

1. As you read . . .

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- ↳ Make a notation of any positive Affect the author expresses. This may include expressions of hope, excitement, adventure, or desire (professional or personal).
- ↳ Make a notation of any expressions of needed direction. Specifically, is the author seeking clarity or guidance in any aspect of any topic? Are there suggestions of confusion?

2. Synopsis statement – Write a statement which expresses clearly and concisely what the author is wrestling with.

3. Be prepared to discuss this.

Blog posting by In Reeves, 11th May 2007 Portland, Oregon IanWalk.Com

Oh, what I'd give to be a swinger of birches; the supple bend of youth to rhythm, float above the soil from trunk to trunk in the lazy arc of the moon, but they don't grow out here so I'll be a swinger of cedars if I can find any now that so many are cut and I can't swing on firs because they're too weak when they're young and too tall when they're old and the bark would be rough on my white collar hands, and as for other trees I don't know their names so how could I use them to swing?

Oh, what I'd give to stretch my length on leaves of grass but out here it's all asphalt and concrete and manicured lawns all the leaves halved and burn browned at the top not a meadow or glade or glen of wild grass within reach so I'll be a layer on stones with unknown edges sharper than time and all the while I'll replay the phrase 'leaves of grass' in my mind till it fills me with green and scents and the sun and everything summer is supposed to mean which is the fruition of spring or the answer to winters still life introspection on death.

Oh, what I'd give to consistently sing the song of myself clear and clean which I do when I can and I'm not out of tune too flat or too sharp wavering between and the verses all muddled and slurred which is strange because I should know it complete the melody is yours it is mine it is the same since the beginning of thought and of reason and of wondering at unfettered stars and wind on the ice and of hypnotized water and its manic times too it is the song of myself but only in that it is the song of ourselves and its being sung from the grave and moaned by shades and thrown down from on high and rising from bottom and our your my song will not stop not even when we've ceased to matter or to be of matter and,

Oh how I wish I could catalog in seconds what eternity means and share with you what I've learned in these my flashing moments of immortality.

Affective commentary:

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Blog posting by In Reeves, 7th May 2007 Portland, Oregon IanWalk.Com

The dryer rolls in heat circles, my door’s closed so I only hear it muffled. Windows cracked to move air, city sounds leak in, the constant metal-ocean groan, sharp horn calls, tire squeal, the ambulance cries “Bring out your dead!”, the trucks, the eighteen wheels moving it all around, getting it here, and there, whatever it is...I say that but I know what it is, it’s not mine.

The carnival is quiet down by the water, the plastic beer cups and candy bar wrappers pushed into mud, a modern mosaic. Carnies sit on back steps of trailers in the corrugated dark, points of cigarette light, orange glows to punctuate the silence, conversations so well-known they don’t need speaking; it’s a life earned hard and hardly worth it. The train whistle shudders out its soliloquy, a one-word Hamlet moan, MAX rattles over the Steele Bridge, the Willamette hisses and gasps beneath with heavy-metal lungs.

I’m six floors up so I can’t hear the homeless, the TB coughs, the hawk-and-spit, the mad dog tinkle of broken glass, the blaze-eyed sermons of the mad, the runs of dysentery, the scratch and scratch of lice and crab, lesion, abrasion, and grime, the snuffle of dirty-blanket pull, the shuffle of swollen feet in broken shoes, the grind of rot-brown teeth jonesin’, the fork-tongued whispers of the Fixers, the Giver-Takers, the Street Corner Undertakers, the Shaky-Handed Vultures, the push-pull promise of a needle in a vein, the laughter of the insane, the hitting, kicking, cutting pain, the ruined visage of an Abel-bodied Cain.

I can’t hear the liquor pour or the dollar bill set on a dirty floor by dirty fingers for a dance; I can’t hear the open, the shut, the slide of doors and windows, the click of locks, and more locks and more, the scatter-jabber fall of dusty blinds, of kill-the-light curtain on bent rod, fans akimbo in their spin, staccato-green glow of fluorescent tubes, backlit years of dead flies and other crawlies, the nicotine ceilings, the cardboard walls, of TV’s tin-can patter.

I can’t hear the scarring of tears on unforgiving faces, the infinite alone of staring eyes, the ever-pressing walls, the closed-circuit symphony of doubt, fear, loathing, regret, pain, loneliness, hate, longing, the thousands of intimate tragedies lived in the between-reality hours of every night, this particular edge of darkness that slices so cleanly to bone.

And I’m awake in it all, too tired to write, too bored not too and I won’t let it in, won’t let it escape, either, I’ll grab it and put it down, right here, and it will end and it won’t, it’ll stop and it can’t, just like this last word.

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Instructions

Name: _____

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Blog posting by In Reeves, 2nd May 2007 Portland, Oregon IanWalk.Com

I've been driving down all the wrong roads, running all the red lights, living every hour like a Saturday night, and now it's me with a handful of wheel, an empty passenger seat and a broken radio. And all that's in my mind, all that's ever in my mind is to not slow down, to run myself into the ground going nowhere.

If I could only find a way to find the fire to be famous, if I could only get the need to make it big, if I could just get myself creative, let it all emerge out of me, so that I could touch immortality.

If I could only find the time to realize that extra time is all I've ever had...and wasted, I might find myself sitting here a happier man. A line from a song: "I'm gonna die alone and sad", that line has always scared me like the singer knew me in his head.

I wait all day for nothing; I wait all day for "purpose" "truth" "reason" to arrive. But they don't make house calls, they don't have rails to ride, it's like they're from some foreign country and their passports have expired. My mailbox is always empty and there's nothing here to keep me, I might as well just drive, and all that's in my mind, all that's ever really there, are the things I've always wanted, and I've wanted everything at some point, even you.

How does something happen that's never happened before? How to break free from me, everything I am, it's like reaching up too high, like breaking your bones against silence, like scraping off my skin on inertia. With my head in my hand I watch things go by, they have names like car and dog and person and bum; just things to keep my eyes busy while I wait for another thing, something, I just can't find its name.

Some words almost approach it, things that might describe me, a me I'd like to claim, like happy, content, whole, aware, now, and in love. Those are good words, but they don't quite reach it, don't quite define that thing that I know I have inside me, that is trapped in my paradox of want and inaction, that I wish I could expose in new-to-world rawness, that I could share and be and know and use and ride into the next day and every day beyond, that thing that I want to be but never looked directly in the eyes...

