

Reflections of an Artist

By K. E. Ward

For Paul

My name is Karyn Elizabeth Ward, and I go by the name, “K. E. Ward,” as an artist and writer. I was born in Connecticut in the 1970’s. I have lived in various places in the country, although I have only traveled as far as Canada. I like to entertain people: and by that I mean, to pass the time and to bring people happiness. Reading and looking at pictures is one way to pass the time, and it can make us happy.



This is a picture of me when I was a baby. I was very sweet.



This is a picture of me when I was three and a half years old. I was playing Mary in a Christmas pageant for my relatives. I did not grow up a Catholic, but from a very early age I had a fascination with and love for the Virgin Mary.



I am showing you this picture because I remember what I was thinking when my mother took that picture, "I am wise." Children think such strange thoughts

sometimes. Looking back, I realize it was a rather deep thought for a six-year-old. But I remember it clearly. I remember sitting in the rocking chair. I went through problems that children go through: scraped knees, medical problems, scolding, not getting along with my brother, and crying because I was tired, or because I was hungry, or because I was overwhelmed. Little things can distress children, like spilling a glass of milk, for example.

I mean, children go through all sorts of things. As I got older, I became more introspective. I became an introvert in the fourth grade. But I would say that I withdrew intellectually more than average. One might have diagnosed me with Attention Deficit Disorder, not hyperactivity, but it was before the days when this was a diagnosis.

I dreamed of stories. I drew pictures. My mother used to say to me, “Earth to Karyn,” because I was spacing out. I would say, “I’m on Planet Venus.” And then I would draw pictures of Planet Venus with tubes big enough for people to fit inside, which was how people teleported to that planet.

I thought of characters for scenarios. Occasionally we would write short stories for class, and also we regularly had art class.

I went to a writer's camp. I would have gone six years, but there was one year which I missed. I won a place at a writer's conference when I was in the sixth grade. I was known for both my writing and art in elementary school.

I thought of my first heroine, Julie Anne Miller, when I was twelve years old. And then I started writing my first novel.

I grew and matured. I went to junior high school and high school. I graduated and decided to major in creative writing at a four-year liberal arts college whose creative writing department was their best department.

So, I ended up studying creative writing, psychology, religion, and law.

I have written young adult books, adult books, children's books, poetry, and non-fiction. I paint portraits, still life, and inanimate objects.

I grew up in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, moved to Princeton, New Jersey, where I graduated high school, and moved back to Seattle around the year 2001. Creative writing was my first major in college, but I was asked to leave the campus. I did not pass any of the subjects and was diagnosed with a more severe form of depression. I was rejected by my college boyfriend. I was hospitalized numerous times for psychiatric problems, put on medication, and forced to attend meetings at mental health clinics for many years. I eventually did go back to school, and studied psychology and law. Though I introduced myself to all my instructors as disabled,

after I enrolled in the disability program, I was one of their best students and got into the psychology honor society after having earned a 4.0 GPA, majoring in clinical psychology. It was my goal to receive a scientific bachelor's degree, bachelor's degree, and Ph.D., and become a clinical psychologist. But my family was moving back to the Pacific Northwest, and even though I was admitted to a university in Seattle, I changed my mind and transferred to one of their community colleges, where I took just one more psychology course, art, English, another term of English grammar, environmental science, and decided to take legal classes to earn a certificate. Also around that time I went through a religious conversion. I grew up going to various denominations of Protestant faith, but I sought to know more about Christianity, other religions, and God. So, in my late twenties, I began to research a wide variety of religions on the Web. I grew dissatisfied just reading books and wanted a real, personal experience with the Divine. I read books and books and books. My readings began with stacks and stacks of popular paperback books, but I got a sour taste in my mouth from them, and I moved on to higher brow fiction and non-fiction books concerning religion and law. A couple of years after my religious conversion, my father, who has seven college degrees, received his fourth master's degree, this time at a theological seminary. He was always giving me clever books. So, after school and after my religious conversion, I went back to mental health clinics, and with my psychology education, I tried to become a peer support

specialist. I looked for work both at mental health organizations and also at law offices. I self-published *The Heart Grows Stronger* at the same time as my mother self-published the first edition of her narrative poetry. After moving away from Seattle, I published with free-ebooks.net, eleven more books. I began to volunteer as a peer support specialist but I was not paid to do so at that point. I inquired about becoming a Roman Catholic cloistered nun, but was asked to leave because of my psychiatric diagnosis. However, I received spiritual guidance, and I am very happy I spent a night at a monastery for a vocation discernment retreat and saw a vocational counselor, because the information I gathered was invaluable. To this day, I try to remain active in my community, read as many books as I can, and spend time in prayer every day.

