

Arachn-*y*-phobia

Introduction

“No she’s not in right now, sorry.”

I hung up the phone, and couldn’t stop myself from smiling. I’m probably the only person in the world who gets an odd joy of answering the phone only to realize it’s a telemarketer. They are the only people who address me with my real name anymore. It’s a name I spent years running away from; a name I don’t even think I could call myself these days. “Emma Julliette” feels like a lifetime ago and it is so odd to be staring out the same window I used to crawl out of, when I hated everything about this suburban world. Now I wish I had never let go of it all. Maybe I’d be happier. I looked down at the pen in my hand and tenderly watched as I mechanically moved my wrist with out even thinking, “xoxo, Heather”

Heather was the name my husband, Spyder, gave me (long before he was my husband) back when he was the messiah of the St. Marks’ punk scene and I was an art school drop out who ended up answering the phone at one of the many tattoo shops lining the street. He didn’t think Emma Julliette was cookie cutter enough for a girl who lived in one of the most expensive towns in “upstate” New York. I could never fake a city accent and as much as I tried to distract people from my roots with my blue hair and black nail polish, nothing screamed suburban princess more than my Westchester accent. Thus, “Heather” was born. According to him, I belonged onscreen with Winona Ryder and Shannon Doherty slaying the Catholic school divas I grew up with, even though I was one in the same. It was an inside joke that never died and now twenty years later no one even remembers who I was - before I was her.

If I had known back then that today my parents would have moved back to Montreal leaving me to live in the house I grew up in, I never would have imagined that I’d be feeling so much remorse for renovating the dated furniture and making it “my own”. When I was living here the first time around, I absolutely despised how each room was color coordinated as if *Home & Garden* magazine would be randomly stopping by to feature us in their upcoming issue. I dreamt for the day I would be living on my own and create my own space however I pleased. I guess I’m still waiting for that day.

I went from living with my parents, to a series of roommates, to Spyder. I guess along the way I forgot what my own style was. I was so focused on being the hip, tortured soul - keeping up with the trends of the underground and ridiculing anything mainstream that every opinion and thought became automated. As I look around this gloomy house now, I know that it is inauthentic, yet I can’t seem to remember when it became that way.

When I was younger I used to strut around with this condemning look of superiority. I didn’t care what the “masses” thought of me, because I knew I was better than them. I was a free spirit who didn’t get bogged down in the cattle call of mediocrity, running through the day focused only on material goals. I was never one of those people who manipulated to get ahead just so that when they’re lying in their coffin someone will say they made something of themselves. I wasn’t swayed by commercialism, and was convinced that I always listened to my own heart as my guide - nothing else.

If I ever have kids, I think I’m going to shy away from profusely applauding them for being special. No one is unique anymore, and it’s so funny for me to look back

through pictures of the days when I was a “non-conformist”. Sure I wasn’t wearing the pearl earrings and oxford shirts like the girls I went to high school with, but who’s to say that the social bindings of my so called misunderstood friends, were any different?

I know it was a conscious decision when I started my crow paintings. I used my paint the same way a writer would a journal. Crows were my life long biggest fear - ever since I snuck into the old movie theater and saw the movie “The Birds” as a little kid. I thought that if I could get comfortable with a two dimensional crow in my waking life, maybe the ones in my dreams would be far less haunting. It was more of a personal experiment than anything else. Ironically enough, the thing I hated most ultimately became my signature. Spyder adopted one of them as a tee shirt for his band, and a trend was started. Suddenly I was the girl who painted death. No one seemed to care for the colorful expressive work, and I guess always wanting to be part of the party, I stopped caring too.

And its now as I’m sitting in my old childhood bedroom, converted to a paint studio, that my anxieties are taking hold of me. I can’t help but think about what my life would be like had I never met Spyder. Would I have given up the art school phase, transferred to some comfortable liberal arts school, joined a sorority and be married to some golf playing doctor by now? Would my house that I live in resemble the doll house that I find myself dreaming about? Is my longing for traditionalism really just me aching to feel like I’m living my own age as opposed to this feeling of fallacy that clings to my skin now, because nothing about his life seems normal anymore? I felt more comfortable playing house on the playground as a seven year old, than I do living the role as a housewife now. It was fine to hold a series of menial jobs in my twenties, and I liked dating the older mysterious guy, but now this life feels like a joke. As all of our peers seemed to have grown up and moved on, we’re still stuck together like two ill advised teenagers. I can’t help but think that if the bed that I share is a false representation of who I am, than how do I know the man I share it with isn’t as well?