I'm peripheral man, paraphrasing my life in the periphery of history. I'm already halfway erased from the collective mind, these scribbling's like ordered dust, like motes in a row, are already really under the sweeping hand of time.

It's so easy to feel sorry for myself, it's the privilege of our kind.

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Blog posting by Ian Reeves, 15th January 2006 Buenos Aries, Argentina IanWalk.Com

Crazy, man, how life just keeps on happening. sometimes I feel like I've fallen behind in it somehow, as if it were a race or timed-event (which I guess it is in a way). Sometimes I feel like I can't catch up, like I never will, like it's all too much to get a grip on.

I started on my walk over 3 friggin years ago, you know? I mean, this is a thing I'd been dreaming about for 10 years before that, nursing, nurturing, using as a security blanket in hard times, like a banner in good times. And then, almost miraculously for me, a guy who's a certified genius in the art of not finishing what I've started and of not even starting what I'd like to someday finish...I actually started the walk!

And, damn, but it's been incredible, the best days and nights of my life. Every day seemed to have some profound moment, some nugget of beauty so raw and real that crying seemed as common to me as breathing.

But I blinked somewhere in there and now more than a year has passed, has "happened", since I've taken steps northward.

I fell in love back there along the way, and the "wow" in my world intensified exponentially and cloud nine couldn't even hold me, I had to create a cloud ten.

I was in Patagonia, working alongside my love, happy as ever, it all seemed immortal, eternal, permanent. But of course it wasn't, man, cause it was life for christ's sake, and that's one thing you can say about life: it's consistently inconsistent. Bit by bit that other entity called "Us" that my love and I had created began to fall apart, aged right there in front of our eyes, cracks and lines and imperfections sprouting insidiously on every facet, while we watched, seemingly helpless but actually the cause of its demise, it was me it was her who were so slowly and subtly tugging on the strings that pulled "Us" apart.

But back there in Patagonia, it was still too early to see that, it was easy to avoid seeing the beginning of the end.

And then buenos aires for a month...that fucking HUGE metropolis. 15 million people jostling around in it, a craggy wasteland of 10 story apartment buildings, every thought backed up by a soundtrack of grinding metal gears and pistons, of shouts, screams and groans. And, you see, I love Buenos Aires, can usually dig on it, on its life, on its frenetic drive. But not this time, not when my selfish desire to be up on some mountain road in Bolivia or Perú, just walking in my own world, was there on my shoulder nibbling on me. Yeah, I hate to admit it, but I did resent "Us" sometimes in that city, unfairly named it as one of the reasons I was "here" instead of "there".

And then my love and I roamed north, visiting friends and family along the way. Snow storms in Neuquen, crisp mornings in la Quiaca, festivals in Tupiza, the horizonless white of the Uyuni salt flats, amazing people and the mines of Potosí. And city of Sucre, dressed like a vestal virgin in white colonial buildings.

Affective commentary:

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And on , then, to the tiny jungle village of Villa Tunari and the hope of volunteering at the wildlife refuge called intiwarayassi. My love now torn between obligations in the south and the adventures to be had here in this far-distant north. Long conversations about decisions, made and un-made, about goals, and hopes and dreams and responsibilities. “Us”, weaker now, and scaring us a little. 4 days at the refuge and then, suddenly, my love on a bus back for the south to face and fulfill those obligations. 1 day later...July 7th, 2005...me cutting a tree in the jungle, slipping as it fell, it hitting me so hard that it didn't hurt. 3 broken vertebrae, a broken fibula. the rest of the month spent there in the refuge, recuperating, resenting my own body for failing me, for keeping me from walking. My every day from there on, while sweet...carrying something resembling bitterness in the background.

Then home to the states to recover. My parents, my sister and bro-in-law, my sweet, sweet nieces, my friends. Subbing at my old school for extra cash, sliding into routine, but again, each day tinged with...with what? bitterness? yes. resentment? yes. frustration? yes. and ultimately with what? with guilt? yes.

Why am I so selfish? Why can't I keep in perspective what a wonderful, fortunate and varied life I have? Why can't I maintain in clear view how lucky I am to have such an amazing family and such warm friends?

I'll just save the pondering of those questions for myself...

It's just so easy to lose sight of things...goals, and dreams, and ideas, and courage, and the fact that my life is truly a fortunate one.

Not to sound too down, though, man...they were also incredible months, those at home...a lot of laughter and food, and warmth and learning and new possibilities, and reencounters and a strengthening of all of those.

But also, during all that, “Us” slowly suffocated, withering away with each uncomfortable phone call, with every misinterpretation and over (or under) reaction...with the distance and the separation.

And now I'm back down here. South America. Buenos Aires. Tomorrow I go south to meet with my love and what remains of “Us”, needing to find a way to give it all an ending that doesn't also snuff out friendship and respect and support, and that foundation of it all, that genuine concern and love one for the other. I pray to all gods everywhere that this be possible.

From there, north again, a straight shot to La Paz...and after so many months, so much of life “happening” without a single physical step toward fulfilling my dream, I'll once again be on the road, letting it wind me where it will, thinking on this last year, hopefully finding an answer to some of those questions I keep asking myself, and with luck and work, maybe even finding a less selfish me.

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Blog posting by Ian Reeves, 15th January 2006 IanWalk.Com

Laying sweaty in my sheets late in the night after the accident. No sleep. No chance of it. Wondering to myself, When did it happen? I mean, when did it really happen? Not the moment of impact, but the beginning or the “birth” of it?

Maybe it happened just the night before when I said “yes” to Annabelle. Or maybe earlier this morning when I decided to put on a pair of cut-to-be-hightop rubber boots with no tread instead of my trekking shoes. Or maybe it happened when I put the axe and the machete in the little backpack and slung the lot over one shoulder. Or maybe the accident was already happening when I waved goodbye to the other volunteers and found myself alone 5 miles from the nearest road.

