

I have invested myself in the creation of a high-quality comic that tells the story of a young woman who has dramatic dreams while she accompanies a friend on a long train ride. The story and dreams focus on the relationship of the two girls, and what this relationship has meant to the main character. As more dreams are depicted it becomes clear to the reader that the two girls have a strange, complicated and tense relationship. I chose this story from the countless stories I have invented this year because I believe the dream sequences will give me the opportunity to experiment with many different modes and styles while staying within the bounds of a single, cohesive project. However, as I began to mould the narrative around the dreams, I became dedicated to the deeper theme of the project, one which asks questions about morality, choice and shame. I chose this particular channel for my story because I am attracted to the idea of complete creative control over a visual narrative, and independent comics give me the opportunity to wield it. Also, within comics, and two-dimensional work in general, almost any image is possible, which is a necessity when it comes to depicting dreams.

I started in a very different place back in September. I say this with the underlying assumption that I would have done a visual narrative no matter what. The only thing to figure out, I thought, was the story. I had one but threw it away within a month because of its scope, then more came and went, each halfway worked on, and by the end of last semester I had a very attractive, if not particularly cohesive body of work. I spend most of my time in front of a Wacom Cintiq, figuring out various Photoshop problems and learning different advantages the program provides an illustrator or cartoonist. I looked at a lot of art, read a lot of comics, and tried to build up the strong set of skills in the realm of digital illustration.

I knew I wanted to do a story that took place on a train. I liked this idea for various reasons- the way that comic panels and train cars work in the same way to contain action, the way people are forced together for an extended period of time, and the way a train encapsulates a person as they travel from one place to another. It's like a plane ride in that way- you really don't *feel* the journey. Train travel is different from flying, however, in that you are meant to stay and live there for a while. This of course provides more opportunity for narrative to occur. Also on some trains, like the one in the story, you can purchase a room to stay in. Rooms on Amtrak trains fascinate me. They are marvels of compression! I put one in my story for this reason- to shove the characters together and light a fire with the friction.

I'm not entirely sure where the idea of including dream imagery came from. I think I just get the urge to depict my own dreams sometimes and never find the time to do so. But I realized this idea has a

precedent- Windsor McCay's *Little Nemo's Adventures in Slumberland*, a comic strip in which a boy has brilliant, insane dreams. Seeing the movie version as a child remains one of my most vivid memories- vivid but not specific, like a dream itself.

The story begins with the two main characters meeting on a train platform in the early morning. The main character, Lynn, waits for her friend, Amy, while she talks on the phone with another unidentified person. Lynn talks to this person about Amy, and it is obvious from her words that the two girls aren't close.

Phone: Aren't you worried things will get awkward? Five days in a tiny closet, I mean...

Lynn: Of course I'm worried! I'm getting ready for the worst here. But I can't turn down saving this much money. How could I? I would have no excuse.

Phone: I was shocked she even asked you.

Lynn: Yeah well I guess all her new friends must have turned her down.

Phone: Don't be mean. That's not going to help.

Lynn: Sorry.

Phone: Think she's still mad?

Lynn: If she was I doubt she would say anything-(looks up, and sees Amy approaching) oh, shit. here she comes. *Laterbye.*



I chose two young women to be the main characters of the story not only because I can best relate to that kind of person, but also because this type of two-faced interaction seems to most often happen within this group. Young women have extremely complicated and often unhealthy relationships with one another.

As the dialogue implies, the two girls are sharing an Amtrak roomette in the interest of being economical. The history between the two begins to unravel within the first few pages. Lynn asks how Amy's family is doing, and Amy answers in a way that lets the reader know that the girls were at least good friends at some point- she uses nicknames for family members and refers to things only a friend

might know about. She then states that her mother's cancer has gone into remission. Lynn is surprised, as she didn't know that Amy's mother had cancer at all. Lynn mentions that she didn't see on facebook that Amy's mother had cancer- which implies that Lynn frequents Amy's facebook, but does not regularly communicate with her.



Lynn and Amy then go to bed, and Lynn has her first dream. It centers around Amy. Within the dream Amy is grey and simply repeats the phrase “I know” over and over again. In the dream Lynn realizes that Amy is punishing her for something she did, which is assumed to be the thing which drove the two apart in real life.

Amy: I know.

Lynn: (looking a little annoyed.) It's not like he was *your* husband.

Amy: It's not like he was yours.



At this point a third character is introduced who will go on to define the rest of Lynn's dreams. She is almost an exact copy of Lynn, but where Lynn is insecure, her copy is confident. Where Lynn is tired, her copy is vibrant, and where Lynn is shameful, her copy is reveling. At this point her copy argues with Amy's disdain, claiming that the aforementioned "husband" was so handsome, and drove a fancy car, and that his wife never knew, and that it was over. The original Lynn is shocked at this copy and what she says. Then she wakes up.

Lynn has four dreams after this one while on the train, and the interactions she has with her copy are the focus of every one. The copy represents Lynn's true, vibrant, carnal nature, which is unconcerned with what Amy and everyone else thinks. Throughout the dreams the "real" Lynn fights with her copy, trying to install virtue and goodness as her true nature. A large, victorian-style house appears in the second dream and becomes a symbol of Lynn's true self- the real Lynn tries to get in while her dream-copy keeps her out.



Eventually in the real world, Lynn and Amy get into a fight and end up avoiding each other for the rest of the train ride. After this happens, Lynn becomes violent towards her other self in her dreams, and eventually kills her.

Throughout the dreams it should be obvious that the “copy-Lynn” is the stronger Lynn, as she is the true wants and desires of the being, while the Lynn that exists on the outside was created based on her perception of the desires of others. In the end, after the “copy-Lynn” meets her demise, and in real life Lynn tries to approach Amy and mend their relationship. She is turned away, because Amy knows who Lynn truly is, rather than the good person she is trying to be.

The question I am reaching for through this narrative is one I think everyone struggles with. Is avoiding criticism a good enough reason to live a virtuous life, or should you only do so if it is your instinct to be virtuous? Lynn's instinct leads her towards all things that are forbidden, not just inappropriate men. Her true self thrives on desire. After she kills that self in her dream, she is a shell of a person. Amy knows that the “good” Lynn is a fake and rejects her. Lynn then goes into the train station bathroom and looks at herself in the mirror. The black of her eye expands until she is swallowed

by it, and the story ends. I came up with this ending with the idea that it best describes the emptiness a person can feel when they betray themselves for the approval of others. A balance must be achieved between unbridled yearning and social decency.

In the interest of time and quality, I split the story into two parts and have finished only the first part for my project. After printing them I bound the pages into a heavy book. I like the presence of the thing. It is taller, wider and certainly thicker than any comic I've read. My hope in doing this is that the average reader will spend extra time trying to understand the beginning of an emotionally and socially complex story. I have also posted the pages online, which is where I will continue with part two, when the *urge* strikes me.