It’s times like these when I need my drawings for relief, and yet again I find myself filling another page with the light and airy drawings of a life I said goodbye to long ago. I know that it’s a world I don’t live in on a daily basis, but it’s one I can visit anytime I want. Who knows, maybe that’s the appeal anyway? Perhaps I’m just bored and long for a vacation. I guess it’s too late now to figure out why and what, because I really don’t think it would have made any difference. This is what happened. This is who I am.

Xoxo,
Heather

Buddy & Co.

When I was twelve-years-old, I was always intrigued by the couple that lived next door. While we shared the same townhouse, the wall dividing our halves may as well have been a separator between two entirely separate worlds. Our house was overflowing with antiques and art that my mother had collected from travelling the world for thirty years. Every inch of the floor was blanketed with illustrious Persian carpets, bleeding intricate and colorful patterns from one into the other. Chandeliers hung high from the

ceiling, glistening rusty and delicate light from room to room. It was not unusual for my friends to compare my house to a museum, as every corner was strategically decorated with my mother's tasteful eye. From the art deco themed living room to the wooden Faberge egg collection lining our staircase to the classic Hollywood posters that glamorized the basement, I grew up in a richly cultured home that served as a treasure chest for my mother's artistic passions.

On the other side, however, lived Heather and Spyder. I never knew if Spyder was his real name or not, but he was creepy enough for it to certainly fit him. "It's like 'spider' but with a 'y'," he told me as they were moving in and came over to introduce themselves. Spyder had long greasy black hair that draped his constantly leather coat hugging shoulders. He had such a deep voice that it sounded like his vocal chords were lodged in his stomach rather than in his throat. Slithering its way up his neck from his left shoulder blade was a huge tattoo of a furry spider leg, giving a sneak peak of the enormous tarantula inked from his neck to forearm. His sunglasses never left his face, as though he was ashamed of his eyes or only wanted to see the world through a particular shade of darkness. Heather, on the other hand, was a cheery blonde who seemed to be more concerned with what leopard print top supported her breasts the best, as opposed to what was going on in the real world.

After they had moved and settled in, Heather and Spyder invited my family over to see their home. Walking through their front door and looking around, it was as though the Addams Family had taken everything out of my house and replaced it with their belongings. While the architecture was the same, our half of the house looked like the polar opposite of their half. Where our home was overflowing with color, the brightest shade in sight in Spyder's house was gray. Absolutely everything was black. *I wonder if they're vampires*, I remembered thinking as we were getting the grand tour. I clutched my mother's hand as we made our way through what seemed to me the interior design of a coffin. As I did this, she looked down at me with eyes that told me she understood my concern.

As we continued to look around, I took a skeptical peek into their house's version of my room. At home, my room was plastered with movie and music posters. Because my mother couldn't bear to have exposed floors, I, too, had about seven different carpets smothering my wooden floors, making their way under big, filled bookshelves and the old mahogany coffee table I used to hold my stereo. It was strange for me, then, to see what my room looked like in this alternate universe – a place where my Britney Spears posters were replaced with blank canvases and a few paintings of crows.

"Oh, that's Heather's studio," Spyder explained when he saw that I had fallen behind the tour and was entranced by the mysterious room. "She likes to paint with very minimalist color, it's a very precise style," he continued as he pointed out the four buckets of black and the one bucket of white paint.

Being used to replications of artwork by painters such as Klimt, Mucha, and Van Gogh scattered across my house, I had no idea that art could be open to so much interpretation. What freaked me out at first suddenly became kind of cool, as I found something in this haunted mansion that actually appealed to me.