I grew up a painfully shy girl, with many heartbreaks and worries. I have been broken-hearted by many boys, and chose to date again a little bit after having been turned away by the monastery. I never found the right one, but my faith tells me to carry on as though I were living in a cloister, and also as though I were married and had many children. You see, the constant conversion towards God is self-sacrificial and unassuming. It would have been happy to have become a nun, because of the joy in Christ that I have become His bride, and it would have been happy to have been a wife and mother, because I would have a man to love and children to

mother. But the self-sacrificial attitude allows God to bless us with that which He desires, leaving aside all our wants for ourselves and for others.

I look back on my creativity, my academic achievements, and my relationship with God, and I realize that all three of these things are happy things. I may have suffered pains in the past, but to focus on that which brings us joy is what we are called to do, and not just wallow in self-pity. I have made outstanding achievements, despite my psychiatric disability. I have had the opportunity to love others, through relationships, gift-giving, and service. I can be happy right here, right now, as soon as I brush aside all worry and convert towards that which brings me joy.

II

If I weren't to focus on both the positive and negative aspects of my life, and if I were only to focus on the negative aspects of my life, I would be a passive-aggressive narcissist.

I try to tell myself this when someone is criticizing me, because I don't want to go ahead and agree with them and conversely hate myself.

I have some good qualities, and I do think about them, too. I am introverted. I am considerate. I am highly creative. I am sweet to people. And I am helpful.

And I know that horrible things have happened to me.

Take, for example, boys I've loved. They've all broken my heart. I have never found, "the one." When I was thirteen years old, fourteen, and fifteen, I received my first broken heart after I fell in love, as I had never before.

I called him a narcissist. In fact, that was the particular myth on which I did an English project that year, in the ninth grade, which was one of the classes we had together. Echo and Narcissus. Echo was the nymph who fell in love with Narcissus, Narcissus did not love her in return, she called upon the goddess Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, and he fell in love with his own reflection until he became a flower; meanwhile, Echo retreated into a cave, doomed to be an endless echo, in despair.

I called him Judas, the Biblical betrayer of Jesus. Only it was not only Jesus he was betraying, but also me. You see, he was suicidal. I thought it was a sin, because I was, too. We were also learning about Romeo and Juliet that year, and the year prior, I had played Juliet in a soliloquy for drama class, also a class we had together.

But his parents didn't want us to commit suicide. I threatened to kill him and obsessed about murder, pondering methods and methods for killing myself, too. The law enforcement calls it the, "Romeo & Juliet Syndrome," in which one of them kills the other one and then kills themselves. In the state of North Carolina, there is also a law about statutory rape called, "The Romeo & Juliet exception," in which two minors, one or two under the age of sixteen, can engage in a sexual relationship if they are no more than three years apart, but over the age of twelve. Well, so which one is it? Is it unrequited love, like Echo & Narcissus, or the Romeo & Juliet Syndrome? Or, are we actually Romeo & Juliet? Or, do we love each other and yet live? I don't know.

In college I received my second broken heart. You see, when I was a little girl, I thought that fairy tales were real, and that True Love really existed. Who knows if that's true.

You see, in college, I met a twenty-year-old sophomore. I fell in love with him the very first time I saw him. I saw him across a busy college campus, with friends all around him. I could have sworn he saw me, too.

When I got a roommate, she introduced me to some friends of her in a different dorm hall. When we visited them, he was there.

"Do you know where I can find some acid?" he asked.

“I do,” said, because I had brought some with me from a different state. So, I went over to his dorm room, and sold him two hits. He gave one to his friend, who was a girl, and tripped with her.

