

“Life Imitates Art”

A Short Story

by

T.D. Smith

“Life imitates art far more than art imitates life.” – Oscar Wilde

1.

None of the world’s finest, most famous artists would be the least bit surprised to find something alive in nature captured in one of their paintings. Humanity’s beloved greats, such as Rembrandt or Picasso would not bat an eye if the human form, a flower, or bird showed up in one of their works. Indeed, Van Gogh certainly would have shown no surprise whatsoever looking at his “The Starry Night” after the sprawling stars in all their brilliant, radiant glory inspired him from out the window of his asylum cell.

For this is the natural flow of things. It is a balance we strike with nature, the way of the cosmos. Art imitates life, seeking to resemble and celebrate the beauty and its awe-inspiring, joyous glow that it instills in us. It is the rejoicing in the evocative splendor of the universe, a cry of elation in the wilderness from us tiny specks singing praise at the indwelling of the divine, who deigns to descend and touch us meager mortals. Through its touch, divinity has imbued us with the faculty of recognition, appreciation, and revelry that compels us to worship the beauty all about us, raising us up through that immortal aesthetic quality despite our mortal hardships and sufferings.

One can understand, then, my shock, dismay and utter confoundedness when I, a young man who has been a gifted painter all his life, noticed that the things I painted in my basement

studio were appearing out in the world, having taken on a life all their own, dancing, or walking, or in some cases, flying all about.

To put it in layman's terms: anything I would paint, and I mean *anything*, be that a scene, an absurd character or likeness, an animal, plant, it did not matter what or how unusual, would come to life in our world the very next day.

I didn't notice it at first. The subjects of my paintings were so simple. I would paint a row of daisies, white and in full bloom, standing against a crisp, blue spring sky. Perhaps the next day I saw such a row of daisies and thought nothing of them. I know not; such things are so commonplace, so expected in our day to day, that we tend as humans to filter them out, bracketing them into the unremarkable background noise when we encounter them. Painting such a common thing in spring made me, a painter, even less likely to see it.

No, it was not until my life became darker, full of woe and grief that I painted into my creations furiously, that I noticed it.

My grandmother had been sick for quite some time. I watched her grow thinner and frailer for months as she grew sicker and withered away. The funeral service was gray and mournful, and is clear and distinct in my mind, as clear and real as the words I type on this page.

After the funeral, so full of despair was I, that I retreated to my basement with nothing but a mason jar full of whiskey and ice and my canvas, paints, and brushes. I lashed out at the canvas with furious broad strokes, pouring my soul into the picture. I painted and painted into the wee hours of the morn until it was complete: a photorealistic portrait of my grandmother smiling a toothy grin, clutching her walker, my mother's arm around her shoulder. Grandma wore a pink and white striped t-shirt and had recently permed hair. I retired shortly thereafter, quite drunk

and exhausted, determined to get a few winks of sleep prior to the next day, which would be difficult enough to face as it were, but would now prove even more difficult, for I would surely be hung over.

At nine in the morning, I awoke to my doorbell ringing. It was shrill and hurt my head. I ignored it. It rang again and again, loud and shrill, incessant. I arose and stumbled to the door. I knew not who stood behind that great hunk of oak, but I knew I was going to give them a piece of my mind.

I swung the door open, a great tongue lashing formulating in my mind, full of a carefully concocted cacophony of expletives, and I froze when I saw her, my mind immediately going blank.

Standing before me was my grandmother, in a white and pink striped t-shirt, clutching her walker, beside my mother, whose hand lay resting on her shoulder. This was no apparition. It was no ghostly occurrence of haunting. It was my real, flesh and blood grandmother, standing before me, just the way I had painted her the night before.

She greeted me, with familiar, tender words that were like sweet delicacies to my ears. Tears in my eyes, I embraced her, so happy to see her was I.

In the hours that followed the duo's visit, I thought and puzzled until my weary, hungover brain nearly collapsed in on itself from exhaustion. Scanning the internet, the papers, any news outlet I could find, I found no obituary, no record of a funeral. I called the funeral home. They carefully and confusedly explained to me that no such for any such person had occurred there yesterday or in days before. Such was the case for every other funeral home in town I called as well.