"And this is my office," Spyder announced, leading us into an isolated room that had it not had a window, would have been pitch black in the middle of the day. It was almost as if with the blinds shut, he was making a conscious effort not to allow any

sunlight in, furthering my theory that, *yes, these people are indeed vampires*. I personally didn't even understand how one would be able to find anything in a room where all the furniture and everything in it looked exactly the same. Behind his desk and throne-like leather chair was a huge bookshelf. Rather than being lined with books, the shelf was entirely empty with the exception of the middle shelf, which had what looked like a lizard tank on it.

"Want to meet my friend?" Spyder asked, as he put his hand into the cage. Crawling up onto his emerging arm was a tarantula. At the sight of this, my mother and I simultaneously gasped. "Don't worry, he's very friendly," Spyder reassured us. His words, however, meant nothing to me because all I knew was that in front of me was a giant, furry, menacing creature that I had zero desire to ever be around.

"Want to hold him?" He asked me. "No thank you!" I quickly responded. "Oh come on, how often do you get to see a real tarantula? He won't bite you I promise," Spyder said, as he cupped the beast and nonchalantly reached it out towards me as if he were offering me a piece of gum.

"No, I really, really don't want to touch it," I nervously repeated while cutting off the circulation of my mother's hand. "Maybe some other time," she said to him. *God, I've never loved mommy more than this second*, I thought, as Spyder told us to suit ourselves as he put the minion back in its home.

Weeks later, I would ultimately succumb to his pressure while my mother was not around, and I had nobody to defend me. I had accidentally locked myself out of my house while my parents weren't home so I reluctantly knocked on Spyder's door to ask if I can use his phone to find out when my mom was coming back.

"Sure," he replied, "but the phone downstairs isn't working, we'll have to use the one in my office." Immediately, pangs of fear started to jolt through my body as if my heart was getting jump started back to life on a hospital bed. I thought I had escaped seeing that giant spider again, but as I walked up the stairs, I knew it was only seconds before I would be face to face with its big black beady eyes again. Taking the fault entirely off myself, at that moment I stripped the heroic image from my mother for saving me before, blaming her that I was stranded outside of our house and left alone with this Boo Radley neighbor of ours.

"Here you go," he said, while he placed the tarantula onto me. I felt my body go completely numb as I closed my eyes and felt the sharp prickles of the spider's eight hairy legs cementing themselves into my forearm. Digging into me, I felt the beast leaving his imprint as though claiming his territory and making an open invitation to use my body as his home whenever he pleased. As it slowly crept its way towards my shoulder, I held my breath and sealed my eyes. It felt like all the saliva in my mouth had suddenly drained and all I could taste was the dryness of my tongue and the panic that engulfed my throat. My head was racing with images of that movie my older brother made me watch where the bad guy put the tarantula in James Bond's bed so that it would bite him and kill him. Buddy, as he was named, was making his way to my bicep before I couldn't take it anymore and screamed "Get it off me! Get it off me!"

Spyder laughed and told me to calm down as he picked up his pet. I swiftly brushed off my arm as if Buddy had shed remnants of himself on me and it was the most important thing in the world to get them off. The next ten seconds of my life were

devoted entirely to cleansing myself of whatever that spider had left on me and of the image and feeling the collision of our bodies left.

“Relax my friend, do you really think I would have gotten a tattoo of this guy if he wasn’t friendly?” he asked me, as if I was completely out of my mind to be as terrified as I was.

After I called my mom and she told me she would be home in twenty minutes, Spyder offered me a seat in his office, the place that had become my personal box of paranoia. “Actually, do you mind if I wait in Heather’s studio? I’d really like to see her art,” I nervously chattered. I wished Spyder’s sunglasses were off so that I could confirm my fears of whether or not he was glaring me down the entire time I was there.

“Well, she usually doesn’t like people disturbing her personal space, but she’s not home right now, so I guess that would be okay,” he told me as he signaled me out of his office and down the hall. Being granted permission to leave that room all of a sudden felt like I had been holding my breath underwater for far too long and had finally made it to fresh air.

