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Crossing the Street

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Author Bio

Eric Canzano is in his third year of studies, with a major in Philosophy and a double minor in English and Religion. He likes to dip his feet into many different waters: sustainability, Buddhism, human rights, and piano to name a few examples. He hails from New Jersey, the 'armpit of America.' As for future plans, his birthplace and his path of study has left him few choices other than star gazing, arguing with people and being ridiculed.

Crossing the Street

The wind blew furiously through the park, picking up leaves and hurtling them into the air. The morning sky wore a uniform gray broken by dark masses of rain-heavy clouds and the white sheen of an opaque sun. Every object bent before the will of the wind: trees bowed to its presence; debris hurried along its guided course; shrubs danced in their delicate positions. Everything bowed except the lone figure of a man, an object hurtling through the park directly into the current of the world around him. He hurried along the path as if he were a train, following a track laid toward a destination already known, an unstoppable hulk cleaving its way through the terrain. His legs worked in a rhythmic pattern, propelling the body forward unconsciously, without mental effort. The arms were folded in over the chest, gripping the long, black overcoat tightly to seal the shell against the elements. The black leather shoes tore along the grimy, earthen path, sneering at the world they knew they didn't belong in, a world of earth and grime and puddles. They waited patiently for the moment they would enter the safe, gleaming corridors of an office complex, with four walls and shoe shine in the office drawer. The only part of the shell that remained exposed to the elements was the head, with its crown of graying hair flattened backwards, the taut flesh protruding like a turtle's. But the seal against the outside world was complete even in this exposure, for within it resided the mind of Tom Seneraw.

Tom felt everything then, as if he were being rolled through every crevice in the road, as if a giant was forcing him into the earth itself.

"I'm late for work. God damn it, I'm late for work. If I walk at this pace for the rest of the way and I find a taxi immediately, and we don't hit traffic, I will arrive between ten-fifteen minutes late." Mr. Seneraw, in his anxiety, always used mathematics to assure himself of all possible outcomes.

In truth, he shouldn't have been too worried about being late to work. Mr. Seneraw was on time or early most of his working days and he often stayed later than most. It was not unusual for one of the lawyers to find him in his office at nine or ten at night, hunched over a case. The whole room seemed to be sucked into his concentration: the books, chairs, table, and lamp were all attentive to his complete ignorance of them.

"Mr. Seneraw, you should get some rest. You can't make a case if you look like the living dead in front of the jury."

"Huh?! What the...? You know, you scare the living daylights out of me when you do that! Didn't I tell you to knock before you came in?"

Mr. Seneraw loved his work almost all of the time. He had been in the profession for twenty-three years, and out of his numerous abilities his co-workers always admired that he could outthink anyone. His boss once said: "Mr. Seneraw thinks so much that if you surprised him to a game of chess, he would have

already thought out all of the possible moves and beaten you before you laid your hand on a piece." Mr. Seneraw practiced law as he would play a sport: with fierce competition, endless strategy, and tireless resolve. He thought of the courtroom as an arena for the game he played best: law. He won almost all of his cases. He had the best record at the firm.

His practice of law wasn't entirely a base motivation to outperform his opponents. Mr. Seneraw would always comment that the most gratifying result of being a lawyer is that, occasionally, one participates in a mindset that revolutionizes the thinking of a country. This happened very infrequently. Mr. Seneraw worked at his job passionately, even obsessively, as if he were falling in love with the law again every morning when he walked into his office and breaking up with her before he left. His fellow lawyers all enjoyed his company, even if they were jealous of his record. He had no wife.

Mr. Seneraw's exemplary habits did not excuse him from routine, the monotony which slowly drowns passion. And so Mr. Seneraw, although he could argue about lawyers as the protectors of justice or the genius of the Bill of Rights like an upstart twenty-year-old, he had been arguing the same thing for thirty years. In fact, he had already started calculating the potential amount of cases left before he decided to retire. This kind of mathematics was only done on twelve-hour days.

"I didn't have much of a breakfast this morning. Eggs and toast. A hasty shower. I hate rushing before I get to work. It makes it harder to concentrate. I need to focus on this case. Should I get a cup of coffee? No, that might make me jittery. Harder to concentrate. I can just push the fatigue out of my mind."

