

Spring 5-1-2016

## Paintings

Patricia Duch  
*College of DuPage*

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### Recommended Citation

Duch, Patricia (2016) "Paintings," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 38: No. 2, Article 46.  
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol38/iss2/46>

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The air inside the silent art museum was cold and biting compared to the damp and heavy muck outside. The consistent hum of the cooling unit and the echo of his footsteps were the only sounds that accompanied the boy through the dim halls of the museum. Reaching into his back pocket he pulled out the assignment that had brought him to the old museum in the first place. The last art piece he was to find was titled 1955, but after an hour of wandering the vacant corridors he was ready to give up. One of the last exhibits was located at the very back of the museum. The only light in the room fell from a few decrepit spotlights that illuminated the meager collection of dusty paintings. Across the room, a lonely bench, on which sat a lonely looking man, caught his eye. Walking towards the bench the boy cleared his throat to get the man's attention. The sudden noise broke the heavy silence, and when the man turned to look at him, it felt as if every portrait in the room had turned to stare.

"Yes my boy?" the man asked.

He was old, dressed in a collared shirt and vest, with hair the color of ash. Next to him rested a sturdy looking cane with a head made of worn but polished bronze that held the permanent imprint of the man's hand.

"I've been looking for this artist, sir, but I can't seem to find him."

The man took the paper from the boy and squinted at it for a while. Then he turned back to the boy and extended his hand.

"You've just found him," he said, with a smile flickering on his face. The boy grinned and shook hands with the man.

"Sir, your painting 1955, is it in this room?"

The smile faded from the man's face. He sighed, and pointed at the painting directly in front of them. "Yes, it is."

The boy sat down at the opposite end of the bench and studied the painting. It was a young woman sitting in front of a pond. A willow tree cast shadows on her pale face, and brown curls framed bright green eyes.

"Who is that, sir?"

"My wife," muttered the man, reaching for his cane and clutching it to him.

"Oh, is she here with you, sir?"

The man fell silent. Then, sighing, he turned to look at the boy. "No. Two weeks after I painted her here, she drowned in the very pond that's behind her. I came home to a note attached to this cane. It said she wasn't

strong enough to walk through life with me, but this would be.” The man fell silent again, and the boy with him.

“I’m sorry,” whispered the boy. The man said nothing. The heavy silence enveloped them once more and goosebumps formed on the boy’s arms. He took out his assignment and studied the questions once more.

“Sir,” said the boy after a minute “why did you paint her?”

The man said nothing.

“Was it because she was beautiful? or maybe—” but the man put a hand up, stopping the boy.

“She was so alive, always so full of life, I wanted to keep her that way forever, but . . .” The man trailed off and tears started falling down his face.

“I’m so sorry sir.” The boy watched as the man started to sob. He was holding the cane so tightly his knuckles were white. Then the man gasped and grabbed his chest. The cane the man had been clutching fell to the ground. The bronze head echoed with a ping. The man landed next to the cane and the boy. The painting could do nothing but watch.



Woman  
on  
pillow  
Ink and pen  
drawing  
Natalia  
Toreeva