While sitting in her plastic-cover smeared studio, I took notice of all the things I had not seen the last time I was in this room. It struck me as so bizarre that just a few feet behind the wall I was leaning on was my bedroom, my own “personal space” as Spyder had called it. While her paintings were all abstract, thickly coated black portraits of birds of prey looking like they were designed for the Marilyn Manson Museum of Art, Heather’s open sketchbook on the ground consisted of charcoal drawings of her home. Rather than shading in all the walls and furniture to give the house the dark, ominous feeling it had in real life, the sketches seemed to be much cozier. In fact, in her version of the house, art was hanging on every wall. The furniture popped and blended in nicely with what I imagined to be a colorful living room, full of life and artistic expression. Flipping through the pages, I realized that these drawings looked more like my house than Heather’s. If this is the life she wanted, why was she limiting herself into these solitary confines of darkness? For a brief moment, I felt sorry for her. *She’s the one that should be named after a spider ... after all, she’s the trapped one.*

In the two years that Spyder and Heather inhabited the other half of our house, I avoided them as much as I could. Even after they moved out, I was always afraid that Buddy one day had made his way out of his cage and found the way over to our side of the house. I even moved my bed from one side of my room to the other, to avoid being next to the wall that divided our homes - just in case he ever found a way to travel through it. As much of a mystery as Spyder was, however, the biggest question mark for me was always Heather. I never understood those drawings – were they an idealistic representation of what she wanted? Or were they just simply unfinished? After all, her work had taught me that art was open to interpretation. I guess I just never knew how she interpreted it herself. The ying and the yang that was our split home on the corner of Esplanade and Boston Post Road will forever remain an image in my mind of my former self as a little boy terrified of the monster and its master next door, and the tormented soul that drew it all.

Spitting Venom

“Don’t worry Atos, I’ll protect you.”

I nervously scratched the corner of my dog's head, hoping that if I could by some way convince him to not be nervous; I would be able calm my own nerves. He was laying on the red and brown frayed carpet underneath the gargantuan painted replica of Gustav Klimt's "The Kiss" that my mother had custom ordered from a struggling yet insanely local Polish artist before I was born. Years later, this artist would shoot herself on a swing set in the middle of the day, gaining national exposure that made her art worth far more than it ever was in her lifetime. I guess it's true what they say – creative geniuses are always mentally fucked up in some way, shape, or form, and are only posthumously appreciated.

I looked at the clock for the tenth time hoping that if I kept checking it would magically go forward two hours. My mother kept telling me that I was "being ridiculous" and that there was "no reason to worry." She was convinced that they would be more "normal" if they were eating dinner at our house. But I knew she was wrong. Spyder and Heather could never be normal, regardless of their surroundings. I knew that even if they were in our half of the house and not theirs, they would still completely disregard any sense of social decency.

8:10. They were late. As I closed my eyes wishing that they'd never show up, my dog started bolting for the door. The inevitable happened. They were here.

"So tell me how you two ended up living in Pelham?" my mother asked, with that perfect polite hostess smile on her face. We were in the middle of eating her famous chicken broccoli casserole, a more American dinner than we usually had, but the looks of our guests made it seem as though they'd be more comfortable eating pork rinds and KFC. From the moment the conversation had started, I knew it wasn't going to end well.

Both my parents are Polish. Unlike my father, however, my mother wasn't raised in English speaking schools and therefore had a thick accent. This was something anyone would notice after a ten second conversation with her, but apparently this had not been too evident to Spyder. He burst out hysterically laughing when my mother offered him a vanilla martini because her pronunciation put the wrong emphasis on the "i" as opposed to the "il," making the syllabic emphasis seem a little off. Always being the gracious host, she simply shrugged off the insult with a smile and gave him a Guinness, prompting him to say, "Isn't there anything remotely American in this house?" I wanted to lunge after him and kick them out, but unlike our guests I was raised to be courteous.

Ever the gentleman in training, I quietly but aggressively shot Spyder my best death glare. I then looked over at Heather, suspecting to see some obnoxious smile on her face and a look of adoration in her eyes for her *ever so clever* husband. However, to my surprise, she was just staring at her nervous foot tapping on the carpet.

It was then that I realized that there was something more in those sketches of hers. Maybe she wasn't happy in the dungeon of darkness Spyder had created for her. Maybe she was just like all the women I loved from my mother's vast classic movie collection - she just needed someone to be her salvation. The Humphrey Bogart to her Audrey Hepburn.