When we were in his dorm room, in the middle of those short words, light conversation, and a little bit of laughter, my mind was on him. I thought of how he looked at me when he greeted me. His eyes were so blue and gentle. He had shoulder-length, wavy, blond hair. His eyes were close-set, and his expression seemed to tell me, “True Love.”

So, time passed during Thanksgiving break, and I didn't see him at all. He was always avoiding me. I was hurt that he had shared the tab of acid with his friend, and not with me. We were smoking pot together one time and he said to me, “Be careful. You don't want to burn your lips.” I hoped he would kiss me, but he didn't. We smoked pot together a lot, shared an ounce between us and one other person, and ate magic mushrooms together. The moon was red that night, and we lay down in the field on a small hill with our feet up and looked at it.

He was a promiscuous guy. He had slept with twelve girls; and meanwhile, I was a virgin. We started going out the night we were hanging out, he wanted to go meet with some girl and a friend, and I told him, “Don't go.”

So, he didn't go. He stayed with me, and he asked me if he could kiss me, and I said he could, and he did.

We lived together in his dorm room for one week, even though it was against the school rules, until we slept together. We dated for three and a half months. He was away in India for the last month of it. We did a lot of drugs together. We had a few fights. It was difficult being in a relationship. But we stayed together for the longest he had ever had a girlfriend.

Around the time he was in India, I was asked to leave the school, because I hardly went to classes. I would cook him lunch and buy a little cake for a picnic. I stayed in the dorm room for most of the time. I felt like a stay-at-home mother and wife, but he asked me one time if I would get an abortion if I got pregnant. I said no, but he wanted it. I got mad at him.

After I was back home, in Princeton, New Jersey, I finally spoke with him on the telephone, and we had a sad conversation. I did not want to break up with him, but I knew that if I didn't agree to it, he would break up with me, anyway.

I came down with a severe psychiatric condition. I drank all sorts of Sprite and could hardly get out of bed. The psychiatrist diagnosed me with drug-induced psychosis, and I was put on an anti-psychotic and an anti-anxiety medicine. I was catatonic and my muscles atrophied, because I slept most of the time, and my

mother washed my face and read me books at bedtime. I was so devastated about the break-up that a few months later, I attempted suicide. Around that time, a close friend of mine, who had done drugs with me in high school, had also attempted suicide, but she succeeded. Three weeks after her body was discovered, I drank ten ounces of antifreeze and was taken to the hospital, after crying out her name and crying into my pillow, asking God for True Love to return to me.

They pumped my stomach. They put charcoal in my stomach. One of my lungs collapsed. I had renal failure. They drove me to another hospital and gave me dialysis two times, and I woke up during the second dialysis treatment. I had to stay in the hospital for one week, and the psychiatric hospital two weeks, after I was committed. People at the hospital told me to forget him and move on. But I could not forget him.

Twenty years passed, and so did many hospitalizations, severe mental illness, mental health clinics, and so many medicines, and I repeatedly tried to get in touch with him, but he would always get off the phone with me quickly. I wrote him many letters, asking and begging him to marry me. One time I called him on Thanksgiving, but he told me he had a girlfriend, and that they were very happy together. I asked him if I could still write to him, and he told me I could, but that he would not write back.

A few years later, once my family moved to a different city, a woman called me at my apartment and told me she had married him, three months prior. I didn't know what to say to her, so I didn't speak. It was the worst day of my life. I was so devastated that I was in shock. I wrote to him on social media to ask him to thank his wife for calling me, although I didn't mean it. He didn't answer me. He seemed to have disabled his account.

The next thing I knew was that he was accusing me of stalking him, to the police. I'd finally tracked him down, tried to get ahold of him, and sent him many pictures of things I'd bought us for our future wedding. I kept asking him and asking him to marry me. He would not answer me. I cried, but he would not speak to me.



This is the same picture I sent him through email.

So, then he sent me an email which told me that I was committing the crime of stalking, told me stalking laws in his state, and told me that he was collecting evidence to use against me in a court of law, and that he was asking everyone he knew to call the police and collect evidence to use against me in a court of law.

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