



CHARACTER// PLACE

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Creative Writing Project



CHARACTER

Character:

Me

When I was born, birds chirped and elephants stomped. Cause it was me that was gonna be the best thing ever in the world, you hear? The best. And everyone knew, too that I was something real special. Like the world turned back a little, did a quick double take. Shook the houses, caused a few forests to tumble but you know. Everything recovered in order to look their best for me. Cause I was someone to impress. Yeah, man.

When I did my little baby cry, everyone in hearing distance literally got on one knee and made a funny face. Like a real real funny face, too. None of that just stick out your tongue bullshit or roll the eyes crap. Nope, they faces be straight up mangled.

And when I would laugh, everyone around would actually throw their hands up and praise G-d or Buddha or Allah, man, that I was there and that they were fortunate enough to be in my presence. Naw, man, I'm serious.

And I was just like the cutest baby, too. Ain't no baby that was softer, sweeter, more angelic than me. I was like a goddammed koala bear.



A pencil drawing of a landscape. In the upper right, a dark, textured tree stands on a hill. A curved branch with several leaves arches across the middle of the page. Below this, a smaller, more detailed tree with many leaves is positioned in the lower right. The ground is shaded with light pencil strokes, and numerous individual leaves are scattered throughout the scene, some appearing to fall. The word "PLACE" is written in a bold, serif font in the center of the page.

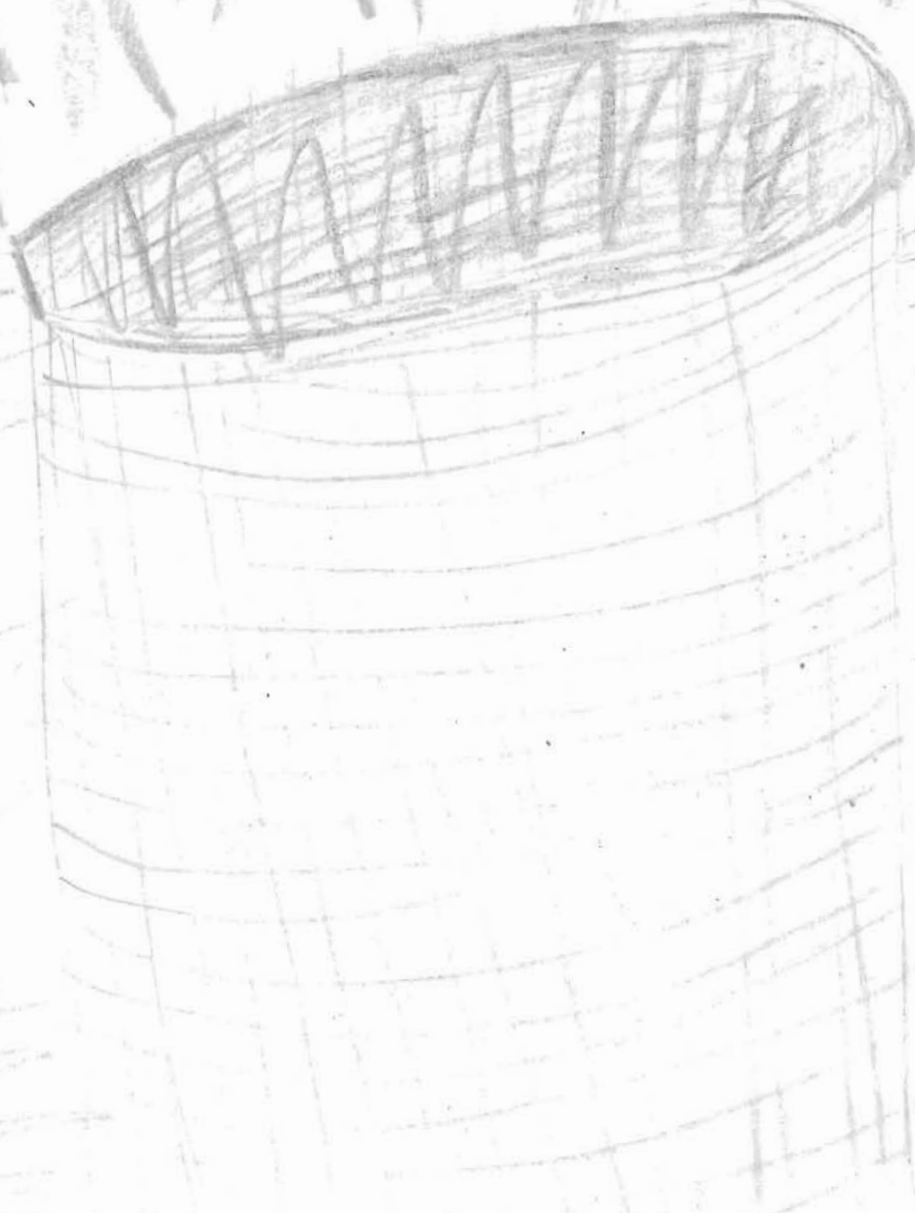
PLACE

Place:

Well, Well

Down dry well
Four nickels,
Vein traces bucket
Missing rope like lover.

