin, to drop onto her hand over her belly. It landed right below her

wedding ring. "Sure Beth." Marie gave a sad smile. Just as Beth went to hug her, Marie's phone rang.

Beth leaned back so that Marie could reach into her back pocket, awkwardly pulling out her cell phone. It was Anthony. "Hello?"

"I got the job baby. The other applicant dropped out, said he got something else. You're no longer a waitress!" silence answered him.

"Hello?"

"Yeah I'm here." Marie glanced to Beth who was looking suspiciously inattentive.

"Aren't you excited?" he sounded worried.

"Yeah, that's great babe."

"Okay good, I'll see you tonight.

I love you."

"Love you too."

Beth looked back to her. "What was that?" she asked while picking at her nails.

"Don't act like you didn't hear it."

Marie laughed lightly.

Beth turned to fully face her. "You love waitressing."

"I know." Marie settled back into the couch and looked over at Beth. She smiled at her. "When do you leave for Mankato?"

"Friday morning. Why?"

"Then I have you until Friday. I want to repaint the baby's room. I think it's too green right now. Will you help?" Beth smiled and nodded. Soon they were in the car on the way to the paint supply store.

Marie heard Anthony open the front door. She knew he would come in soon. The smell of fresh paint had taken over the small house and would give her away. She was

painting the last wall in the room yellow. There were little black bumble bees painted on the yellow, buzzing around the room. "What happened to the green?" Anthony asked.

"I wasn't happy." She rolled another yellow stripe over the green.

"Why yellow?"

"Because I wanted to do the bee theme. He's going to be my little bumblebee."

Anthony smiled and came up behind Marie, wrapping his arms around her and placing his hands on her belly. Marie looked back at him, "Can you finish this, my feet hurt?" Anthony nodded and took the roller from her. She gave a small smile and left the room without saying a word. She sat on the couch and within minutes fell asleep.

"Sweetie, let's go to bed," Anthony was lightly shaking Marie's shoulder, who was slumped over on the couch. She sat up and groggily rubbed her eyes. They both went to the bedroom and laid down, Anthony with his arm draped over her.

An hour later Marie slid out of bed and went into the baby's room. She opened a fresh roller and took the plastic off of the yellow paint tray and began rolling fresh paint over the black bumble bees.

Marie awoke to Anthony shaking her awake again. She had fallen asleep on the couch after painting the baby's room. Yellow with white stripes. "Marie, paint it blue." "What?" she groggily sat up and stretched but Anthony was already walking from the living room.

"I have to go to work. I want the room blue when I get home." He

pulled on his work jacket and grabbed his keys from the table, they chimed as he stuck them in his pocket.

"But I liked it yellow." She slowly followed him to the mud room and watched him tug his boots on.

He was bent over tightening his laces, but he looked up at her with a heated stare. "Like how you like it green, and then with bees? You don't know what you want. I want it blue, just do it." he straightened up and turned his back to her.

"But I don't want it blue."

"Too bad." And he opened the creaking screen door and was down the porch steps before Marie could say anymore.

She stood there for a while thinking about what to do. He wanted the room blue, she wanted it to be bright and sunny. Maybe if she surrounded herself with warm colors the feeling would seep into her. But he wanted blue, like his old nursery back home, in his family's small ranch house with their 1950's ways. She didn't want that. She started laughing. She laughed so hard that she doubled over in the mud room and had to hold a hand to the bump on her belly.

When she finally calmed down and whipped the tears from her eyes and sore cheeks she called Beth. Once she answered Marie said, "I need to go back to the paint store. Will you go with me?"

Marie sat in the passenger side of Beth's car as they drove on the interstate. "I love you, you know," Beth said. Marie nodded. She didn't feel like crying. She felt relieved. But she knew Beth would think she

were unstable at the moment, so she smiled sadly and nodded, playing the part of the woman who's life had just crumbled. Not just who had a fight with her husband, but who lost everything.

Marie looked out the window while picking dried blue paint from around her fingernails. The blue was the perfect color for Anthony. She imagined him walking into the baby's room and seeing the paint drying, smiling at having won, at having his way. He would be happy maybe. He might feel like Marie was finally coming to, realizing her and his roles in the family. Maybe she had turned into her mother, a content and happy housewife.

But then she imagined him calling out her name, smiling while he waits for her to come from their room. But she wouldn't come. He would be curious, confused, and he would look for her. Her things would be gone, some of their wedding presents too. He would find one thing left behind by her. A creased picture from a glossy magazine, one with a business woman on it that she had left on the counter by the dishes. And when he realized that she was gone, it would be because the last thing he had of hers was something that didn't even remind him of her, and he would realize he never had her in the first place.