"Well, we um actually just moved here not too long ag..." Heather started to say, in a quiet, sweet voice that didn't match her appearance. If I had my eyes closed I would never think that a woman with a timid and shy voice like that would be sitting next to such a villainous looking husband.

“We inherited this dump from her crazy parents. They upped and moved back to Canada. You know how Canadians are - avoiding conflict at all times. I guess this whole Twin Tower thing was too much for them,” Spyder rudely chimed in. The words shot out of him like baseballs at a batting cage, and with each insult you could see a pang of pain on Heather's face. My mother was taken aback by his brashness and was left stuttering with a response.

My father decided to take this opportunity to change the topic and started asking if Heather grew up in New York or Canada. Heather smiled at his graciousness and started to reply, but just as her tiny scarlet lips began to form the words, Spyder once again cut her off to tell his condemning view of her story.

At the time, I thought that he was just one of those people who always needed to be the center of attention. Looking back on it though, I interpret it was more of a control issue. Spyder ultimately viewed the world as if everyone were his pet. He liked the power of dominating a seemingly wild or exotic creature and taming it to his command. At first glance, Heather appeared to be this nonconforming woman; dressing alternatively and dating someone as taboo as Spyder. However, the more I saw the two of them interact, I realized she was no different than the typical submissive, suburban housewife. She may not have worn the traditional uniform, but her leather pants did not strangle the freedom out of her any less than the strings of an apron would.

Throughout the duration of the evening, Spyder did not let Heather speak more than two words. With every story he told, he managed to insult at least two people sitting at the table. Not even being old enough to see a PG-13 movie on my own, I didn't feel appropriate ridiculing his bad table manners - or even asking him to stop. Although he was obviously disrespectful, I still treated him with respect. He was an adult and I was not. As much as I disagree with the whole “you must respect your elders no matter what” belief now, at the time I knew no better and kept my mouth shut.

There was so much tension in the stoic, staccato conversation, that at one point I slowly slithered down my chair like a wilting balloon. I pretended to drop my napkin just so I could momentarily relinquish myself from the negative aura that seemed to be tossed around the five of us like a never ending game of catch. My mother shot me that universal “mom look” which I know meant to stop, but since I wasn't allowed to take everyone else's escape route of drinking alcohol to numb the awkwardness, she allowed it.

I was under the table petting my dog, counting in my head, to see how long I could stay there before my mother stuck her hand under the table to tell me I needed to return to my seat. I stopped counting at one hundred and twenty-seven because I could hear Spyder laughing so heavily that it made me shutter. At the sound of this diabolical chuckle, Atos too started to perk his ears and snarl his teeth at Spyder's feet. He also knew there was something not right, and like me felt that Spyder was more of an intruder than a guest.

Spyder was in the middle of telling some story of how his band used to be huge and claimed that Minor Threat stole his sound. Not knowing what that even meant, my father simply replied, “oh that's a shame,” which un-surprisingly resulted in an offended Spyder going on an accusatory rant where he implied my parents were ignorant and close minded for not knowing the punk scene of the 80's. I rolled my eyes, thankful that I was under the table for this portion of the conversation and nobody could see my face, as I

nervously stared towards my mother's seat - praying that her delicate fingers wouldn't be there to wave me back up.

Amidst my gaze I saw Heathers foot start kicking Spyder's leg. At first I didn't think anything of it, but then I realized it her was her way of asking him to be quiet. He ignored her requests, however, and kept up his pretentious conversation. This caused Heather to start frantically bang her leopard print stiletto against his black jeans. I was shocked that he had no reaction to this at all. *He's completely void of feelings, mentally and physically.* I didn't necessarily predict that he was going to be humane and stop his insulting banter, but I did think that maybe if he wasn't going to calm down, he would have the adverse reaction and be intentionally insulting. Instead, he behaved as though he was just numb.

I wasn't surprised that Spyder didn't care about offending my family. The way in which he completely ignored Heather, however, was appalling to me. As the product of a successful marriage that had lasted over thirty years, I wasn't used to watching a married couple behave in such a cruel way. I could never imagine living with something that disrespected me enough to act as though I didn't exist. Suddenly everything became clear. Spyder's obsession with spiders extended far past owning one as a pet, or even branding his body with one.