And squirrel bones:
Tunneled in,
Watched sky darken
The claws,
The throat,
Tail a kite streamer.



A pencil sketch of a rural landscape. The sky is filled with a sunburst pattern of radiating lines. Below the sky are several rolling hills, each with a small barn and a silo. The hills are drawn with simple, wavy lines. The word "COUNTRY" is written in a large, bold, serif font across the middle of the page.

COUNTRY

Country:

Faith

I am a man of little senses. I used to have morals, goals. I was founded in my beliefs. I woke up every morning with Jesus in my heart, a beautiful feeling and a sense of peace. My wife, Janine, would serve me breakfast made from fresh eggs from the chickens outside and we would wake up early just to be together. The children would be picked up by the school bus that would drive them down that long, rolling country road to their schoolhouse.

I am a certified minister who knows a troubled soul when he sees one. In my day, I've assisted Christians in leaving their sinful habits behind. I even counseled a man through abandoning his homosexuality in order to escape a damned eternity. But heaven above knows when that horrible, wonderful girl entered my life, my blood tingled. It was as if the devil himself grew long, flowing blond hair and legs of a goddess.

Janine was at home, in the kitchen cooking up a Sunday dinner. The whole family was coming over, including my wife's parents who constantly sulk and boast thin white hair. They are unbearable, even at the point in my life when I got along with everyone. They would argue and grumble about the cooking, or taunt me one about my brother's unemployment situation, as if I was the one to blame.

But all was forgotten when she stepped into my office. Yes, all I knew and loved disappeared from mind. It was if I could only imagine me and her. Her and me. United in passion, lust, lo-. No. Not love. If love is what Jesus exudes than this was not that. But she had a mission and, lord above, that mission was going to be fulfilled.

She asked me a question and I stared at her tits. I don't even know what she asked me but the next thing I knew she was standing close to me and the tips of her hair hit my unshaven face. She was still talking when I felt her smooth skin and I was blinded by some great force and-

The choir master walked in with my pants around my knees and her shirt on my desk, flung shamelessly over the picture of my wife.

Janine received a phone call immediately.

Lord, dinner that night was unbearable. Janine's parents, her absent eyes focused on serving food. The children chatted on about their day, unaware of the sins that had just taken place.

When Janine's parents left, so did she. She turned and briskly walked outside to sleep at the neighbors. Truth be known, I hardly cared. I left early the next morning with just the clothes on my back to the city where I could "work things out."

I've been lying here on the cold cement under the El tracks waiting for the devil to pass for three spectacular days. Once, I did muster the energy to go to a soup kitchen down the street but I quickly returned here to think about her. I can see her body ingrained in the covering, and when the train passes her hair waves in the wind. I believe I will die here in Chicago's snow under Granville's tracks; my toes can hardly move anymore. A fresh corpse a few hundred feet away is beginning to make me gag. And with the approaching darkness, her body on the ceiling is escaping view. I stare upwards, not for Jesus, but for the last glimpse of her face in the shadows.

A pencil sketch of a map, possibly a world map, with wavy, irregular borders. The sketch is light and appears to be a preliminary drawing. The text is centered over the map.

CROSSING BORDERS

Crossing Borders:

The Holy Land

Face flushes. Hands tremble. Gun glows like light off skyscrapers and he runs. Bolts off, leaving her on that cold, wooden floor, hair red with blood.

Repeatedly wipes hands on coat jacket. Eyes blink against the wind. "Unholy," he whispers again and again. "Unholy." Looking up, he spots a plane, and it clicks.

He darts home, without a foot stepping inside, hurries around back to the garage. His cheeks quiver as he heads to the airport. "Unholy." His mind races. "Unholy."

Without speaking to anyone, he punches his credit card number into El Al's electronic ticket machine and takes a seat in a black plastic chair. His back bends, head down, stares at the gray carpet. "Unholy."

Does not check into a hotel. He does not pause to take in the smooth, pious air. Does not get a bite of falafel. "Unholy." No, jumps into a taxi. In his mind flashes a picture of the red-headed woman and his body ticks.

Smelling the salty sea, he gasps and runs towards it. "Unholy." Nearer and nearer, toes drink water. "Unholy." And he jumps in, ungracefully, expecting never to breathe the air again. But up he floats. He pushes himself down, but with all his strength used to end it, something greater pulls back. "Unholy."

Things turn serious. With a full dolphin dive, head submerges, then pops back like a buoy. Even once controllable arms do not stay under. Fingers scramble beneath the line of air versus water and eventually experience the cold breeze once again. Mud caked families periodically break from scrubbing bodies to eye thrashing man. Sea is covered in hodgepodge of multinational floaters except for an ever-widening circle around him. Hair is dry by the time he gives up on giving up. Joins the slightly unwelcome masses of those staring heavenwards dreaming of a collective history.

He never stops feeling the sting of salt.



OCEAN

Ocean:

Squid, Octopus, Lobster: A Political Satire

Lights up on ticket office in Pacific Ocean.

Sign reads: "Opening Night!"

