

A STORY IN A ROOM

By DALE ESTEY

The candle light framed a dark corner of the massive oil painting hanging above his desk. Wax was quickly forming a liquid pool in the bottom of the glass holder, causing the flame to stab mad shadows across wall and desk, papers and books. The books moved falsely on their shelves, swayed in the flickering light.

"Who is there?" he asked.

The only sound was a hollow snap from the rapidly dying candle. He leaned over to peer into the smoke-stained holder. The candle shrank at his quick movement, leaving a small blue glow in the middle of the dirty yellow puddle. He moved back cautiously in his chair, and the feeble light grew stronger, until it once again illuminated the book he had been reading.

"Who is...?" he started again, but did not finish his question. He was surprised to find he did not like the sound of his own voice. His words seemed to get lost in the dark corners of the large room. Absorbed by the thick drapes covering the windows. He pushed his chair back and slowly stood up, looking cautiously at the wavering flame. He went to the door and pressed his ear to the cool wood. He could hear nothing. Perhaps. He drew back the large metal bolt and eased open the heavy door. The passageway was dense with the gloom of the late hour. He strained eyes and ears, but he saw or heard nothing. He did not walk into the hall, but closed the door behind him again and solidly slid the bolt back into place. He leaned against the door while his fingers traced the solid metal bolt, the ornate knob. Perhaps, after all, it had been nothing.

He went back to his desk and reached over to pour himself a glass of wine. His hand trembled and red drops splashed against the cabaret top, trickled in thin streaks down the side. He replaced the stopper and sat, holding the glass carefully. He raised it in front of his face and watched the flame through the dark red liquid. The fire was chopped into pieces by the crystal; a thousand tiny red candles dancing through the body of the glass. Each small flame clouded a deep red by the juice of the wine. He took a drink and placed the glass near the candle. A red glow spread over some of the pages. He watched it for a moment, then picked up the book he had been reading. He was certain the answer he sought was very close. After so many years. A few more pages.

He turned one leaf of the book, and then another. By themselves the books had meant little. But when they were put together; when one led to another which in turn led to the next. He had begun to understand. To find what no one else had ever found before.

"Who is there?" He twisted around in his chair, knocking over the glass of wine with his elbow. The candle jumped wildly.

"Who is..." but he stopped. He knew. He leaned wearily over his desk, closed his eyes.

"You must give me more time", he said.

There was a gentle movement from somewhere in the room; he opened his eyes but could not see anything, could not tell from where the sound came. He turned back and clutched at his book, ran his fingers over the old leather binding. Another slight sound behind him, and the candle flared up to a large white blaze.

"It is not fair", he said.

He closed the book with a sigh and put it carefully back on the desk.

"It is not fair", he said. "You have come too soon. Just a little more time." There was a sob in his voice. "So close."

The candle went out.

— the autumn tree, like the old man's beard, with streaks of other colours, colours of dying life, life of seasons past

— John

P
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To Liliane

"How many times can a heart be broken before there is no more love left to give?"

— as many times as the loved and the lover refuse to be each other, because love is not a quantity that falls away to life's experiences, and is left behind, a little here, a little there, no, it is a quality that shares itself in some way, great or small, with all things, small or great.

"How many times can we go on to hurt people and never feel the consequences?"

— there are no consequences; people do not hurt each other in love, but each hurts himself by knowing love without understanding or, worse, by understanding love without knowing.

"How long can a person be lonely before his soul gives up in despair and dies?"

— as lonely as a man may be, his soul does not feel it, for a soul is born out of love for eternity and where transient love burns, the wound is but a lust-breath in the quiet soulfire sleep.

"What can you do when there are no more feelings to express and your emotions fail to vibrate?"

— expression is only the exhibition of understanding and emotions are expressions which surround us, coming at once from every part of our being; if you cannot express, either by emotion or by means more material, you are hiding yourself from your own understanding, and denying that you know the answers to your own questions before they are fully asked.

"Where can you go when the one you love tells you to 'go away'?"

— into your soul, to the love there, and to your understanding of it.

"Why must I go on in this world alone and deserted like a flower in the snow?"

— the flower in the snow is still warm life despite the cold death about it; the flower is still beauty, in the midst of the starkness; the flower goes on, and love makes flowers of us all, whether we are one in fields, or alone in our ephemeral eternities.

— John

My cockneymistress demanded a poem

I rhymed the moon
and Carol June,
her sunny smiles
and funny wiles,
her urging lips
and surging hips,
her burning eyes
and churning thighs
then came to grief
on her fish and chips.

Maurice Spiro

from "Prelude and Fugue"

Matthew 10:29

He knows when any sparrow
has fallen on the ground
but He doesn't lift a finger
or make the faintest sound.

Maurice Spiro

THE DIN OF THIRSTS SOUP

the frenzy fever words break out
beading
running wild arm flailing
in a dazzle
in a daze
and a puddle
more more more words
and the spinning gets out of control
and looking around me at shelves of
threatening washouts of words and
worlds of avalanche and one broad fat
cheap word to hum to on the end of
some lazy dead bobbin and the crash of
long rotted gone shutters echoing the
miracle of some time left to hollowness
and empty features on the screens amid
this clutter feeble urgent growth of
wait-and-see-ohoyoboy and all the nexts
your vision hazards:
noses pressed against many panes
making faces and sticking out all the
wagging tongues.

Nicky Drumbolis