His behavior at the table enforced my theory that he lacked any form of human empathy. He truly was a tarantula living among us. He infected people with his venom - paralyzing them from having any sort of free thought or idea. The more anyone seemed to disagree with him, the more he hammered his ideas into their brain and soul. His words were harsh and sharp. He knew what to say to intimidate someone into being quiet and getting his way. There was no overcoming him. Heather was trapped in his web and there was no saving her. To this day, I wonder if she was aware of how poisonous he was and if she just thought she was insoluble to him, or if she just couldn't resist the temptation of intrigue, darkness, and mystery.

Painting Death

When 9/11 happened, the world went into shock. My neighborhood, being only half an hour away from Ground Zero, was particularly impacted. At the funeral of the man who lived in the house next door, I spotted Heather sitting by herself in the corner of the church. She wore a large dark sunhat and sat with her legs crossed, letting the ends of her silk black dress caress her exposed ankle. Had she had bumble-bee sunglasses on, she could have passed for a clone of Jackie Onasis. *I wonder why Spyder's not here. Why did Heather come to the funeral alone? Doesn't Spyder care what happened?*

As the church was letting out, I felt someone lightly grab my shoulder for attention. I turned around as Heather pulled me aside. She didn't have the same mascara lines running down her face that my mother had. Instead, her make up looked perfect and if she were in a different setting, I would have never guessed she had just been to a funeral. *How come she didn't cry?*

"Alex, I have a favor to ask you," she said.

"Um, yeah, I guess. What's up?" I responded.

“Well, as you know, I really like to paint. I’m creating a series of pieces about the youth’s perspective of what happened on 9/11. If you have the time and your mommy says it’s okay, would you mind coming over and drawing for me in my studio one day? It won’t take long, I just need inspiration,” Heather requested.

The offer seemed harmless enough. As much as I loved to draw, I was never talented enough to call myself an artist. My painting career had ended at age seven, when my brother told me that my portrait of Princess Jasmine looked more like her pet tiger than like herself. Having put down a paintbrush since then, I decided to move beyond my insecurities and take up Heather’s offer. It would be a fun and creative challenge. “Sure,” I told her.

“Great! Thank you so much! Just knock on my door whenever you can come by and we can go up to my studio,” Heather told me. Immediately after hearing this I wished I had a time machine and could travel back and say “no” to the offer. Even though she had said it before, it didn’t process that I would have to make my way back into that gloomy house – let alone sit in Heather’s interior-decorated-by-Tim-Burton studio.

I might as well get it over with sooner than later, I thought, as I knocked on my the door to my house’s counterpart the next day. Given my luck, it was Spyder that answered – this time with puffing on an enormous cigar lingering in his mouth.

“Lose your keys again, kid?” He laughed as he beckoned me into the house. “Is Heather here?” I nervously asked. *Please dear god, don’t leave me alone in here with this creeper again*. “Yeah, she’s upstairs in her studio. Just be to sure to knock first,” he instructed as he walked away from me into the living room. While walking up the stairs, I peered to get a glimpse of what Spyder was doing. I saw him sitting down at a drum set getting ready to attack the instrument as if to blockade the noise of his unfulfilled rock star dreams from his mind.

After knocking on the door to Heather’s studio, I made my way inside to find her deeply in concentration. Seeing her was like every image I’ve ever had of a painter at work. There was paint splattered all over her clothes and body, dripping from her arms all over the plastic covered wooden floors, as she clutched her pallet standing in front of her easel. The canvas she was working on had two giant rectangular shapes that looked like they were melting into a puddle on the ground. Obviously, her 9/11 project had begun.

Automatically, my eyes zoomed in on the giant contrast that found itself dead center of the room. Amongst all the dark crows and black paint was an open box of colorful crayons next to a pile of lined notebook paper. Heather directed me to it and told me to just draw whatever came to mind when I think about that day.