Mr. Seneraw was a man of faith. Of faith in the mind. He had the disturbing ability to lose all sense of time and people when he began to work. In this state the only elements that existed for Mr. Seneraw were those which he created with his mind, like an alternate universe with his natural laws expanding against the walls and glass door of his office. It was a beautiful, structured, and fully knowable universe; Mr. Seneraw did not wish any brazen co-workers to come pelting through his space, like dangerous and unpredictable meteoroids. In this way, his co-workers often felt like he made no effort to talk to them. When they approached him, he was indifferent or cold to their chatter. It wasn't entirely his fault; he couldn't help that reality was not so conspicuously demanding of him. In his first years at the firm, he would sometimes forget about his appointments with clients. He hired a secretary. He wished she could take calls and schedule appointments for friends and family. He rarely called his parents or his relatives. His mother would call him, irritated but expectant.

"You know we're not dead yet, dear."

"I know, mother."

"When are you coming to visit us?"

"I don't know, mother."

"How about Saturday for dinner? You don't have anything planned then, do you?"

"Well...I have an important case that I..."

"Now don't even try and pull that with me. It's too old. Think of a new one, and be here Saturday."

"Yes, mother."

"Write it down on the calendar, right now, so you don't forget."

"Yes, mother."

Mr. Seneraw had been forgetting for all fifty-three years of his life. He had been concentrating for fifty-three years. He liked to think, ponder, wonder, calculate, and prove. On certain nights, when he would come back exhausted and lay in bed he would hear the sound of silence in his head for a moment or two. He would think it queer and even disturbing. He didn't have a choice to stop thinking, either way; it had become a willing, forceful entity, an agreed domination, the tool to his power.

"When I get to my office, I'll just start working right away. No one will notice me. Maybe I'll skip lunch just to make it convincing that I'm working very hard. It's already..." he glanced down at his watch, a small recognition outside of his thoughts, "8:57 anyway." Recognition for a specific, determined purpose.

A leaf blew into his face, thrown at him by the persistent wind. It caught in the wisps of his hair. He swatted at it unconsciously, leaving bits of leaf tangled in his hair.

"What do I have to work on anyway? Oh, that's right, that case with the Board of Education. Can anyone seriously think that creationism is a credible theory? I really hope they try to pull that scientific creationism bullshit with me. That would make things more interesting, and infinitely more enjoyable."

In his haste, Mr. Seneraw stumbled over a rock protruding from the path. He did not seem to take any conscious notice of the break in his path. His legs quietly and automatically adjusted back on their determined course. There was no break in his thoughts.

*"I love it when people try to bring religion into the court. And to think that this country was founded on Christian ideals. Well, more deistic. It reminds me of my mother when she tried to drag me to church every Sunday. 'Mom, I don't want to sit in that stuffy church and listen to a priest drone on about all of those courageous things he doesn't believe in.'" He would sit home and read books assigned for summer high school reading instead. That particular day he read some of *Walden*. He had disliked it. It was too idealistic, too romantic, too many words.*

The trees snapped back and forth in neatly lined rows along the street as Tom approached the end of the park, deep in thought. Parked cars along the side of the road reflected the ominous contents of the sky in their metallic luster. There was very little traffic in this part of town. Tom approached the curb like a line approaching inevitably to form an intersection. This street was to be crossed, conquered, just like anything else in the way to the firm. Just like anything else in the way of Mr. Seneraw. Conquered without so much as a glance, like a great emperor pointing a finger at a map to the place of his latest whimsical conquest and airily flinging his massive army upon it. Tom's black soles clicked on the sidewalk as he exited the park. Parking meters stood in between cars like sentinels, blocking his path to the other side of the street. He stepped around the nearest one and in between two parked cars, only slowing down to glance cautiously at both sides of the street before crossing. The eyes swiveled left and right in their sockets, assessing with pupils unfocused and distant. This observance was done as a natural motion

of a machine, a practice engrained into the body and long ago stripped of its effort.