Maybe, just maybe, that accident had been happening my whole life, moving imperceptibly faster and faster as I neared that crucial moment of impact between possibilities and the reality of the moment. Anyway, it did happen, regardless of when it was born...and here’s how:

Night before, 1 liter beers on the table like a brown-glass forest. Six or seven volunteers lounging in green plastic chairs, everyone tired from the long day, heavy jungle air settling in around us. Huge transport trucks roaring and grinding past two times faster than they should be. They hurtle onto the narrow two lane, no-sidewalked bridge crossing the river Espíritu Santo. Any locals crossing the bridge at that moment just sidle nonchalantly up against the side railings as the 18 wheelers heave by only a foot from their faces. Gringos on the bridge though, the ones crossing into town or back to the refuge where we sat, first freeze, then jump all panicky to the rails, leaning out over the river, trying to get away from all that moving metal without falling into the shallow waters below. I liked to call that span “The bridge of death”, even though I hadn’t seen anyone get plastered on it...it just seemed a matter of time though. Such an incongruent thing, to be so close to wild jungles, in fact, to be surrounded by them, but to be only 30 feet from a busy trunk road linking two of Bolivia’s largest cities.

Annabelle was there with us, watching the “bridge of death”. All muscle and bone, annabelle. Her face seemed like it wanted to pull in toward the center, the squinting eyes, pursed lips, and the brows drawn down in thought...or disapproval...or both. She’d been there a year already, started out as a 1 month volunteer like the rest of us, but just couldn’t leave, couldn’t stop working. And here she was now, the erstwhile volunteer coordinator, caring so much for the animals in the refuge that it sometimes seemed not to care about us. But that wasn’t the case, as I found out the next day.

She leaned over to me, a thick French accent tugging on her words, “Ian, tomorrow you walk the Puma.”

“Which one?” me, surprised and already nervous.

“Gato” A hesitation, a thought “And I have a favor to ask. A tree is blocking his path. I want you to clear it away.”

“With him there...watching me?” Hint of a smile, “No, Karen and Rachel will finish his walk. Will you do it?”

“Of course.”

“But there’s one more thing. The tree. It’s not lying down. It’s upside down. Still standing, but the wrong way. Do you understand?”

Affective commentary:

“Uh, yeah, I guess I understand...a flipped tree, sure. Happens all the time”

Another half smile. “Don’t let it fall on you, ok?”

Next day, early morning. The capuchín monkeys housed outside my room, the “quarantined monkeys” already awake, chirping, screaming, laughing, crying in they’re high-pitched human-baby/song-bird voices. All the drama of a lifetime packed into 3 minute intervals: fights, reconciliations, surprise and betrayal...all three feet from my ears. I get up; on go the already-musty-dirty clothes and my trekking shoes.

Outside, clouds and humidity, the usual. Annabelle hands me a small knapsack, axe handle and machete blade poking out the top. She looks at my shoes, her face pulls into the center again.

“No. Those shoes won’t work. You need wellies (rubber boots). You’ll be in mud pits, streams, standing water.” She marched away from me. Her back said “follow.”

“Here, take these” She said, handed me rubber boots, each one cut to half height.

Ten minutes later, on the trail with Karen and Rachel, each of us with bags of food, straw, equipment. Twenty minutes climb up to Gato’s cage, tucked into a fold in the jungled hills north of the volunteer compound.

The daily ritual: open first door of cage, slide in next to second door. Other volunteer puts foot against first door, leaving it open only enough for the leash to run free. Gato standing in front of second door, volunteer reaches in, hooks the leash carabineer onto his collar. Other volunteer hooks other end of leash onto a long “runner” cable tied between two trees near the cage. Doors are opened and Gato bursts out, a 180 pound cat at full sprint to one end of the runner. We clean the cage, put down new straw bedding, set 2 whole chickens in the feed pan, cover them...they’re for dinner.

Then it’s off for a 10 mile puma walk. Gato sprints around every corner, we stumble and lurch behind him, dodging roots, holes, small ravines, boulders. This is not a stroll. We climb along narrow trails closed in by muscled trees, everything green and brown, alive and rotting. We descend past a rubber tree plantation, the linearity of man-planted trees a shock after so much vegetated chaos. We skirt ridges and climb again to a rotting-wood lookout deck. Below the entire valley of the Río Espíritu Santo, the Holy Ghost River, a rock-littered gash through a bolt of green cloth. Then on and down and up and around, always following the blue-marked trail. The red and yellow trails belong to other pumas. These cats don’t like each other. Instincts tell them to want territory, lots of it. “Don’t let the pumas see each other” Annabelle always told us. “It’s dangerous. For you.”

We turned a corner, our trail hugging the bottom of a cliff and stopped. Had to. There was the “upside down” tree. It had fallen down the cliff, landed on its canopy, the trunk shot upward, nosed against the cliff a bit. Like a giant umbrella I thought. The branches covered part of a little wooden bridge. There was no way to get around the tree.

“Well, time for me to play lumberjack” I said.

Karen looked up at the trunk of the tree. “Be careful, Ian. ok?”

“Yep. Believe me, the last thing I want is to have a tree fall on me.”

“How long is it going to take you?”

“No idea. A couple hours. Maybe I’ll catch up with you guys at the lookout.”

“Ok. If not we’ll see you back at the house.”

Gato stood up, pulled toward the bridge and the tree, Rachel leaning all her weight against the leash. He hissed, pulled again.

“Come on Gato, let’s go this way.” Rachel cooed, keeping tension on the leash, trying to convince the cat to turn around and retrace the trail we’d been walking. Gato hissed again. “Pumas want routine, understand?” Annabelle had informed me the night before. “Break that routine and they get grouchy. When they get grouchy they bite and scratch. And when they do that, you get cut and bruised. Understand? You will get clawed, you will get bitten. These are not house cats. They are not tame. Do not try to force them, and do not break routine. Understand?”

I stood watching Rachel and Gato try to out-will one another. Two minutes, five, eight...and finally gato relaxed, turned his back to me, hissed once at Rachel, and padded away down the trail. I was alone but surrounded by teeming life. Leaf cutter ants, red bodies, long legs, carried their chunks of leaf above them like green sails or protest signs, a single file freeway coming from invisible leading into invisible. Inexorable. Birds coughed and fluted in the trees. Giant leaves rustled in places where the breeze above could sneak down toward the ground. Vines hung in tangles. Bushes and ferns clogged the floor. Rotting leaves everywhere, covering muddy ground in the rare bare patches of ground. I smiled huge. I was in a real jungle, I could feel all that life around me, all that scurrying for food and light, for safety and shelter.

