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The Ring

Carolyn Phillips

The breakup had been devastating for Ava, but she hadn't counted on Tom not showing up to get the ring. He'd asked for it back some time ago, but she'd been too angry to face him. She checked her phone. He was forty-five minutes late. No messages. *He's really not coming.* A final humiliation.

A passerby glanced in her direction, a man with Tom's build and his dark hair. Her heart raced and her mouth turned up in a smile, but the stranger continued past her. She sighed and stood up, turning around to look out at the Bay, resting her hands on the steel railing. It was a beautiful day, warm and windy, with small waves lapping as far as she could see. The warmth of the sun on her face and smell of Spring in the air, usually a balm to her dark mood, made the pain inside her feel hot and alive.

She rubbed the smooth platinum band and twisted it back and forth. A habit she developed since he first slipped it on her finger. They were so happy that day. His proposal, brief but romantic, on a rainy candlelit night in their apartment when she'd least expected it. She planned the wedding. And a whole life. But it was not to be, and here she was waiting for closure that hadn't bothered to show up.

Ava scanned the waterfront once more, expecting to see Tom rushing toward her with apologies for being late, apologies, perhaps, for everything. The same weekday afternoon smattering of moms pushing strollers, office workers returning late from lunch, or sneaking out early for the day, moved on oblivious to her. No Tom.

She closed her eyes and breathed deeply, steeling herself against the waves of anger that had been her constant companion since he'd called it off. She gripped the rail, but the anger did not come crashing in with its usual force. Instead, it was slow, quiet, weak, like a half-deflated balloon falling to the ground. She exhaled and let go of the railing, steady on her feet now.

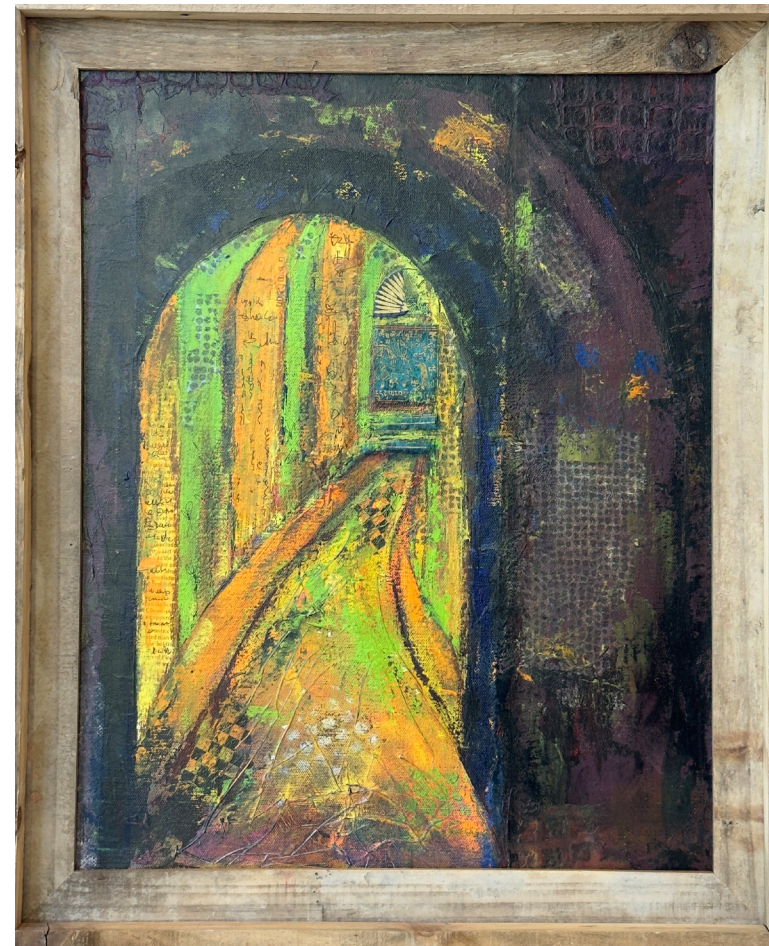
There was something else coming to the surface from deep inside, something lost to her for months. Hope. It welled up like a natural spring breaking through ancient ground and awakened in her a flutter of courage.

Ava slid the ring off her finger and let it sit in her palm, the metal warming in the sun. She turned the diamond to face her. It glittered in the light and for a moment she marveled at its beauty. *Maybe I'll keep it.* She immediately dismissed the idea. She knew what she wanted to do.

She stretched her hand over the water, careful to keep the ring nested in the center of her palm. An errant wave crashed against the stone wall and a spray of cool salty mist settled upon the band. The tiny droplets pooled together and slid down onto her skin. She turned her hand sideways and the ring fell into the Bay. It dropped fast like a stone and disappeared into the water without a sound. She rubbed her finger and smoothed the skin where the ring had been for the last twelve months.

"That's better," she said and turned to walk away.

Light Within



Shalini Singh — Acrylic and Collage