

The two Chloe Blands eat at the same restaurant. (There are about 800 restaurants in Brooklyn, and about 4,200 in all of New York City. The population of Brooklyn is about 2,500,000. If Brooklyn were an independent city, it would be the fourth most populous in the United States.)

The OTHER Chloe Bland happens to sit at a table serviced by the friend of THE Chloe Bland. (The OTHER Chloe Bland could have easily dined at a table *not* serviced by the friend.)

The server notices the name on the credit card, and chooses to start a conversation with the OTHER Chloe Bland. (Servers in New York City tend to be far too busy to ever notice names on credit cards.)

The OTHER Chloe Bland offers to forward my e-mail to THE Chloe Bland.

THE Chloe Bland visits the restaurant *that very day*, for the first time in seven months, gets my e-mail address, and offers to help.

She hasn't seen Irving in five years, but will see him in two weeks.

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In my dictionary, the word “miracle” is defined as “an event inexplicable by the laws of nature and so held to be supernatural in origin or an act of God; a marvel.” Any engineers out there might say that “Just because you have a string of improbable events doesn't mean it's a miracle.” I won't argue. But these events impressed me: I marveled. The usual six degrees of separation between John Irving and I got compressed to four (the OTHER Chloe Bland, the waitress, THE Chloe Bland, and finally John Irving). It seems more probable for me to bump into John Irving on the street than to arrange these Chloe Bland events.

This string of coincidences caused me to actually *think* about the word “miracle.” Maybe there *was* something to that power of intention, that intention to give Romuald a gift. Maybe all the prayers said for Romuald by his fellow monks and community had influenced the events. Who knows? But when I think of these events now, I feel a certain lightness, a feeling of *Maybe there are vast worlds beyond my limited capacity to see, hear, taste, touch, and smell.* And maybe I can sometimes touch the magic of these worlds, and see how it touches others.

As promised, about two months after our initial con-

tact, Chloe Bland mailed me a signed copy of *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. A few weeks later, John Irving himself mailed me a handwritten note apologizing for the “slow mailroom folks at Random House,” and enclosed signed photos for Romuald and my sister. Later, Chloe Bland told me that, at the time of the signing, Irving's thumb had been in a cast.

By that time, Romuald had vacated the cabin. He'd had to move back to the cloisters because his femurs could snap at any time as a result of the tumors. I felt dread in the pit of my stomach. I wanted this kindhearted, smart, devoted, hardworking, jovial man to spend his final days in the peace and tranquility of his board-and-batten red-wood cabin.

Romuald kept working. One day I had to pry him away for a surprise meeting in the monastery library. There, I presented him with the autographed book and photo, Irving's note, and THE Chloe Bland's e-mail. His energy lifted and he smiled broadly. *I'd gotten my smile. Perhaps he'd forgotten his illness for a few moments.* We posed for a few photos as Romuald, wearing his monk's habit, held the autographed book. He made jokes about these being his death photos.

*That very day* I received an e-mail from Chloe Bland asking if I had received the book.

After careers in science and business, **Robert Nizza** began exploring alternative ways of living at the Esalen Institute and the New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur, CA. He is currently working on a collection of essays about those dimensions found between the measurable and the immeasurable worlds. He works as a massage therapist in Berkeley, CA where he sometimes speaks Chinese and plays the piano. Feel free to contact him at [rnizza@gmail.com](mailto:rnizza@gmail.com).

## HEE JIN LEE

*Sunset Meditation, 2013*  
acrylic and mixed pens, 12 x 16 in



courtesy: the artist