At first, I was going to draw a portrait of our neighbor who died. However, given my lack of any sort of artistic skill, I was afraid that I would butcher the picture and make it a mockery rather than a tribute. Instead, I opted to draw an American flag that was torn down the middle and ablaze with fire. To me, it represented the hurt and suffering our country was feeling. Later on when I told my friends about it though, they took it as me sympathizing with the terrorists. *Shows how art truly is open to interpretation*, I thought.

While working on the drawing, I felt incredibly uncomfortable. Heather and I were occupying the same small space, but we weren’t talking. We were both in our own creative zones and didn’t want any outside distractions, but it still felt extremely awkward for us not to be talking at all. With each line I colored in, I felt the silence pressing deeper and deeper into my skin to the point where I felt like there was no air left in the room for

me to breathe if I didn't open my mouth to speak. At that moment, loud drumming noises escalated their way up the stairs.

"There he goes again," Heather proclaimed. "Spyder used to be in a fairly successful band in the 80's. They played a lot of gigs around the city," she explained to me. "After they broke up Spyder gave up on his music and it wasn't until a couple of years ago that he decided to start playing again."

"Did you know him back then?" I asked.

"It's funny you should ask that," Heather replied as she put down her brush. A nostalgic smile crept its way onto her face. Even at a young age it was clear to me that she enjoyed talking about her youth because it brought her back to happier times. "I actually met him then because I was friends with one of his other band members. He introduced us and after looking through my portfolio he asked if he could use one of my crow paintings for a t-shirt design for the band."

Hearing this I immediately felt closer to Heather. Not because she had let me in on her past, but for some reason, watching her tell this story I could sense that there was far more to her than she ever showed. From the outside, it seemed as though she was a replica of any other suburban housewife, but after listening to her speak, it was clear that she had a much more interesting and complex past that brought her to where she was today. Afraid of prying too much, I didn't ask any more questions and instead imagined what her and Spyder must have been like back then. Visions of Spyder playing to a sold out crowd at CBGB's and pushing past a hurdle of groupies to get to Heather romanticized my mind as I created a narrative of how their love story began and evolved into this dark, sad relationship it was today.

"I'm finished!" I announced as I handed Heather my drawing. "Wow, Alex, this is beautiful. I'm definitely going to use this for my project!" she said as she thanked me. I proceeded to ask her why she asked me to do the picture with colored crayons if she was just going to paint it in black and white anyway. She explained that it was so I could fully express myself on the page, and that what she was doing was her own artistic interpretation of the work I had done. *Isn't that plagiarism?* I pondered. *I guess not since I'm giving her permission. I wonder if I'll get credit when she's a famous artist?*

It wasn't until three years after Heather and Spyder moved out that I knew what came of that drawing. I was nearly sixteen when I got an invitation in the mail to the opening of Heather's "9/11 Through The Eyes of America's Youth" exhibit in Austin, Texas. In the brochure that also came in the envelope, sure enough was an abstract, dark painted version of the crayon picture I had drawn while listening to the thumping beats of a drum that accompanied the story of how two artistic souls meshed together.

Today, while I don't draw anymore, I still love and appreciate art. I frequently spend hours losing myself at the MoMA, and consider the Brooklyn Museum to be a necessity stop when I'm home in New York. My personal style has evolved into a culmination of both my mother's flair for the antique, Renaissance inspired watercolors and Heather's post-modern dark sketches. The end result is a colorful, mainly abstract avante garde taste that attracts me to splattering my room with poster replicas of works by Salvador Dali, Jackson Pollack, Daniel Phill, Alfred Gockel, and Laurie Maitland. My art travels with me from dorm room to dorm room as I move every year, remaining a constant in my life that covers every wall I inhabit to instill a sense of home. *Home is where my art is.* It has always equaled comfort for me, so having my personal favorite

paintings hanging around my bed makes the annual transitions from one living space to another far less daunting.

I remember wondering if having her art on display meant Heather was closer to having her dreams come true. I remember wondering if Spyder was proud of her. I remember wondering if Spyder would even go to the opening, or leave her by alone in the corner like he did at that funeral. I remember wondering if she ever submitted her drawings of her ulterior house. I remember wondering if the only art anyone ever saw of hers were the crows on the band tee shirts and the portraits of 9/11 induced pain. I remember wondering if all Heather would ever be remembered for would be the woman who painted death.