I hacked the branches away from the bridge, used the machete to carve a tunnel through the upside down tree's canopy. Got to the other side, cleared away more branches, found which of them were supporting the now-swaying trunk's weight. Chose which to cut, wanted the tree to fall parallel with the trail.

Cracks, lurches, groans. Each hack with axe trembling the tree. I stopped, made sure I could get away from the falling trunk. Practiced it once, twice, three times. Went back, another swing of the axe. Another. A pause. CRACK! Time to run.

I turned, pushed off with my left foot, and there was nothing to push off on, my left foot flying out behind me...I was slipping.

Down. Belly on the ground. Panic-rush. Scramble.

Pushing to stand, a glance up and over my right shoulder.

Movement there, heavy, fast.

I got to my feet, my hands still on the rotten leaves, pushing into the mud, head down.

And just like that I was back on the ground, an explosion of force so hard and so sudden it seemed like it almost hadn't happened at all. no air in my lungs, the world white, white, white, and hissing like a broken TV, something warm running out of my nose. Blood...just pouring. Then it stopped, like a faucet turned off. No pain. The white noise gone. Calmness. Lucidity.

I'm broken. I'm really fucking broken. Wow. Remember this, Ian...if you last long enough. Remember that this is and was the very moment when your life forever changed. You're broken. It was so clear, so obvious. In those 10 or 20 seconds, I felt no fear, no pain, no worry...just an absolute and surprised surety of a turning point.

Then came the throbbing in my back, like being pinched in a giant vice, hard to breathe, head rushing and swirling. Panic again. Oh, shit, the tree's on me! The fucking tree is still on me! I'm trapped here! Oh my god...no. I had to move just had to get out from under the tree. I pulled with my arms, clawed at the debris-strewn jungle floor. And I moved; I slithered along with no resistance. Relief, I'd sigh if I could get a deep enough breath. I wasn't under the tree, after all. I gotta get up! Gotta get out of here, get help. Shocky, shivering, I started to push myself to my feet. My back tensed in crazy spasms. I lay back down, chanted to myself. Relax Ian. just relax, man...relax, Ian, relax Ian.

I lay there, shallow breaths, my mouth in contact with the bits of bark, dirt, leaf, twig on the ground. I could smell the rot, musty fungus, I saw an ant crawl by inches from my eye. Relax, Ian. I moved my fingers, my wrists, my elbows, shrugged my shoulders, gently tensed the muscles in my neck, expecting sharp pains, felt none. I switched to my toes. Just like Kill Bill, Ian...wiggle your toes. Flexed my ankles, slightly bent my knees, some pain in my right leg, but dampened by the red-hot glow in my back. Ok, so far so good...now the back...but very carefully. I swiveled my hips an inch to the right, an inch to the left...no increase in pain, no sharpness, no numbness. I lifted my hips off the ground, arched my back. More pain, so stiff, like a permanent cramp...but again no stab of new pain, no inside-the-body sound of grinding bone. Breathing still short, hard to take in air. 10 minutes passed, maybe 10 days. If I get up, and my back is broken, I might actually paralyze myself by moving. But if I stay here, who will come to get me? How long will I have to wait? It's gotta be, what, 10am now? The girls will have lunch with Gato at around 1, wait for me, think nothing of the fact that I don't show up, leave around 2. They'll finish up with the cat around 5, head down to the house, have a beer, eat some empanadas, talk about the day. Then they'll shower, come back for another beer, and dinner. When it gets dark one of 'em might ask if anyone has seen me. Maybe then they'll start to worry, might try to find Annabelle or Stuart, ask them what to do. Then maybe they'll come for me, fearing the worst. It'll be dark, pitch black dark. It'll take 'em a couple hours to get here. Then it'll be, let's see, around 10-11 at night. Hmm...

I could feel myself already starting to stiffen up, the shock settling in. Even though it was in the seventies, I was cold. I pictured army ants coming across me, sending news to their minions, picking me apart pinch by little pinch. I pictured swarms of mosquitoes settling in for a feast, I pictured those tenacious, badger like Tejones finding me, messing me up just for the hell of it. I pictured a jaguar smelling me out in the night, coming in for the easy dinner, I didn't even know if there were jaguars in this particular fold of the jungle, but like a castaway floating in the sea not knowing what lurked in the depths below him, I had no clue what might even then be watching me from the dense green horizontal abyss surrounding me. Fuck, no. If I lay here any longer, I'll be stiff as a board, won't be able to move even if I wanted to. I gotta get out of here.

I pushed myself to my hands and knees, then slowly stood up. I felt like a bad imitation of Frankenstein, or of a corpse emerging from a grave in a B movie. Then I smiled. I was standing, I wasn't going to die. I couldn't sense any weird internal scariness like ruptured organs, and my back, while hurting like hell, didn't feel unstable.

But when I stepped out with my right leg and planted it I heard the disconcerting feel-sound of bone scraping against bone. Fuck! My right fibula was broken. How? The tree hadn't hit it, I was sure of that. I'd broken both the tibia and fibula of my right leg before. Well, at least the fib is a non weight-bearing bone, if I'm careful, I can walk without doing too much extra damage down there. I was a bit surprised that my leg didn't hurt more. It just felt wrong or unnatural, but it didn't hurt. "Disconcerting" that's what my leg felt like.

I hobbled over to my camera bag. I was going to take some pictures of the puma and of the process of clearing the tree away. Instead I took a few pictures of myself next to the tree, so I'd never be able to forget how fucking unlucky and at the same time absurdly lucky I seem to be. I found the point where my boot had slipped in the mud, took a picture of that, too. That little brown smudge on the ground, that tiny scar, was evidence of how random and fragile life really is. If my boot catches a stone there, or the leaves don't slip away, I'm away from the tree and patting myself on the back instead of wondering whether it's snapped in half. Then I start thinking about the angle and force of the tree, how it hit me. If I'd just stayed prone on the ground the tree would probably have missed me, maybe hit my left arm, if it was stuck out to the side. If I would have lifted my head up when I was scrambling to my feet, the trunk would have clipped me skull before smashing into my back. I'm positive I'd be dead if I'd have done that. And if I had somehow gotten all the way to my feet, the tree would have caught me full on in the abdomen, made a pudding out of my organs, crushed my ribs, pinned me to the ground...I'm sure I would have died in that scenario, too. Later that week, when I'd lay awake on my back on the over-hard mattress in the volunteer house, I'd replay those possible endings out in my head over and over again and every time I'd cry from the knowing of how intimately I'd caressed against Death. Such a humbling thing an encounter like that.