What could have caused this miracle? What was its catalyst? Pacing in my basement, I finally glanced over lazily, then jolted and jumped when my eyes wandered over to my painting. It was the only possible explanation I could think of, having ruled out any remaining explanation, rational or otherwise. I must have brought my dear old granny back to life with my painting.

2.

It all bears a little explanation, some background info as it were, at this juncture.

When I said before I had been a painter all my life, I was telling the truth. I have had the artistic gift of painting in such a way that my works resemble real life my whole life, cherishing it and developing it through art classes and the like over the years. I have not, however, been a painter by profession my entire life.

Several years prior to the incident wherein I rejuvenated my late granny, I was a miserable graphic designer in my postgraduate career. I hated it. It was so drab, boring, monotonous, and predictable to a fault.

I would be lying if I said I was not relieved when they finally laid me off from that job. My family bewailed this. My mom cried for me. My father ranted about the unfairness of it, then continued on and on about politics, the government, our society, and such, ad nauseum, ad absurdum. It was certainly not a fiscally favorable predicament. No longer affording rent, I had to move home, becoming like so many other unemployed millennials who lived in their parents' basements. However, at least I was out of that job. Words cannot adequately express how miserable, how soul crushing it was!

The man and his larger corporate schemes there exploited my art skills. They milked and sold me for my talent, and I got nothing but a meager salary and health benefits; I was truly cattle, fodder for their moneymaking ploys, and nothing more, usable and disposable when times got uncertain.

That said, 'twas not long before I realized being home again meant far less privacy and freedom to do as I wished, to frolic as I pleased with no one bothering me about dinner time, asking me to mow grass or help replace a light fixture, or inquiring as to when I would expect to be home that night. I secluded myself to my makeshift basement room, and spent many an unemployed day and night painting, honing my skills.

“These are *good*,” my sickly grandmother, who now lived with my parents, too, said, “Good enough to sell. I’m not just saying that because I’m your granny.”

It was then that a small lightbulb would have dinged and glowed above my head, were I a cartoon character.

“You know what?” I replied to my grandmother, “Maybe I will.”

The first paintings I sold were ones that hung on the walls at the local coffee shop. Eventually I sold enough paintings to gain notoriety there among the hipster crowd. Soon, they asked me to show off my work at underground grunge galleries and events.

There I caught the eye of several young hipsters’ wealthy, art-collecting parents, who, unlike their offspring, did not have as many piercings as one could fit on one lip, nor did they

have variously colored hair paint, but rather were the types who were clean cut and shaven, and wore tuxes and ballgowns to cocktail parties.

Long story short, I became something of a celebrity in the local art community of my town and surrounding area, selling many of my works. I also did quite well by exposing my art on social media, which directed many clients to my online shop. I even was asked at one point to commission some art for celebrities like Howie Mandel, who wanted a painting of his head inside a nose-inflated glove, and another point, Kanye West, but that's another story.

Within a year and a half, I was able to purchase my own home and move back out of my parents' basement once again. I moved out, but not far away, as my granny was much sicker.

I set up a studio in my large basement, which was finished except for the gray concrete floor. It was cool and comfortable down there in the summers, when I did much of my work, and had just enough natural light that could pour into the area out of two windows on either wall that brought me eye level to the ground when I sat upon my painting stool.

There I spent my time painting and toiling. I would sell my art out of that house, where I made it.

3.

This brings us back to where we were before. Everything had changed because of that first painting I did in that house that I realized came to life. In the following days, my grandmother became more lively, active, and cheerful than she had been in years. She looked ten years younger (so I had painted her) and felt even younger, of that I am sure. She even joined a badminton team at her church and led the league in serves that season!

As I said before, I had arrived at the conclusion that the only possible explanation, however unlikely, was that my painting had caused my grandmother's return to full health. I had deduced that by following the same sort of reasoning good old Sherlock Holmes had used in those stories my dad read me as a kid.

But how to prove it?

An idea came to me one late night. I would paint the wildest, most off the wall thing I could imagine. Something so absurd it could never happen under regular conditions. If it came true, I would know. I went down into my basement studio and brainstormed, then dipped my brush and touched it to canvas.

