

## How The World Ends, But Doesn't

Frank stood outside my dormitory window every night and smoked a cigarette while singing *Wicked Little Town*, which was his favourite.

Simultaneously, William, a homeless man, stands near a rubbish-fire with a stack of cards he had found at a local Goodwill. The man shuffles through them: three-hundred-ninety-two. When you're homeless, you have enough time to count three hundred ninety two cards. The cards have pictures of people on them: people who had lives. Rich lives. He makes sure to take a look at each individual face before adding the cards into the fire. The homeless man grins and watches them burn.

Thirteen miles away, there was a boy named Bryan who lived an ordinary life. Each morning, he would rise from his bed, walk towards the window, and greet the morning with a smile. He'd go eat a bowl of corn flakes with milk, and drink a glass of orange juice from a smooth-set glass. Kissing his mum goodbye, he walked out the door to the bus station where he would wait for the bus. At school, he'd listen to the lectures, and eat the greasy cafeteria food. He'd stare at a girl he had a crush on, named Cassandra, who was in his science class. Likewise, she'd glance over at him and smile. After school, he'd watch her get picked up by her mother, and drive home. He'd take the bus home, and play baseball with a few friends.

Across the street lived a blind girl named Lindsay. She sat in bed all day and felt the glass of the window and imagined what colour must look like based on how hot the glass was. Her mother would bring in soup each night and she'd draw pictures, thinking they must be the best thing in the world. Imagine if she could draw a tree without actually having seen one? She'd be famous. Lindsay and Bryan spent each day like this for years and years, never talking to each other, never interacting.

One day, Bryan hit a home run, and the baseball smashed into the girl's window as she was feeling the warmth of the dying sun. It fell in her lap and she felt it in her hands, realizing she was so disconnected with the outside world, she couldn't draw a tree even if she tried. They continued their lives, never speaking, never seeing. Bryan and Cassandra married after college and lived bright, successful lives. Lindsay died two weeks after the baseball entered her world, never knowing what her mother looked like.

Frank smiles at me. “Mind doing that somewhere else?” A woman yells across the little gap between dorms. “You’re fucking up my lungs!” Frank frowns and walks away slowly. After that, I never see him again. He just vanishes.

William walks into a deserted apartment. He knows it’s deserted because two weeks ago, the police took away a body of a man named Brendan Wilkes. Brendan was told, as a child, that he had to make his own meaning, so he decided to watch all the films in VideoHound’s Movie Guide. When he was done, he watched in a TV screen as he hanged himself, believing his life had all the meaning in the world. William sits on the sofa and watches the moon as it crosses the windows. Far away, he can hear the faint whistle of a melancholy song, as a support beam gives way and the roof collapses on his head.

Chris Short For Christian stands atop Westminster Bridge, shedding tears no one will catch. Perhaps one day, they might evaporate and rain down into someone’s drink. But that person won’t taste despair, she’ll taste joy and rebirth. Chris Short For Christian weeps about his previous love interest, who didn’t know she was a transgender, but had sex with her anyway. Thomas had made her feel like a woman, but he ditched her for some bitch named Kristy. Chris Short For Christian jumps to her death, thinking about how her father wouldn’t have approved of her life choices.

I go for a short walk down to the park and try to imagine what life would be like right now with an ice cream sandwich. Maybe it would bring joy, or perhaps it would bring pain as I remember my late grandmother who used to take me out on Saturdays to get an ice cream, but died when a car ran her over.

I imagine myself running. I run to stop Chris Short For Christian from jumping off Westminster Bridge; maybe I’d make her feel like a real woman again. We all deserve that, don’t we: to feel human? I run to stop Frank from leaving. Maybe we’ll become best friends and smoke joints outside my dorm window, pissing off the adjacent dorm complex. I run to Bryan and introduce him to Lindsay, two weeks before she dies so she has a friend. I run to keep William company by his rubbish-bin fire so he could talk and laugh and William wouldn’t be in the apartment when it collapses.

None of this will happen, I think as I take a drag from my joint. But even if it did, would it even matter all that much? Once I met a professor who told me that all events held the same

value, just like all musical notes should be played with equal weight in mind. But not all events affect me the same, just like I don't like every note on a violin string.

I inhale deeply, and walk to my car so I can start driving. I drive for four hours while it rains heavily; but I keep driving. Eventually, I reach an old home in York and stop, get out of the car, and enter. Inside, my mum sits in a wheelchair watching the news about a suicide on Westminster Bridge. I sit and stare at her, and she stares back. We sit there until the world ends. "It's ok," she says, smiling.