It took me almost four hours to walk the five miles to the volunteer house and that road full of semi trucks. Up hill and down, over root and under fallen tree, across creek and up ravine. I moved methodically, a robot programmed to plant right foot, make sure it wouldn't roll or flex, slowly shift weight, swing left leg and hip around, back clenched to the side, in an all-day spasm of dull pains and shifting bone. I passed it thinking about how amazing life is, how much I missed my family, how stupid I'm being when I worry about this or that or the other, how badly I wanted to be walking, letting the road and the world stretch before and behind me. I passed it wondering if I was going to be ok, if my back was really broken, if I was endangering myself with every step. I passed it feeling incredibly lonely, sometimes scared. I passed it chuckling at the "reader's digest-esqueness" of it all. "TREE FALLS ON MAN IN JUNGLE, HE CRAWLS TO SAFETY ON ALL FOURS."

Three hours pass. Ahead I hear the thwack of machete on branch, footsteps. I call out "Hey! Who is that?" No answer. I hobble forward a bit longer, come to a steep-sided ravine. A creek tumbles at the bottom. I yell again. "Hey, who is that?" This time an answer. "It's Karen. Is that you Ian?"

"Yes. Could I get some help." A pause.

"Um. I'm on the other side of the ravine."

I didn't know how to respond. For some reason felt silly shouting out "But I'm broken goddamn it!" So I said nothing, slid on my ass down to the creek, spent five minutes scrambling up the other side. There was Karen, about 30 feet away, in profile, chopping at bushes encroaching on the trail. "Rachel's up with Gato at the lookout, just thought I'd clean the trail up some. You ready?" And without looking at me she started up the path.

Affective commentary:

Again, I said nothing, tried to follow. Time passed. A big tree trunk across the trail. Crazy pain as I tried to fling my leg over it without moving my back. I must have groaned because Karen turned around to look at me. "Are you...holy shit! Ian, what happened?" She moved toward me. I must have been a sight, shock-white face, twigs and bark stuck to my cheeks and lips, blood crusted on nose and upper lip, shirt stained from mud and water and tree trunk impact.

For some reason, the concern on her face hit me like a brick, tears jumped into my eyes, my voice broke as I told her in short sentences what had happened. "Cutting tree, slipped, it fell on me. Broke my leg. Back is killing me."

"Do you want me to go ahead and get more people?" She asked me, guilt showing from not having noticed my state before.

"No. I can walk. Maybe just a shoulder now and then going down hill...that part is no fun." A while later, the lookout, Rachel already gone with the cat. Then near the monkey park, Karen yelling down to the volunteers there. Up come Robert and Tor. More shoulders to lean on. Joking with Robert as we finally get down to the river. My leg finally starting to hurt on the wobbly river rock. Rob so positive, encouraging. Then the house, the road, a VW bug, the village clinic.

A non-doctor looking at my back, not touching it, not asking me questions, just looking. The nurse with her back turned to me, reading a romance novel. Details: the rusty blood stains on the feet of the tables, the smell of ammonia and bleach, the broken windows, flickering fluorescent lights, the staring quiet of whole families in the hall, the ancient machinery and tools. Then the 17 year-old x-ray tech. The x-ray machine older than her grandparents, her lack of knowledge, the Refuge's veterinarian having to hold the photo plate against the wall behind my back, his head exposed to the zap of radiation. The results from the back x-ray...like a cloudy day, no details. Tech girl saying nonchalantly "Yeah, figured as much. That machine's too weak for back x-rays" Then why in hell did you take it in the first place, little girl? The leg x-ray worked. Ruptured bone in five little pieces, a mini jigsaw puzzle.

I stayed there for a month, healing. My back curing faster than my leg. Then a flight back to the States. Family. Friends. Warmth of loved ones. A back x-ray there shows three broken lumbar vertebrae. Me surprised because my back feels fine now. The doctor, "So, Ian, do you feel any pain in your back?" Me, "Nope, what'll you do?"

"Nothing." A couple minutes later, the secretary, "That'll be 290 dollars, Mr. Reeves."

Ah, yes, the States.

I'm alive, I'm well. Life is short, maybe shorter than you know. I know what I'm going to do with it now...

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2. Synopsis statement – Write a statement which expresses clearly and concisely what the author is wrestling with.

3. Be prepared to discuss this.

Blog posting by In Reeves, 12th February 2008 IanWalk.Com

“I’ve learned everything there is to know about loneliness, now it’s just punishment”
– Oliver, drunk, skinny, bitter (and alone) old sea captain.

Now...right now...think of your wife, your husband, your boyfriend, girlfriend, lover...your soulmate. Picture his/her face, the crooked smile, the dimples, the crow’s feet, the full smile, the tears, the furrowed brow, the squinted and twinkled eye, the burst of laughter, the silent concentration, the bristly beard, the peachfuzz, the serenity and innocence it exudes in sleeping repose.

Now picture her/his hands, the spidery delicacy of veins, the slender fingers, the callouses, the nicked fingernail, the whisperingly soft touch, the firm grip of support, the gestures, picture that hand resting in yours as if it knew all along that it belonged just there.

Now picture his/her body, that symmetrical, finite-yet-endlessly surprising landscape, the nape of the neck, small of the back, the hollow behind the knee, an ankle, the spine, the belly...flat or rounded or expansive, you can see it in your mind’s eye, right now, in all its dimensions, you can map it out with all of your senses, it is, really, another you, that’s how truly you know it.

Now picture his/her mind, the quirks and angles of thought, its perceptiveness, sensitivity, empathy, and agility, its ability to carry you through every emotion, how it contradicts itself and you, yet somehow it always brings you back, and in fact gently sets you down in a new place, a better one. Now close your eyes for one minute and imagine him or her in all his/her vividness and act as a witness to what feelings that image inspires.

What if you found yourself thousands of miles apart?

What if that distance was growing every day, inexorably?

What if along with the distance, the months and years flowed right under your feet and away?

What if you somehow felt that you would never be able to see her or him again?

