

COLBY SEMPEK

Missing Puzzle Piece, 2013
Archival pigment print, 24 x 16 in



COURTESY: THE ARTIST

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The Man in Tweed

The Need to Look

On the other side of the street, as if it were on the other side of the ocean, there is a sign: “Café.” The man in tweed waits for the light to change.

While he crosses the street, the man in tweed remembers the first time he drank coffee. Another time, another world: a smell of jungle in the steam.

On the sidewalk in front of the café are two little tables. One of them is occupied by a vaguely familiar-looking old man who stares at the man in tweed.

The old man smiles, a toothless gesture. The man in tweed swallows saliva and enters the place. A fan revolves on the ceiling like a wasp.

The only customer inside the establishment is sitting in front of a laptop. The man in tweed glimpses an Internet page: Twitter.

The customer with the laptop writes at that moment something related to a man in tweed in a café. The man in tweed shivers.

“Good morning,” says the girl behind the counter, her dark hair tied at the back of her neck. The man in tweed takes a hesitant step toward her.

“I am lost and need directions,” mumbles the man in tweed. “We are all lost,” the girl says. “Tomorrow is the first day of spring.”

“I know what you’re getting at,” says the man in tweed, thinking of black pollen, “but right now I need to orient myself.” “You can’t find the north,” says the girl.

The man in tweed remembers the idea of the north, and agrees. “Will you help me?” “Yes,” the girl says, “but first you must buy something.”

Frantically the man in tweed scrutinizes the chalkboard behind the counter. It’s filled with names that mean absolutely nothing to him: hieroglyphics.

An image emerges slowly from the memory of the man in tweed. A speeding train breaches the dark night like a bright zipper.

“Espresso,” whispers the man in tweed, and the express train vanishes into the tunnel in his mind. “See?” says the girl, smiling. “That wasn’t so hard.”

The smile that the man in tweed attempts to return ends up as an indescribable grimace. “You need a double,” the girl says, and turns around.

While the girl prepares the coffee, the man in tweed catches a glimpse of the back of her neck. There, among a few rebellious hairs, shines a ruby-colored butterfly.

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The tattoo seems to flutter on the girl’s neck as if wanting to flee its prison of skin. The man in tweed imagines a milky sky.

In the midst of that whiteness, the man in tweed sees a trace of moving blood: butterflies. Beneath the whiteness, the gardens of the world boil.