

Gravitational Encounter

By Lauren A. Margheim

Amelia Wells tucks a stray lock of hair behind her ear. She stumbles slightly as she steps into her high heels, but quickly regains her balance. She is used to the instability by now. Pulling her cardigan back onto her shoulder, she turns and grabs her car keys from the ledge by her front door. As she leaves her condo, she makes sure to not jostle her camera bag—her precious cargo.

The chill of the Colorado spring air nips at her face. She misses the warmth of California. The wind brushes at her legs as she walks to her car. She probably should not have worn a skirt today, but she feels confident in her favorite style. Even the most mundane things help her feel at home these days.

Aspen reminds Amelia of a bubble. The picturesque town retains the boundaries of a setting straight out of a nursery rhyme and gives a sense of freedom only isolation can provide. For a photographer like her, Aspen is a paradise. Beautiful trees of the same name fly by her car windows. Quaking aspens are in high supply and grow curvilinear on the mountain incline, persistently looking towards the expansive sky. Her aunt always says there are two kinds of people – ocean lovers or mountain lovers. Amelia prefers the mountains even though her family disagrees.

She drives from her East End neighborhood towards Roaring Fork River, but makes sure to deviate from Main Street in order to stop at her favorite café to treat herself with their exceptional chai tea latte. This is her favorite part of the morning.

“You look lovely today!” exclaims the waitress as she hands Amelia her espresso-laced latte. “What’s the occasion?”

“Oh, I’m attending an art exhibition opening at the museum tonight,” she replies. “Some new artist—Jacob Rose, I think—has this series with a photography theme.”

“That’s right, you’re into the photography stuff.” Amelia realizes she comes here too often; they are starting to remember her. *I just had to take that picture of the fabulous veggie burger...*

“Yeah, I’m actually going out to the river to try and get a time lapse today,” she offers, even though slightly embarrassed by her apparent noticeability. “I plan on going straight from there to the museum, or else I would not be shooting in these heels!”

The waitress laughs and offers her good luck for the day. Amelia makes her way up Mill Street to the river. She ventures here every night to capture the sunset, but it feels strangely foreign for her to be traveling this route so early. Roaring Fork River is a common spot of the creative type, she’s noticed. Occasionally she’ll see an artist packing up his to-go palette as she’s arriving for her daily shoot. Many other photographers frequently visit the location as well. However, Amelia does not speak to a single one. After parking her car, she sets up her tripod and composes a good shot with the river in the foreground and the mountains behind. Time lapses are so time consuming, but she loves the finished product. Ainsley, her best friend back in California, showed her the preset on her camera and since then she could not stop making such masterpieces.

Moving to Colorado was by far the best decision of Amelia’s life. Sure, she misses her friends and family back home, but she had to get away from their expectations. Her family owns a legal firm in Anaheim that they founded before she or her sister Sophia were born. Sophia now works for the company as a legal assistant. Everyone expected Amelia to follow suit, but she had other plans. From a very young age, she enjoyed taking pictures on her family’s annual visit to

Disneyland. In high school, she dual-enrolled in the photography program offered at the community college and was able to graduate with her associates degree and a certification in photography. Her family supported this because they assumed she would transfer to law school, but instead Amelia took a job as a PhotoPass Photographer at Disneyland. Her parents obviously disapproved. They didn't see creative endeavors as a real career. She needed to escape her family's suffocating pressure. Ainsley, a fellow PhotoPass Cast Member, told Amelia she must channel that wonderful Disney cheesiness and follow her dreams.

Amelia's dreams comprise of mountain sunsets and fall colors. Snow in the springtime sprinkled in her dark hair. Pine scented air and quaint little condominiums. She dreams of becoming a professional photographer, of creating her own success, of her parents being proud of her for who she really is.

Amelia sees that it is almost 5 o'clock. She quickly packs up her photography equipment and heads to the Aspen Art Museum. Not even a week after moving to town, she knew she needed to become a member of this museum; they support contemporary artists and photographers. Before getting out of her car, she is sure to freshen up her perfume after sitting outside all day. *I didn't think this through very well*, she realizes. *What if I actually meet someone?*

The waitress at the café is the closest thing she has to a friend in her new town. She still talks to Ainsley every day, who is constantly trying to force her into human interaction. However, Amelia has always been the hermit type. She doesn't mind eating alone in public or going to see a movie by herself. Ainsley is right though; she will never build a client base unless she starts networking and making connections. Her photography blog does have a good

following base and her old Disneyland prints still sell, but Disney fanatics don't care about the way light hits the aspen leaves or reflects off the river water.