But...what if...what if you had a chance at a second chance? Would you take it?

What if I asked you if you believe in love? But maybe you’re too young to be able to believe in it, maybe it’s still just an abstraction or some shiny sugar-plastic words from a Hannah Montana song. You’re all about crushes and giggles, glances, and feigned indifference, sweaty palms and pimply cheeks all blushed with infatuation.

Maybe you’re too cynical, too jaded to believe in it. to you it’s just an artifice, a farce, an empty holy grail, a tragic-comedy that you’re too smart to take part in, get sucked into. It’s for dreamers and dunces...a dance for the ignorant and impressionable...maybe to you it’s just plain old pathetic. Maybe you’re too hurt to believe in it. Maybe your belief in it is at this very moment getting a major league beatdown, gnawed on, stepped on, crapped on, thrown about, wrung dry, bitchslapped, abused, twisted, deceived, tainted, crushed, torn apart, shattered, defiled, ruined, drive-by-shot at and it’s all to immediate to really be able to say that you could ever believe in it again...if you even did in the first place.

Maybe you’re too cold to believe in it. Maybe to you it’s just a slushing flow of hormones, chemicals and electrical signals triggering a heavy dose of endorphins, maybe it’s just a cultural

Affective commentary:

construct used to make sure that two people stay together long enough to raise offspring to independence, or just another word for mutual respect.

Maybe you've always wanted to believe in it but it just hasn't happened yet. You expect it as you turn every corner in your life, with every day you awake and stretch a long-morning stretch, with every kiss and caress, every long conversation, but it just hasn't arrived.

What if I told you I believe in it.

What if I told you that I once felt it whole and real?

What if I told you I took a blade to it?

What if I told you how I ruined it?

What if I told you I could happily do without it.

What if I told you I was very wrong?

What if I told you every secret about loneliness?

What if I told you what I want?

What if I told you what I now know?

What if I told you I have a second chance?

Do you think I'd take it?

Do you think I'd do my best to make it happen?

What if I told you I am taking that chance?

Would you believe me? What if you did?

What would you say? And what does it mean?

It means that I'm not walking. And won't be until that second chance says either "yes" or "no". If it's a "yes" I would happily never take another step from that scrubby flatland in central panama where I stopped. If it's a "no" I haven't a clue what I might do...but I might very well return to the walk...I wonder if it would be worth it.

You see, I've come to realize a lot of things recently. One of them is that I don't want my walk to define me, as it has these last 5 years. I want the person I love to define me.

Our history is complicated, and my part in it much less than admirable (some call that quality by the term despicable) and I thought it was as over as over can be. Then I saw her.

I realized that she is (and this is a much-debated concept, some believe in it, others scoff) "the one". She told me recently, just before slipping off her shoes, emptying her pockets, setting her purse on the conveyor and stepping through the rectangular metal detector, as pig-eyed cops looked on (airport security checkpoints really take the romanticism out of pre-flight goodbyes) and said, "Ian, be patient" which I took for a "Ian, I'm yours, just let me get some stuff figured out, ok?" (of course, my imagination could just be running away with me and she might actually be saying "Ian, keep waiting, because it'll be a cold day in hell before I take you back") so, I'm being patient...waiting.

Not walking. Waiting. No walk. Wait. Walk? No. Wait? Yes.

Affective commentary:

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2. Synopsis statement – Write a statement which expresses clearly and concisely what the author is wrestling with.

3. Be prepared to discuss this.

Blog posting by Ian Reeves, 25th July 2006 IanWalk.Com

Sometimes the road is a time machine...in reverse. The narrower some valleys get, the slower time seems to move, until at some point I find that it's moving backward, taking me to centuries gone by. The people here are not from the 21st century. They, their houses, fields, crops, and animals are locked into 17th or 18th century. I see this every day, with every step, and yet most times my stubborn mind refuses to accept it, denies that I'm a fugitive in the past. Somewhere, somewhen after entering that valley, I fell into a world already gone by.

I see barefoot men poised in the rough, oxen-plowed fields, worn-down picks poised above their heads, the rustic, homemade handles polished by calloused hands. I see women bent under patterned cloth carriers full of carrots, potatoes, corn, grass, onions, their brown legs shooting down, a seamless connection of color to the soil that enslaves them.

I see men with pitchforks carved from a single sapling tossing wheat high into the air, over and over again. The chaff pulls to the side in the breeze like thin brown curtains, the kernels sighing back into the ever-cleaner pile. I only see this for the two minutes they are in view, but they are there for days, weeks, years, they've been there for generations, bending, lifting, sending the grain aloft, watching it fall, again and again and again. I see women crouching over tattered ground cloths, spreading corn or quinoa, or peas, or beans out to dry. Their hands move so lightly above the cloth it seem they're casting a spell, placing a charm, warding off evil.

I see families, whole communities, bent over double, rooting through the soil, harvesting potatoes, filling sack after sack. The young men heave each bag onto their shoulders, 120 pounds apiece, set them in rows; battalions of lumpy figures in the afternoon light. At night, one of the men will guard the bounty, taking shelter from the cold in cornstalk shelters. The next morning the workers return, they carry the sacks down from the steep slopes, from the summits, up from the river's edge, through thickets and over berms.

I see tiny, shriveled humans, some over a 100 years old, limping along after their meager flocks of sheep or goats, conversing and chiding their animals through toothless gums and sunken cheeks.

I see the roofs of homes covered in hundreds of corn cobs, yellow, black, brown, burgundy. And the yards full of cornstalks, hay, animal shit, old pots and pans, the cloth and leather tack for the donkeys. And the smoke billowing out of the cracks and chinks in the kitchen's walls and eaves. Inside it is a sooty, smoky black...everything: walls, doors, tables, utensils. And there, hunched from a lifetime of bending and squatting, a woman feeds bits of eucalyptus branch into the mud stove, the guinea pigs that will some day be dinner scurrying and nibbling beneath her stool. And the homes themselves, adobe bricks, a mixture of sand, clay, dirt pebbles and hay, each wall in a slow, fifty year melt. Where does the ground stop and the wall begin? One, maybe two windows, open, gaping at me, or covered in burlap or cowhide. The dirt floors, the wooden door lintels, the time and weather-warped doors hanging always a bit askew. One room, one bed for all the children, one room, if lucky, for the parents. And those same children, hiding behind corners,

Affective commentary:

peeking over fences, around mother's skirts, calling siblings to see the gringo walk by, or staring blankly at me, eyes slowly shifting with my steps. They are barefoot, torn, stained clothes, ever-runny noses, wind and sunburned cheeks, bug bites like braille on skinny legs.

