

Before Crossing
By Erin Kresmery

When I wake up, I don't know what time it is or if I have been to this place before. I don't know if the clothes I fell asleep in are different from what I woke up in. Every day I arise from a new bed remembering less about the person I was and the life I lived.

Each day goes by my own personal clock. When I wake up it is morning and when I am tired the sun goes down and I go to sleep.

The bed in which I sleep in and where I spend my time both change every day and if I don't write it down, I won't remember it.

I have a journal here, wherever here is, and it never disappears. I always wake up with it in my arms and a pen in hand.

The first page of my journal is written in a handwriting that doesn't seem to be my own. It explains that I am no longer alive and I am in neither a heaven nor hell. It continues to say that I will stay here until I move on and that only I will decide when that will be and where I will go. The writer shares with me that her name is Emma and she too was stuck in a place like this. At first she thought it was a paradise, but when she began to forget about herself and her family, she realized it was anything but. Her last days were spent in nothingness where there was no land or sea or color, for she had forgotten about all of these things. There were no smells, tastes, or feeling. She floated by without a breeze through her hair or the fear of falling. All of these sensations were lost.

My journal says that I have been here for 477 days and that my name is Avery. It also says that I hated this name and throughout my time here, I have changed it many times. Apparently I thought myself to be a Lily, Katherine, and even Genesis at one point or another. Each new entry is more vague than the last. I talk about all of the places I have come to visit during my stay here like a beautiful bungalow and even an amusement park but with every new page, I learn less and less about myself.

The first few entries are about my family. They describe my mother, father, and even a dog I used to have. I found out that I had a best friend and that he was there when I died.

Throughout these pages I have expressed many theories about what happened to me. One of the more creative ones describes the idea of me being comatose. The thought fills up two pages of ranting about how I need to find a way to wake myself up. I later explain that I have given up on this theory after many failed attempts to get me out of the coma.

The rest of the pages are filled with memories. The first ones are the most beautiful and detailed; as I continue to read it I am disturbed to find that I eventually just talk to myself. I no longer have any memories of my life except for what is in this book.

I also write about my fear of never moving on. I know that if I don't move on soon I will float along just like Emma. I don't know what happened to her or if anything ever did happen to her. She can still be floating here with me, waiting to move on.

Today, I am sitting in a studio apartment high above a city. The buildings are merely a black outline of what they should be. The sky is white as paper and every so often it silently ripples like a drop of water hitting the flat surface of a quiet lake. When I look down, there is no street; there is no end to my building. It towers over nothingness like a hot air balloon.

My bed, which is made up of a single mattress on the floor and a thick blanket, sits in the room. The floor is wooden and although I can barely feel it beneath my toes, I know it is cold. The only other object is a desk. It sits in front of a wall made completely of glass and despite the lack of view, I still find it mesmerizing. The desk is the only thing in the room that is not black, white, or grey. Its dark brown with flowers and birds carved carefully around the trim. I have read that I've seen this desk before and it was a gift from someone important, but I could never remember who.

I slowly walk to my desk with the tingling sensation in the pit of my stomach telling me that there is nothing there. I can't feel it in the soles of my bare feet but the floor catches my every step. You would never think that the feeling of weight underneath your feet could be overlooked and forgotten so easily.

There was an ordinary desk chair sitting next to my desk where I carefully and slowly sit. The sensation of something sturdy underneath me has disappeared but the feeling of falling to my death has not.

I could sit at this desk for hours. I don't need to eat, drink, or use the bathroom because I am dead, but eventually I know my eyes will grow weary.

I sit and study my life. I was shy and quiet. I had few friends that existed and many that only existed in books. I loved my family and nature. I am always describing trips to the mountains with my father. The huge rock formations amazed me like nothing else. I read about faraway places and dreamt about going to these places someday. From the things I have read, I am not a terrible person. I have committed no serious crimes, and I tried my best to be invisible. The only clue I have about my death is that my friend was there.

He was in a lot of my memories though. He was in my thoughts more than my life and so I came to a conclusion that I may have loved him. The thought brings back a new memory and I quickly write it down.

I am fading downward, reaching out for someone to grab me. This guy that I am love with isn't there. He was the last person I thought of. He was important to me. How could he have let me die?

I sit and ponder this idea for a couple of hours, but then I heard it. A loud THUNK! as if someone was here with me. Out of all my days here and of all my journal entries, the only person I have ever heard here was myself. I was the only one making noise in this world, until now.

It came from behind me and as I jumped from my chair I nearly tripped after not feeling the floor beneath my feet.

"Who's there," I asked. In reality, well my reality, I didn't think I would get an answer.

"I don't know." It was a soft and unfamiliar voice.

I looked toward a doorway I hadn't noticed before, maybe because it didn't exist before. A boy walks in. He is dressed in a plain white shirt and pants, his shoes are nonexistent and his face is lost. It is clear that he has been here longer than I have, but how is he in my purgatory? I haven't read of a brother or friend that he could be.

"Are you lost like I am?"

He moves his head to the floor and his dark hair falls in front of his face. Both hands are behind his back and as he starts to step closer he slowly moves one in front of him. In it is a

small journal like mine. It is thicker and covered in black smudge marks. As I look closer I see that his hands are also stained with dark blotches.

“I was,” he replied as he begins to look up at me. “But I think I’ve found what I have been trying to remember.”

His cold black eyes look into mine and another memory appears.

I am in the mountains with my father again. He smiles and tells me to go exploring but not to stray too far. I am nine and this was my first ever camping trip. I climb up rocks and jump over fallen logs. The day was bright and warm where the sun fought its ways through the trees and it was cool and calm in the shade of the giant branches. As I explore I notice something that stops me in my tracks. A boy is asleep in the hollow base of one of the bigger trees. He is covered in dirt and has tiny scratches where brown, dried, blood has congealed. His clothes are ripped to nothing and he shivers in his dream as I watch him.

I open my eyes.

I remember this. I remember the young boy asleep in the tree. It was the boy standing in front of me. He was there in the woods eleven years ago but yet stands in front of me the same age as I remember him to be.

He comes closer and hands me his journal. I see the scratches on his arm, the ones from so long ago. I open the old book and find memories like mine except he drawn them instead of turning them into stories. The residue from his sketch pencil is what stains his hands. This boy seemed to look to be about six or seven when I found him, but his pictures look anything but elementary.

The first pages are of his family: a mother, two sisters, and an angry father. The pictures tell a story about his father hurting his sisters and his mother. The angry man then comes after the boy who flees. He has many pictures describing his journey. He ran three days without stopping and eventually he became lost. When I found him, he had been missing for five days and was starving to death in the hollow of the tree. He was sleeping because he was too weak to do anything else.

The next picture is of me.

He knew I was there. He knew I saw him and that I decided to walk away because I didn’t want to ruin my first camping trip. I never told anyone about the boy I found in the woods. Eventually, that memory disappeared on its own.

I looked up at the boy with tears in my eyes.

“You killed me,” he said. He took the journal from my hands and walked toward the black doorway.

I fell to my knees and began I sob softly to myself because now my self-image has changed so drastically. Was I always so selfish?

I finally know why I haven’t moved on. I have been waiting for him. Not all memories are good and the ones that are bad, we can refuse to remember. I begin to remember the bad memories. The friend I thought I loved was someone that I hurt. All of the people I had disappointed and lied to began to flood my head.

I wasn’t a very nice person. I appeared quiet and shy to the people who didn’t really know me. I died alone because no one trusted me and wanted to share their life with me.

Two doors appear in front of me. Now I have to choose my own fate based on the

person I now know I was.

I stand up and wipe the tears from my eyes. I walk toward the doors and decide the one I deserve. As I open it, a bright light blinds me. I take a step forward and fall.