A well-to-do squid, dressed in a business suit and a bowler hat. The squid is a professor at Coral Reef University, and is planning a proposal to his girlfriend of two hours for the upcoming Saturday night. He faces a disgruntled, extremely red lobster who sports a pair of patchy jeans and the "Wavy Theater" jacket. The lobster's uncle owns the theater and allowed the nephew to work there as a favor.

S: Hi- I'd like two tickets for "Odd Octopods."

L: Octopods? (scoff scoff) I think the play is titled "Odd Octopi."

S: Excuse me, sir, but have you written on the subject of language plurality for three years? I have mind you, and I will have no one, no one, especially not you- a claw, scrubby faced youngster correcting me in the area of my expertise. Perhaps if I had said something about eating skin after molting, or any other of the numerous repulsive habits that you reds take part in it would have been suitable to correct me. But not today. Not on my watch, thank you. Now, may I please have two tickets for next Saturday night's showing of "Odd Octopods."

L: Yes, sir.
Lights down.

CITY



City:

Pay up

Please give me your money. Please. I asked it nicely. I'll give you one more chance.
Please give me your money. Nope? Ok then. It was your choice.

That's what I always whisper as I swiftly escape the train and run out into the fresh, crisp air of my city. My city because I actually own it. Anything I want or need is at my disposal. More than most can say, right?

I mean most people sit in their nice, spacious apartment sippin' on their hundred dollar wine and watchin' wide screen TVs. I just can't stand those people, man. Those people who think they're all conscious but they don't even know what it's like to live outside for weeks or sleep on your friend's friend's couch till you have to leave when the wife comes home and tries to read a magazine at 2AM but you're there and you get sat on and something inside of you forces you out the door and you have to go you have to get out and the guilt the pain of living off of someone else eats you up inside and carries you to the door that you accidentally slam and you go to the park down the street where the old white men lay with newspapers covering them like in a movie and you feel like you can never fit in and you can never get out of this trap that is life and this trap that holds you in and suffocates you no matter how hard you kick and yell and pound at the surface till your hands bleed.

I own this damn city. They're living in my house. So pay up.



SUBURBAN



Suburbs:

Lost Date

Jack called me up Tuesday night, right after dinner when I was watching *Lost* reruns with my mother. I almost died when my mom handed me the phone. She knew it was a boy and gave me that look. Whatever. She's always pulling stuff like that. So, me and Jack WALTERS, only the coolest guy in school AND a sophomore, planned to meet outside Starbucks in the mall on Friday at 5:00.

I spent three hours getting ready. I even ditched 10th period gym to come home early and straighten my hair. It was pretty easy to come home. I'm usually first back at the shack anyways, especially since mom is back at work or whatever. If she knew, though, I'd be totally dead. Seriously. So, anyways I got perfumed, applied eye-liner, curled eyelashes, tweezed brows, shaved legs. I was so ready.

I had to beg Ted, my slimy brother who schemed his way into getting a license, to drive me 15 minutes to the mall. As if he really has better things to do. He agreed under the circumstances that I allow him full TV privileges for the month. Fine by me, I think, knowing this date will be better than any Laguna Beach. And plus, I think, Jack will let me watch TV at his house. He's such a sweetie, seriously.

So, when I got out of the car, Ted sped off like a maniac, and I walked confidently into the north entrance. I stopped at the Starbucks right near the Lego store where I used to go when I was a baby with dad before he left, and sat down. Cute, right? Sometimes that store makes me all emotional but not today. Today, I was in control and everything was going to be like so perfect. I waited for ten minutes and glanced at a nearby clock (it was way too unfashionable to wear a watch with my new purple dress). Jack isn't coming, I go, and blocked up the tears to make sure my mascara wouldn't smudge. I felt invisible, smothered being surrounded by so many people. The world totally covered me up! Oh my god! Why does this always happen to me?

Just then I heard "Baby Boy" start playing and I picked up my razor. It was my mother and she had, like, found me out! The school had called her cell and left a message saying that I wasn't in gym class, and this was my 8th absence or whatever. She was totally yelling and probably causing a huge scene at her new office or whatever and embarrassing herself. I just did that thing where I held up the phone in the air while my mother practically lost her voice. I would normally care about being grounded but I knew she wouldn't threaten my life or anything in front of her new office friends. When the yelling stopped, I calmly put the phone back to my ear and was like, "I'll see you later, mom. Love ya." I just hung up on her and turned the phone off. There was no going back now. Maybe Jack will let me stay at his house so I'll never have to go home and face that witch again. If he would ever come, seriously...

Then I remembered. There was another Starbucks upstairs. As quickly as I could without tripping over my Uggs, I made my way upstairs. But I couldn't find the Starbucks and people kept getting in my way, and they stood in front of me and blocked my vision, and I could feel my toes beginning to sweat and the air growing stale and my dress's shoulder strap wouldn't stay up. I tried so hard to read the map but my eyes wouldn't focus, you know?

I composed myself, took some deep meditative breaths, and went into the pretzel shop to ask for directions. The Starbucks had been right in front of me the whole time!

I'm so dumb, right? I walked causally over to the upstairs branch and didn't need to do anything more than glance around. Forty-five minutes had passed, thanks to no one, and he wasn't there, alright? My life is officially over.