"Not that I have anything against religion. I'm a man of science and math, and if religion coincides with these aims, fine. Pure, cold truth, that's what I want. People say it doesn't exist in a courtroom. I say to them, 'The truth belongs to whoever gives the best evidence and the best argument! The truth is what you make of it!'"

Faintly, dimly, Mr. Seneraw heard the sound of what he imagined was a chorus of screams, grinding screams erupting from the asphalt. Then he felt a pain as intense as he had never felt before, burning, raging, into the whole left side of his body. The cracks of bones splintering resounded dully in his ears as numbing sensation spread over his entire body. He felt his face contort into a sort of grimace, a grimace that was at once in total shock of what was occurring and fighting off the threat of unconsciousness. He had felt his face move as though he was an alien host in his body feeling muscles that moved of their own accord. Ever so slowly Tom felt his feet leave the ground, his body propelled violently into the air by some unknown force, like a dead leaf in the wind. For a second, suspended in flight, he felt like an angel floating through the air. Or he felt like a man who had been pushed off of a cliff and wasn't quite sure what to make of the few puzzled seconds before he hit the ground.

The ground came up to embrace Tom's twisted body. It rolled him along with its hardened hands for what seemed like minutes. Tom felt it tear viciously at his clothing, shredding his pants, obliterating the sneer of his shoes, clawing away strips of flesh from his body. Tom felt everything then, as if he were being rolled through every crevice in the road, as if a giant was forcing him into the earth itself. He felt it with an excruciating intensity, an intensity he had never felt before because his most precious moments in life had been in the sanctuary of his mind, a sanctuary torn asunder, its foundations bare and crumbling. It was cruel to be exposed to the world like this, the world that he had never noticed but was now making itself undeniably, obtrusively known to him. But with this pain, this incredible, unendurable pain: Tom wanted unconsciousness. He desperately needed it, to escape this horror. But that which had helped him for so long, had been his strength and power, his victory, now prevented him from his one desire, keeping him awake. His body screamed for release, to be free of the searing inferno that was consuming it. He remained conscious.

Tom's body stopped rolling thirty-five feet from the now motionless bus. The bus had come around the corner of the park, hidden by its many trees. Tom had been in between the parked cars when he had given a cursory look to either side of the street. The bus driver had not seen Tom hidden among the cars. Tom had been completely unaware of the bus, even as it sped toward his destruction. The line had not reached its intersection; the laws of math and science had been shattered in Tom's limp form. Nearby, the trees bent low to the ground in submission to the wind.

Tom should have been feeling anger, or terror, or sadness, or fear. Strangely, he felt none of these. His mind had broken too, although he was not aware of it. He lay serenely on the pavement, arms and legs spread wide like he had paused in the process of making a beautiful snow angel and was silently contemplating it. His eyes fixed upward. His mind was blank. The wind played with pieces

of his garments that had been torn during his flight. It licked his face and ran through his hair. It lightly tickled his mouth. Tom had never felt these curious sensations before. He felt the blood pouring out of his many wounds, trickling down his legs and pooling on the street. It felt warm, almost comforting. In the far distance, Tom could faintly hear a voice screaming, another voice yelling for 911. It sounded like a choir was singing softly to him from a distance, gathered solemnly as witnesses to the spectacle. Tom peered at the sky. The sun had appeared in one of its brief moments through the clouds. He stared straight into the hot white orb as it shined its fiery beams over his body. The rays made Tom feel naked, exposed, and cold, like he had been thrown into an extremely icy pool of water. It was the kind of water that was so cold it burned and prickled, making one feel as though one were gasping at the brilliant surprise of life. Tom was gasping for air, but it was without desperation. He felt that it was the first time he had ever been naked without embarrassment, lying there with his mottled clothing clinging to him on the asphalt. He felt like he could lay there, mangled and open, forever. Most of all, he felt the silence. It weighed upon him with a lightness more exhilarating than any sound or any thought he had ever possessed.

When the paramedics came, Tom had had already been dead for minutes. The last thing they saw before they covered his body in darkness were eyes glazed with water, looking straight, open towards a path no one could see.