Amelia readjusts the clasp on her necklace so it is back behind her neck. She joins the assemblage of art enthusiasts as they enter the building. The white light pierces the tense air that only she feels. She tentatively makes her way to the food table like a migratory bird at the beginning of the season. A platter of appetizing petit fours catches her eye; these will be her safety net tonight.

After a brief introduction, Amelia and the other guests are allowed into the gallery. Jacob Rose, the artist, had been previously indisposed and would not be attending his own exhibition opening. *How selfish is that? The guy can't even show up to thank people at his first big show!* She continues to marvel at his apparent lack of humility. However, coming out of her judgmental preoccupation, Amelia sees the six paintings lining the walls.

Six paintings of Amelia Wells.

She stares forward, the suspending moment of realization stabbing her in the heart. The paintings are obscured, almost abstract or fauvist. Six post-impressionist representations of her and her camera loom over her. The power in these images is virtually suffocating. Her dark brown, almost black hair flies across the canvas. Particles of light speckle the design and draw the viewer around the flat surface with a three dimensional rapidity – the result of her camera flashing dramatically in every picture. Some show her eyes, others her lips, frequently her hands, but never her entire face in one frame. The light skin tone contrasts her dark hair, and deep red is flung precisely in each composition balancing them together in unity.

She finally understands Munch's *The Scream*.

Her flight response kicks in and she has to get away, far away from this uncharacteristically claustrophobic gallery. However, fight tells her to figure out how Jacob Rose has the nerve to do this to her. *Who is he?*

Trying to casually hide her face, she rushes to the plaque on the wall offering an explanation to this monstrosity.

EXPOSURE by JACOB ROSE

Post-Impressionism. Acrylic on canvas.

“Photography is not the first medium to come to mind when one considers the classification of art. I respect photography as real art. It captures the fleeting moment with the assistance of light, as did the great Impressionists. Post-Impressionism aims to further their techniques. Is photography a form of Post-Impressionism? Vincent van Gogh was one of the great Post-Impressionists. He struggled with his mental health and eventually, tragically, took his own life. However, he exposed his emotions through his paintings. I hope my work inspires others to expose their true colors and promotes the acceptance of one’s self.

If you see yourself in these paintings, I welcome you as a friend.” – J. Rose, 2015.

His last line lodges in Amelia’s mind like a kernel of popcorn stuck between her teeth. She feels unsettled, but oddly at peace. She respects Rose’s words. They resonate with her and, for a brief moment, she imagines a massive art movement led by herself and Rose. The pain of personal invasion brings her back to reality and she swiftly turns and storms out the door—leaving the petit fours uneaten.

“Ainsley, I’m so scared,” she blurts into her phone. Her car is running, but remains stationary in the museum parking lot. She cannot move. “Is he, like, some creep who’s been

stalking me? Am I in danger right now? Should I even go home—oh my gosh, what if he's there waiting for me?"

"Amelia, honey, calm down," Ainsley demands. "Panicking is not going to help at all. Deep breathing. Do your thing." Amelia closes her eyes and breathes in through her nose for four seconds, then out through her mouth for six. Her eyes open again and she repeats the process. "Good, good," continues Ainsley. "Now, let's approach the situation logically. Is there any reason to believe that these paintings are a threat to your well-being?"

Amelia knows she's lucky to have her. Ainsley's level head is just what is necessary to counter her irrational, yet unavoidable, overreactions. "No, no threat," Amelia answers. "His words were actually beautiful."

"Honestly, I think you have a great opportunity here," Ainsley begins to suggest. Amelia is confused, but lets her friend continue. "I feel like you need to contact this guy. Be cautious about it, just in case though. Like, make a new email or something. But yeah, ask him what inspired the figure in the series and maybe make a joke out of it? You never know, could be a coincidence."