Watercolor Artist - Antonio Bernal

Antonio Bernal is a self-taught artist based in Cork, Ireland. Since Autumn 2011, Antonio has been working on “The Man in the Hat” series. The Man in the Hat is a fictional, enigmatic character who incidentally appeared in Antonio’s artwork when he started painting with watercolors. As this man kept materialising in the scenes he painted, he became the protagonist of this series.

Antonio’s artwork portrays inspiring, light-hearted and charming scenes that the Man in the Hat finds in his amazing imaginary journeys.

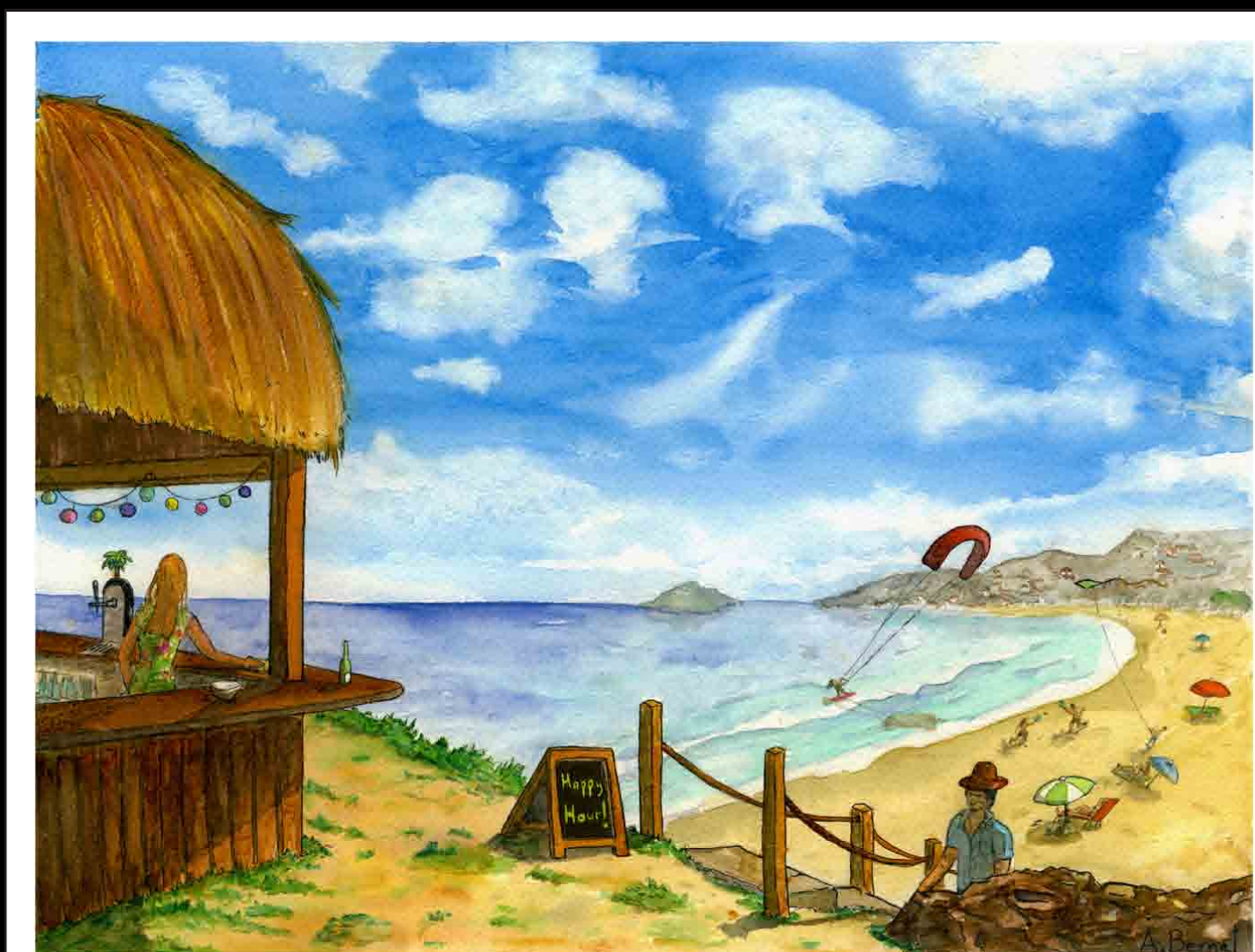
The Man in the Hat series has a strong narrative element, but there is no story as such. Through the different illustrations the viewers are able to make up their own story, which takes place in the different and varied locations and situations presented in the illustrations. This apparent but nonexistent plot provides a solid narrative background which enhances the story-telling feel of the series, presented as a pseudo vintage travel journal, where travelling scenes are a recurrent theme.



Colony Hotel - Antonio Bernal - “The Man in the Hat”

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Happy Hour - Antonio Bernal - “The Man in the Hat”



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by Michelle Morlan



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