I see the hundreds of tiny, misshapen fields checkered along the valley floor and slopes, remnants of a serfdom that ended within my lifetime, each family with its land but little else, the government some hazy, ominous, occasionally violent specter, known but never seen.

I see, smell, and hear another century every day I walk through the Peruvian Andes.
And yet,

and yet, the buses, trucks, taxis and private cars rumble, belch, and buzz by me, by them. They even board them from time to time, to bring harvests to market, to purchase, to visit, to learn. But I can't help but think that each car is like a shooting star to them, something briefly seen, ephemeral, untouchable...not of their time.

And yet, and yet, there, in each home, placed almost worshipfully in a clean space sits a television, flickering images and tinny sounds of L.A., Madrid, Miami, London, Tokyo, Las Vegas, Rome, Rio De Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Sydney, Singapore. Coca Cola, bikinis, white skin, blond hair, Lincoln Navigators, mansions, music videos, street lights, traffic signals, jewelry, skyscrapers, business suits, Kmart, cathedrals, malls, carpeted floors, Brangelina, the Tube, the Louvre, bullet trains, crystal wine glasses. What does that all mean to these men and women who's work knows no beginning or end, who wash their hands and faces every day, their bodies every week in cold, contaminated water, who's tools, homes, way of life in general has not changed in two, maybe three centuries? How does the 21st century compute in such a world? Do they treat it as a kind of science fiction, a titillating fancy, unreal? Do they long for what they see, dream about it, wonder at their lot in life, compare themselves to what flashes off the screen and into their eyes? Or is it just one more unexplainable thing in a world full of strangeness?

And who am I to them, as I pass them by? An alien? Do they judge me (and why?), see me as just another rich, privileged whitey that leapt from the TV onto their winding road? Can they comprehend my reality?

And what are they to me, as they pause a moment to watch me? An anachronism? How can I judge them (and why?), even catch more than the tiniest glimpse of the richness of their lives, or even comprehend them, their world?

We live in different times, and this road in this narrow valley is our time machine.

Affective commentary:

Synopsis statement:

Instructions

Name: _____

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2. Synopsis statement – Write a statement which expresses clearly and concisely what the author is wrestling with.

3. Be prepared to discuss this.

Blog posting by Ian Reeves, 21st February 2006 Buenos Aries, Argentina IanWalk.Com

I've got so much to write, so much to say. I've seen so much and felt so much, and I'd like to put it into words here where you might stumble upon it and find something of worth (however slight) in it...

but right now I can't.

I'm in a strange place right now and I need to do some serious existential housecleaning before I can again share this walk with y'all without feeling, well, fraudulent and cold... don't ask.

Suffice it to say that life is incredibly unpredictable and even when you think you know yourself, when you think you've gained a certain sense of your stance and worth in life, in your actions, in the world at large...just when you think you have it nailed; "solved", life swells up to meet you and proves to you that you in fact don't know jack shit, and that furthermore you are not living up to (and that's a friggin' understatement) your ideals, your principles.

So, enough of the drama...

I'm not going to write any anecdotes or stories or reflections for a while...not sure for how long, either.

I'll probably post some pics now and again and some general updates, too...we'll see. in the meantime, know that I'm on the road, trying to walk my way to a cleaner existential house.

I appreciate so very much all of your support, your kind words, and the knowing that y'all are out there checking up on me now and again. Thank you, and much love.

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Blog posting by In Reeves, 24th November 2006 IanWalk.Com

Thousands of them. Thousands upon thousands over these last four years. In each of my slow-walk days, I pass ten, maybe thirty, occasionally hundreds. And even now, even after seeing so many of them they tug at the corners of my eyes, sting me with tiny jolts of sadness, loneliness, regret, guilt even.

Crosses.

The roads of South America are riddled with them. Sharp corners, cliff-lined passes, crossroads, small town intersections, steep descents and tricky curves, each are infested with little concrete crosses, some homemade, some elaborate and ornamented, each one marking the spot where a loved one died. Each one sums up an entire human life with a couple words in latin, a birthdate, a date of death, occasionally with a brief epitaph.

Some of the crosses, especially the most humble ones, are left blank, just the rough face of hand-mixed cement, the arms of the cross askew, uneven...the memory of the person who died there fragments a little more with each passing year, as those who survive move on, die, fade away. Soon only the cross itself carries the last hint that this person even existed. And mudslides, floods, careless road workers, and erosion will snuff out even that mute shadow someday.

They stand like so many exclamation points by the road, warnings, the frozen tails of a cry, a groan, a wheeze, a sigh. They are an instant of inflection created by flashes of surprise, fear. They are often clustered together in threes and fours, as if seeking company. There are lonely ones too, however, pushing up, seeming lost and out of place along the flat wastes of desert straightaways.

Sometimes I turn a corner and see a forest of them, arms outstretched, all different sizes and shapes. Twenty, thirtyfive, fifty. Whole families, whole villages, wiped out in the time it takes to doze behind the wheel, to overcorrect, to not see the dangerous curve ahead, for a tire to blow, for a cow or dog to stray into a lane, for brakes to bleed and weaken...a blink, a breath, an uncontrolled tic, or a drunken lurch. And what's left of all that shattered glass, bent metal, burned rubber, crushed bone and opened veins?

Crosses.

And I pass by them every day. I read their names, calculate their ages. My mind registers the colors of fake-plastic flowers, of water-stained photos, and sunburnt prayers. I take in the flaking concrete, detritous, cracked stone, dust, neglect. I stare into that unkempt look of forgetfulness, the abyss that whispers and mocks, "this soul never even existed".

And I say to each one the only thing I can say, "I'm sorry."

For whatever that's worth.

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Blog posting by In Reeves, 6th December 2007 IanWalk.Com

The scars weren't there when she was 21.

That spattering of pinched skin from her left shoulder to her ankle. some like marks from cigarettes, some like bullet wounds, some like exactly what they were; 3rd degree burns. A map of small, sudden violences.