I painted a large, gray elephant wearing a bright blue USPS mail carrier suit and hat, just like a normal mail delivery professional would wear, but large enough to cover a behemoth mammal such as itself. I depicted it delivering mail into my mailbox, on my street, in front of my house.

Surely this was so random, so odd, so unlikely a scenario that it would not occur unless my theory and suspicions held water. I would find out.

Next day I awoke, showered, ate breakfast, and then sat stationed on my front porch in one of my padded deck chairs, coffee in one hand, anxiously awaiting the delivery of that day's mail.

At half past eleven, my heart sank as I saw the normal, white box-shaped mail truck round the corner. My heart nearly leapt out of my rib cage when a large, gray elephant in a bright blue USPS mail services uniform came rounding the corner after it!

I stepped down from my deck and strode across the lawn to my mailbox, watching the elephant come stomp-stomp-stomping down the lane, stopping at each box to deliver packages and letters handed to it by the driver of the truck.

“Top of the morning to ya!” said the mail driver enthusiastically when the unlikely duo reached me. He handed the elephant my mail, who reached down with his trunk and deposited it into my outstretched hands. “Bet you didn’t expect to get your mail delivered by an elephant today, did you?”

“No,” I replied earnestly, “but I had wondered if something like this would happen.”

The mailman reared back his head and laughed.

“Ha, ha, ha, ho, ho, ho, of course you did! Ha, ha, ha!”

When I asked him why the elephant was there, he explained it was part of some sort of local campaign to raise awareness and money for the town zoo.

As the pair walked and drove down the street together, I pondered. One could have argued that this was a huge coincidence. I thought otherwise. But, to prove it, I would have to paint more. So, I did.

4.

Over the next few days, I painted several pieces, busily cranking out painting after painting in rapid succession.

First, I painted a pair of evil, anthropomorphic Air Jordans that were reaching out and strangling a bank robber in striped clothes it was holding up and had bound with its long, outstretched laces. The shoes’ red rubber soles arched into a sly grin, with pointed teeth

protruding from their mouths formed from gaps in the front of the shoes resembling holes that a hobo's toes would have jutted from in an old cartoon.

The morning after I painted this piece, I saw a story on the morning news on TV. A local man had stopped a pair of bionic sneakers, Air Jordans no less, from strangling a bank robber to death on a rooftop by pouring water on them. A local inventor had been robbed earlier that day, losing his robotic shoes to the robber. He had given the shoes a malicious aesthetic as a joke to himself and his buddies. The criminal managed to rob a bank after leaving the inventor's home but was thwarted when the inventor remotely activated their anti-theft system shortly thereafter. The authorities apprehended the burglar after the local man who doused the shoes called them when he saw a huge bag full of money in the man's hands, and his clothes.

"I just thought to myself," said the man to the reporters, "who even wears stripy clothes and a black mask around their eyes to rob a bank anymore?"

"Holy shit!" I proclaimed, "This is working!"

The second thing I painted was a portrait of a young detective, inspired by my beloved Sherlock Holmes. He stood looking cartoony, with a deer hunter cap, from which his brown hair and long sideburns jutted messily. He wore a gray hooded sweatshirt with a drawstring lining the hood. In one hand, he held a white ceramic bowl filled with tomato soup that had a triangular grilled cheese sandwich jutting out from its depths, while in his other hand he held an oversized plastic magnifying glass, the kind an elementary school student might use to examine butterflies and other insects.

The man's foot I painted resting on the back of another man, who crouched on all fours beside him. This man was wearing a tan suit with a yellow-checkered pattern lining it. He had

short hair, a round nose, and spectacles. Both men wore a look of grim seriousness on their faces, despite their comic props and scene.

I must admit that I haven't the faintest clue whether this painting came to life. After a few days of neither sleeping nor hearing anything related to it, my mind began to turn.

I painted again, re-creating this picture but smaller. A framed version of this detective and his partner now hung in a middle-aged woman's parlor, against a wood panel wall in this new portrait. The woman wore a pink dress and cap not unlike something First Lady Jackie Kennedy would have worn and stood smiling in the foreground.

After a few more days I decided to go and sell both these paintings at the coffee shop, my old stomping ground. I doubted they would sell elsewhere. A woman dressed in bright pink gleefully bought these from me, saying her son would love them and they would make a perfect birthday present for him. She was also a mixture of astonished and enthusiastically charmed that she and the woman in the portrait bore such striking resemblance.

Third, I painted my neighbors, who one day I learned were packing up their belongings and moving into subsidized housing. They were going on welfare after both husband and wife had lost their jobs and had no prospects. They were unable to pay rent and were too proud to accept my offer of footing that monthly bill for them until they got back on their feet. I felt for them, identifying with their plight, for I myself had been in a similar circumstance not long before.

Then it dawned on me. I *could* help them. I would. Boy would I ever!

I finished the painting that night, beaming.

The next morning my neighbors banged on my door excitedly. They had won the lottery, the big jackpot, the evening before! All their financial woes were over. They were going to pay off all their debts. They could finally afford to pay off little Jonny's steep hospital bills. I congratulated them and joined them later in the evening of that same day in their back yard for a celebratory barbeque.

I held off giving them the painting until a few days later. They thought the gift, a painting of their living room TV flashing the winning numbers, the father screaming in victory, the winning ticket clutched in his hand, his wife with her hand to her mouth in shock just behind them, with their two healthy children hanging midair in jumps of elation was a creation made after the fact to celebrate their good fortune. They would never know that it was in fact the other way around.

5.

I was on fire setting the world right after that. I was Superman, wielding my power left and right to help the poor and afflicted. The hobo down the street became a senior partner overnight and bought the old, dilapidated, condemned and soon to be closed orphanage, renovating and revamping it, and tremendously improving the children's lives.

A little boy down the street broke his arm after he fell through a rotten board in his old treehouse. The next day the boy had a brand-new tree *mansion*, and his arm was whole and stronger than ever.

Poor old Ms. Sue, the old maid who lived across the street from me passed away, never having accomplished her dream of obtaining her pilot's license and flying, I learned at her funeral.

The next day, she barrel-rolled across the sky above our houses in her own personal plane, adorned in blue horn-rimmed pilot's goggles, helmet, and long, billowing scarf that flapped in the wind behind her.

After a week or so, I decided to do something good for myself. I had earned it, I told myself, having done such good things for people.

I poured my soul into her, the woman standing against the red background on the canvas. She was young, beautiful, and exactly my type. First, I would paint her naked and behold her, then I would paint a green evening gown and heels atop her image. Then, after I was finished, I would go out there and find her, and she would be my bride. I smiled, beaming at her and at my cleverness as I painted her cascading brown locks that tumbled and curled, covering her left rosy breast. Eventually, in my perfectionism and tiredness, the painting not being just right yet, I gave it a rest and went to bed.

"What's this?" my older brother asked me a couple of days later in my basement. He had found the painting of the woman, unfinished but both bare breasts blaring up brightly at him. His wife saw it over his shoulder and stifled a snigger, then covered her young son's eyes.

"Oh, um, well..." I stammered awkwardly, "It's a project of mine. I'm trying to paint a portrait of, um, the perfect woman...for me."

They both laughed. Those ignoramuses! I had just burst into a lecture about prudishness and celebrating the human form, glorifying it, in art rather than covering it up shamefully, when my brother interrupted.

“Uh, huh,” he said, “So um, does this painting *remind* you of anyone you know?”

“No...” I said, glancing back and forth from the painting to him, “What do you mean?” He and his wife exchanged a glance. She giggled. They looked back at me.

“I wonder what Dr. Freud would say about that, Oedipus?” asked my sister-in-law.

“Wh-what do you mean?” I stuttered.

“Looks an awful lot like old photos of mom when she was younger, maybe college aged, is all I’m saying.”

I looked in horror back at my creation.

“Yahh!!!” I screamed, the recognition and realization suddenly hitting me. I picked up the still wet red paint-soaked brush and flung red paint on the portrait. It splattered across the woman’s face, neck, and bosoms, creating an effect of blood trickling down her.

My sister-in-law giggled a bit more then said, “okay, whatever, just keep it covered up while Timmy’s here, okay?”

“Okay.” I agreed.

6.

My nephew, Timmy, and I had a blast that evening while his parents enjoyed a much-needed date night. We played spaceships, cars, and built a fort from blankets, under which we

encompassed the TV, watching cartoons and movies, everything from “Diary of a Wimpy Kid” to “Star Wars.”

After a while, Timmy unpacked a notepad, pens, and markers. I asked him what he was drawing. It looked quite good. I mean, it really did, for a kid his age. (It must run in the family!)

“Comics.” He said.

Then we began discussing all sorts of comics he liked, from Batman and Superman and Flash, to The Avengers, Spiderman, and even SpongeBob comics. I told him I had started doing art by making my own comics just like him when I was his age. He asked me what they were about, and I told him. My first one was about a super hero named Goofy Guy, who was an older gentleman with large, floppy ears, spiky gray hair, and a gray mustache that looked like a cloud. He fought crime by night and worked as a janitor by day.

Timmy laughed delightedly. Then he bid me draw Goofy Guy. I did so on his notepad, making several panels that told a story of Goofy Guy rescuing his boss from his day job, Nancy, from the arch-nemesis of the comic, Bad Guy. Timmy laughed and made me read the comic to him repeatedly, including right before he went to sleep.

In the morning, I awoke and cooked the boy a breakfast of eggs, bacon, sausage, and biscuits before his parents came by and collected him. I made my way down to the basement. Today I would start a different project. I knew not what yet. I noticed a newly opened squeezable bottle of red paint, with a brand-new canvas leaning up against a support beam, a paintbrush lying idly beside it, red paint slowly drying and adhering it to the gray concrete floor.

Picking up the canvas, I saw my old comic book villain, Bad Guy, painted there in a child's style. A wave of emotions came over me. First, I was annoyed at having my studio invaded and materials used by my nephew (who must have done so, sneaking down after I told him to stay in the living room while I went to the bathroom, and under no circumstances whatsoever was he to go to the basement and touch my painting supplies!). Then, I laughed, tickled that the boy had chosen *my* dumb old boyhood comics as his subject, and finally a feeling of uneasiness and dread fell over me as I began to contemplate the potential implications of his actions.

I had not long to do so, for I heard my doorbell ring. I quite automatically went up the stairs and opened the front door. He met me with sleek, black metal pointed in my face. The man behind the gun was a cartoonish ghoul. Standing 6 foot 7, with a stick figure body that resembled the broad, painted stroke of a 7-year-old, a bulbous, red button nose, and a shabby black beanie on his head that drooped down to his beady, black eyes, Bad Guy, the antagonist of my childhood comic book, was on my front porch brandishing a gun.

"Alright, bub," spoke the cartoon in a high nasally rasping voice, "back up inside, nice and easy!"

I put my hands up and backed up inside slowly, butterflies churning in my stomach and my heart hammering away in my chest.

"Close and lock the door." Bad Guy commanded. I obeyed. "You got like a basement, or something? Let's go there."

We descended into the basement, where the armed comic book character briefly examined my paintings. He unveiled the painting of the unfinished woman, which he thoroughly

examined from top to bottom before whistling and saying, “damn! Broad’s got some fine knockers! Leaves something to be desired in the butt and legs region, though!”

He then saw my nephew’s painting of himself.

“Hey, hey! Look at dis! I dunno who this fella is, but I like him! Looks smart. Good looking, too!”

He immediately dropped the pleasantries and made me sit on my painting stool. He tied me up with rubbery, cartoonish rope he produced from nowhere (or it seemed from nowhere, for his hands moved so quickly, my eyes couldn’t follow from where he pulled it!) that looked and felt like wet paint, but tying me up tightly, was tough and kept me bound. Then he went upstairs, grumbling, talking, and laughing to himself as he went. A few moments later, I heard my TV blaring.

7.

For three days Bad Guy kept me tied up in the basement, only letting me out to use the restroom and go shopping for supplies at the gas station down the road, which he made me walk to, having hidden my car keys and my phone from me.

Whenever I went into the bathroom, he would say, “No funny business in there, ya hear me?”

Alternatively, “Don’t forget to wipe!”

And once, “Remember, shaking it more than three times is playing with it!”

He thought these witticisms far funnier than they were, laughing excessively at them every time.

Once a day at 6:00 AM sharp, he would send me to the gas station with explicit directions to buy a small pizza, beer, peanuts, and pretzels. I was to talk to no one, I was to call no one, and I was to tell no one. Or he would kill me.

I do not know why it took me until the 3rd day to try what I tried. Nor do I know why I did not just run away on one of those occasions to the gas station. Maybe it was because I was petrified, and it took me that long to thaw my wits slightly. Maybe it was due to lack of sleep and food; I couldn't think and had hunger headaches. I don't know why I decided to go with this plan instead that morning. Perhaps I had finally reached my breaking point and simply could not stand the diet of only peanuts and water, the only sustenance Bad Guy offered me, any longer and was finally willing to risk death to end his rule over me, and this was the first cockamamie scheme that popped into my head.

Whatever the case, I bought a pay as you go cellphone that third day and called the police. They laughed at me, called me a child, and told me I needed to stop making prank calls, and that next time they would send someone to arrest me. I begged with them, pleaded with them to send someone to come find me now, to arrest me now! They hung up on me.

I called my older brother then, who seemed relieved to hear from me, even from an odd number. He had been trying to reach me and wondered why I had not called or texted him back in days, although he clearly did not believe my story, thinking it was a joke at first. I knew he thought I was crazy and could hear his tone gradually turn from amused to concern as I insisted upon persisting. He agreed to come out to my house to check on me, but refused to bring weapons.

"You know karate, right?" I asked.

“No.” he said.

“Damnit! Do you know anyone who does? Bring them!” I pleaded.

“I’m hanging up now, bro. I’ll be there in a couple of hours.”

A couple of hours! I walked back to my house, dejected. I finally entered the house and Bad Guy greeted me, smacking me across the face hard.

“There you are! Where have you been? You’re waaay past your thirty-minute window!”

He did not buy my story about long lines at the gas station, and dragging me to the basement, (he was quite strong for a cartoon) slammed me down onto my stool. He produced a switchblade, which he deftly and violently jabbed through my outstretched left hand. I screamed and clutched my hand as blood trickled onto my floor in splashing, crimson dots. Bad Guy reached into my pocket and retrieved the pay as you go phone, which he threw on the ground and stomped to pieces in a fury.

“I **KNEW** it!” he shouted. “You was up to funny business, probably called old Goofy Guy himself, didn’t ya?” He laughed, maniacally. “Well, just be glad I didn’t cut your painting hand. Next time, I will.”

I started crying from fright, from hunger, and from fatigue. Bad Guy was unaffected.

“Which, I’ve been thinking,” the villain said, placing a paintbrush in my right hand, “you being the artsy-fartsy type and all, I want you to do me up in a painting real nice, show me robbing Fort Knox, with lots of tanks on my side. I think it’ll go nicely in my evil lair after I’m finally able to leave here when I’m sure I’m clear of Goofy Guy. Ya know, it’ll make a nice piece, for posterity’s sake.”

I shuddered.

“And I’m gonna make you paint dat, right after I take a piss!” And he yanked the knife out of my hand quick, which sent a burning pain and a feeling like when you hit your funny bone up my arm and throughout my entire body.

He stomped upstairs, humming and singing some showtune I had never heard. He slammed the bathroom door and I heard a stream pattering on the toilet bowl water. I closed my eyes. He was going to make me paint him robbing Fort Knox, successfully. Then it would come true, and prior to departing on that mission, he would surely kill me. Come to think of it, he would most assuredly kill my brother, too, who was on his way over here right now!

Oh God! What was I to do? This maniac cartoon thought Goofy Guy was real and was going to kill us both over it. Wait. Goofy Guy. Real. That was it!

Quickly, I gathered what paints I could and squeezed them onto the floor with my good hand, and dipping my brush into them, painted furiously on the canvas before me, swiping and stroking the paints together, even smearing my own blood into it at times, to create the most photorealistic looking Goofy Guy I possibly could in 30 seconds. I heard the toilet flush and the sink water begin to pour.

Oh God! I closed my eyes. I knew these things usually appeared in the world the next morning after you painted them, but I begged, pleaded, I *prayed* that the universe send me Goofy Guy. *Now!*

I heard the slow plop-plop-plopping of Bad Guy’s steps coming down the stairs. He turned to me and began talking.

“Let’s get star-” He had turned to my newest painting before me and frozen. His face contorted into something surprisingly gruesome and furious for such a simply drawn man. He let out a chain of expletives and pulled out his knife, held it against my throat, and verbally assaulted me, harshly. Suddenly, another voice, high and heroic, called out.

“Unhand that good denizen, you vile henchman of naughtiness!” it yelled.

Bad Guy whirled around, and saw what I saw standing on the basement floor by the steps: Goofy Guy, an older man with a gray mustache and spiky hair, and long, floppy ears, adorned in a red jumpsuit and cape, standing heroic and cartoony but far more realistic than Bad Guy. He was just as I had painted him minutes earlier.

“Wh-what? No! Goofy Guy! It can’t be! How’d you find me? Noooo!” Bad Guy sputtered.

Goofy Guy lunged then, swooping airborne across the basement, tackling Bad Guy headlong, knocking the knife out of his hand. The hero easily overpowered his foe. Then, he reached and snatched up the length of cartoon rope the villain had used to bind me. Tying him up, Goofy Guy flung Bad Guy over his shoulder and flew.

“GOOFY GUUUUUUY!!!!” my rescuer bellowed, dashing through the air and up the staircase. I heard a loud crash of glass as a window in my living room shattered. Then they were gone, flying away into the morning light.

I stood, panting, and turned around to see another person standing there, whom I had not heard come downstairs in all the commotion. It was my older brother, finally arrived. He had seen everything and was standing in my basement, mouth agape.

“Holy shit,” he said, “It was all true. You’re weren’t making it up, *or* crazy.”

Thereafter he explained to me that no sooner had he arrived and was unlocking my back door with his spare key, then Goofy Guy, my childhood comic book hero, swooped down onto my back deck next to him, asking very politely to be let in. He swiftly made his way down into the basement, my brother following at a distance, seeing and hearing everything unfold.

“Yeah, let’s not tell Dayna about any of this,” my brother suggested, “she won’t be too happy Timmy stayed here a couple of nights ago in a house that makes anything you paint come true, and accidentally spawned a comic book villain.”

We agreed to keep the secret his and mine.

8.

“You’re sure they don’t have *any* creative hobbies?” I asked my older brother the realtor over the phone, a few days later as I stepped out to check my mail. “They don’t paint, draw, sing or play an instrument? No creative writing?”

“I’m sure. They’re the very outdoorsy type. And that’s as far as I could go talking to them. Would be weird and a turnoff if I said, ‘and if you do any of those things or decide to take them up, I’d really appreciate it if you didn’t do them in the basement!’” he replied.

“Well, thanks, again bro,” said I, “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“See you.” My brother said, and then made a joke, which I don’t remember, because as he said it, an older man walking down the street distracted me. He was wearing a blue janitorial jumpsuit as he walked past my mailbox. He had floppy ears, spiky gray hair, and a gray mustache. As he passed by, he looked at me and winked.

“I still don’t understand why you’re throwing these away,” Melisande said, “your paintings are so wonderful.”

“Thank you, dear,” I replied, “but I think it’s time to move away and move on. I won’t quit painting. But I want to paint other things in other places.”

“Okay, then.” She said, rolling her eyes. “Psh! Artists!”

I glanced over at her, then at the painting of the unfinished lady and then the one of Bad Guy as I chucked both of them into the large, brown dumpster. I became contemplative for a few long moments. Would that I had been able to paint myself elsewhere, happy, and not remembering that basement and its power! But alas, this went beyond my skillset. I knew not how. For my skill lay in painting the world as I saw it, and its people, things I had seen and experienced. I knew not how to paint myself un-knowing something, what such a thing would look like, feel like. This made sense, after all, because it was how the universe itself was. Art imitated life, and *not* the other way around. However, after my experiences over the past several days, I pondered whether the opposite were in fact true.

I looked at her then. I smiled down at Melisande and she at me. I had just closed on my new house a couple of days before and was disposing of my last, unwanted, unneeded possessions from the old one. Now I would start anew with this woman, who was exactly my type, and whose deep, radiant red hair glinted in the last rays of waning sunlight.

I reached out my arm toward her. She took my hand, and together we walked away from there, down the street towards home, into the deep, reddening sunset.