"Or not." Deep down, Amelia knows Ainsley is right and this is just the break she's been looking for. She and her best friend discuss the matter further and eventually come to a conclusion. She can create a photography series in response and ask his permission to submit it to the museum to be displayed with his paintings. Two artists helping each other make it in this dismal world. But, somehow, this is not enough. Her parents will say this method is cheating. She wants to become successful on her own. She doesn't need assistance.

“Ames, you can’t let pride be your roadblock.” Ainsley is sometimes too good of a friend. “I know your parents’ standards, but those pressures aren’t your jam, remember?” Amelia giggles at their inside joke. She takes another deep breath.

“I’ll try,” she decides.

She drives the short distance to her home in what seems like a lifetime. In her head, she composes her email. Sure, her family will say this is not the right way to become who she wants to be, but she is not like them. She loves the mountains. She knows that success is defined differently to each person. Personal success is more important than great achievement in the eyes of others. She will not rest until she finds this incredible, illuminating artist. He has to know that he inspired her to identify her own success.

She only hopes Jacob Rose will welcome her as a friend.

Jacob Rose parks his car in the small lot by the river. He has visited this location many times before, capturing the beautiful glistening of the light on the water—this became his series he calls *Reflection*. His paints will never do this humbling sight justice, but they do come close. That is good enough for him.

He peers over his steering wheel to find the girl. The girl with the dark hair that reflects the sun almost as wonderfully as the water. She is the inspiration of his apparent masterpiece. While he feels that this achievement should be his *Reflection* series, he is glad *Exposure* gets a chance to show people his view on personal acceptance. When he submitted both exhibits to the museum, they told him they would choose the one with the stronger message.

One year prior, when the Aspen Art Museum was accepting exhibit submissions from novice artists, Jacob entered his first series—*Rose*. It detailed the anatomy of a rose in realism

style. Jacob felt he could only draw inspiration from what he knew. He wanted to create realistic representations of things with relevance to himself. He was so consumed by this way of thinking that he pigeonholed himself into very specific realism artwork. The committee at the museum rejected *Rose*, but asked if Jacob had more contemporary works. He thus explained his conviction as a realist only for the committee to advise his art may not fit their criteria.

Dejected, Jacob revisited his values in art. He knew he could not bring himself to work with expressionism or the like—he needed some sort of structure. He also did not want to completely change his art style just for one museum. These thoughts swirled through his mind like oil and water. He found himself driving out to Roaring Fork River each day at sunset to watch the water run over the rocks. Maybe the clear, petite waves would stir his muddled thoughts.

The photographer became a constant visitor six months after *Rose* was rejected. Jacob noticed her attention to detail and careful calculation poured into each shot. Many times he heard her wonder aloud at the perfection of the lighting. She was so confident in her art; never stopping to question the method or medium as he did constantly. The light was her paint and the camera her canvas.

Light, Jacob realized one autumn day. The epiphany shone through his severed thoughts like a semi-truck on a dark highway. Impressionism is the realism of light. Impressionism can capture all his values of art as well as the attention of more contemporary museums. The next day, he brought his paints to the river and began his *Reflection* series.

Jacob knows he is blessed to have his art displayed professionally. The only problem is now he has to tell the girl who inspired him. As an artist, he is constantly borrowing bits and

pieces from real objects or people with all the right intentions. Now Dr. Frankenstein has to face his monster.

He hoped to have told her before the gallery opening tonight. However, the museum has kept him away from this task in preparation for the opening. Finally, just minutes away from quite possibly the biggest moment of his life, the guilt is too much.

The sun is descending as the Earth turns. A waxing gibbous moon is just visible above the mountaintops before the sky fades to night. The gallery opening has already started. He knows they will make up some previous engagement as an excuse for his sudden absence. He doesn't care. He needs to find her, to thank her.

He waits for half an hour and still no photographer. Maybe they are not destined to meet. Maybe fate throws them together, but only near enough to feel the effects of the other's gravity.

No, that's not good enough. He starts the engine of his car up again and makes his way back to his condo in East End. He will not rest until he understands who this incredible, illusive girl is. She has to know that she inspired him to share his art with the world.

He only hopes she will welcome him as a friend.