She'd just graduated from university. In Colombia, after receiving your degree, you're required to spend one year in a town or community in the country, doing volunteer work of one kind or another. A great idea. An even better one if the country weren't in it's fifth decade of civil war...a war so long and tired that no one involved, if asked why it's still on, would be able to come up with any kind of a convincing answer.

She was assigned to a small community a few hours northeast of medellín called el apartado. I'm not sure what it was she was doing there as a volunteer. We didn't really talk about that. From the look in her eyes as she talked about that time, though, it seemed like the experience was a great one. She was young, beautiful, intelligent, and curious. She was just jotting down the first few words of her adult life.

Some friends from Bogotá came out to visit her, including her boyfriend of 4 years. They went to a local nightclub to dance and celebrate their friendship. A Normal start to a normal night.

I sat for a long time after she'd told me what happened at the night club, thinking about what it must have been like, that night. trying to fill in the spaces, trying to picture the muggy tropical air, the lights and lamps of a small town at night, everyone dressed to the nines. The sound of salsa and reggaetón blasting from cheap speakers, local men leaning against walls with beers in their hands, their clean shirts tucked in, watching a group of laughing Rolos (kids from bogotá) stroll by, their eyes lingering on that one petite girl, the one with all that energy, the one so intensely unaware of her youthful beauty.

They entered the club as a group, bought drinks, danced, talked, peoplewatched, whatever it is you do in that pulsing dark and light, the hypersensory world of sound, skin and movement. "I was having such a great time." she told me. "I mean, my friends were visiting, we were dancing like crazy. I remember looking at them and smiling just because they were with me."

I only saw her eyes mist up twice during the whole story. I think I would cry harder with every telling, if it were me. Maybe she used to. Maybe time's done its work, softened things a bit, carried her a bit further away from the immediacy of it all.

She didn't see the man. She didn't see him throw the homemade grenade into the middle of the crowd, just a couple meters from where she was dancing, caught up in the music, and she didn't hear or feel the explosion. OUT. BLACK. NOTHING.

She woke up. "I was so disoriented. I couldn't figure out where I was, why I was on the floor, where that floor was, why my left side was wet and slippery. And then men came

Affective commentary:

over and reached for me and I remember yelling and kicking at them, telling them to get away, screaming at them ‘who bled on me! who’s blood is this?!?’”

They carried her out. Hundreds of people stood outside, straining to get a look at her. They put her in an ambulance with seven other bleeding, burned people. It really didn’t register. She still couldn’t figure out what was going on, and why there was so much commotion, sirens, lights, and screaming. They got to the hospital and put her in a wheelchair. A few of her friends were there, asking her how she was. She asked them what had happened “Was it an oven that exploded?” she wondered. “No” they said, “it was a bomb, Andrea. Someone threw a bomb into the nightclub.”

The medics began to cut away her clothing with a pair of scissors. She looked down at herself. “estoy negra, parezco un carboncito” (I’m black, I look like a little lump of coal) she thought to herself before she passed out.

The next few days were pain. That was existence; constant, screaming pain. The small town’s hospital couldn’t deal with nearly all of the 160 injured victims, especially the critically wounded ones. Andrea and a handful of others were flown by US Embassy helicopters to Medellín. They had her heavily sedated because of her many 3rd degree burns, but it didn’t really help, it just suggested the concept of less pain. They opened up her abdomen to remove the shrapnel that had perforated her small intestine. They removed other bits of metal from her left side, they washed the burned skin away, scrubbed out the dirt and grit from the seeping pink flesh, they monitored her imploded eardrums, they took the shrapnel out of her right eye, put in a plastic lens to replace the one that had ruptured from the concussion of the explosion.

she faded in and out of a hazy reality and pain-drug-fantasy. “I only had one dream. Over and over.” she said “I was a tiny doll in this huge doll factory. I would roll down the assembly line and workers would be shoving limbs onto my body and then further down the line they would rip them out again and I would just go around and around like that being put together and ripped apart.”

She would also call out for her best friend Javier nearly every night. “It was strange” she told me “I didn’t ask about anyone else, I just felt that something was wrong, really wrong with Javi” Her family, friends, and the medical staff deflected her questions regarding her friend saying, “he’s too ill to communicate right now, just give it time.” But something kept nagging at her and she persisted until one day she looked at her mom after yet another deflection and said “He’s dead isn’t he?”

“Yes”.

Weeping. Silence. Pain of a new kind.

The painkillers intensified her nightmares of the doll factory. The doctors said that the only thing they could do was to try to continue the treatment on her burns without anesthetic. They warned her that the pain would be absolutely excruciating. She told them to bring it on. “I felt like I was offering up my pain to the memory of Javier, that by feeling life so intensely I would honor his death.”

Days folded into weeks which gelled into months. wounds were healing, skin was grafted onto her worst burns. She started rehab “...which was almost worse than having my burns cleaned.” she laughed.

She saw the left side of her body for the first time. “No one will ever want me, now” she mourned, the scars, shiny-new twinkling’s mocking her in the mirror. She kept asking herself that universal question “why me?” She slid into depression, and even when she got out of the hospital she moved through a fog. Friends ignored. No work. Living at home. Lingerin

Somewhere in that monotony of all that her grandmother took sick. The night she died, Andrea decided enough was enough and made the conscious decision to take control of her life again.

Nine people died in that nightclub, including Andrea's best friend, Javier. One hundred sixty wounded. Her boyfriend nearly lost his leg and has almost no calf now, all the flesh and muscle having been torn away by the explosion. Several more of her friends were wounded as well. And then there was Javier. "Javi died in part because he was directly facing the bomb" Andrea explained. "it picked him up and slammed him against a wall. But I was standing sideways to it, that's why only my left side really got hit. The concussion threw me too, but not with as much force."

A miracle of angles and surface area. A miracle of one beat. A miracle of one tiny movement in dance that turned her sideways to the blast. A miracle of just the tiniest fraction of a second that ended one life and saved hers.

She's taken that to heart in the years since...that harsh lesson about the brevity of it all, the infinitesimally fine line between life and death. She shines and bounces and moves and smiles and laughs and listens. "I used to be indecisive and I worried a lot. but not now. It's so simple. None of that matters."

And she smiles again.

Affective commentary:

Synopsis statement: