

It's About This Drawing ...

by Erika Byrne-Ludwig

Shall I or shall I not? Will I or ... ? I'm pacing up and down the footpath, looking in the shop windows: a hairdresser's salon, a massage parlour, a piercing studio, a tattoo shop. The street that sees me as a regular.

I've been hesitating for quite a few months now, possibly even a year. Never been able to make up my mind. The drawing is in my hand, has been nesting in the hollow all that time, but still I dither.

Not today either. You need to be in that special mood, someone writes. What mood? No elaboration is given. An inebriated state perhaps. Or an hallucinated one? I seem to be standing elsewhere, not drunk, not deluded, just undecided, wavering. Yet I plan to persist with my intention. There surely will be a moment of boldness soon to give me that push.

Maybe I should wait for the winter. Warm clothes would hide it. I would enjoy it secretly, roll up the sleeve or have an occasional peek under the cuff. But then something secret must eventually be told and be shown.

So why not commit myself. No, I don't think today is going to be *the* day. I might wait for the rain. Fewer penetrating gazes prowling over me.

The rain has come. I'm stepping on the footpath. The drawing is in my hand. The moistness surrounding it has faded its colours. I might have to refresh them. Tonight I'll get all my crayons out. It's just a pretext, I know. Again I'm walking away, relieved that I don't have to make a decision today either.

One month and a bit more go by. An early light enters my window when I wake up. It suggests *it* would take place today. Waiting on the footpath, drawing in hand. The door opens. A shy glance inside. The tattooist is standing there. Will I brave my awkward timidity and walk in?

I squeeze the drawing once more. Suddenly my feet lead me in whether my mind agrees with them or not. The tattooist guides me

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to a seat. My heart tries to hinder me with its extra hard pounding. The paper is warming up in my palm. More than ever. I unfold it and bravely stretch my arm. "I want this picture here on my wrist."

The process begins. I look through the wall in front of me as if I didn't wish to be part of the present, but somewhere beyond the shelf of paints. My wrist has become a graft, part of a limb that doesn't belong to me. I let the artist deal with it. My drawing is being recreated. Too late to retrieve my arm.

The tattoo is going to be here to stay. Not a fly that you can swipe away. More like a birthmark. Ingrained. Somewhere between the layers of self-doubt, is a sentiment, still vague, of having accomplished something.

He's holding my hand while I stare at it. I'm thinking ... We're one month into spring. The cool weather will lay a sleeve over it. It'll sleep underneath away from curious eyes. Summer heat will then come, expose it and slowly bake it in its kiln.

