

A blurred blinking red star passes along the Malago Road as I sit and watch the colours of the pre-dawn, through minus 7.8 myopic sight. Charcoal and navy with a hint of rose in the east. I hear singing, as if everyone has woken up on an average Wednesday with the joy of redemption in their hearts. This is not usual. I must be losing my marbles again. I close my eyes and concentrate on the birdsong and try not to interpret it. Just let it be sound. How many millions of years ago were birds here before us? I'm awed by their existence. I'm not a believer but grace is forcing itself upon me.

As if it would. "It droppeth like manna from the heavens," as Shakespeare's Portia said about mercy. Grace raining down upon us like radioactive dust. Unavoidable. We are stardust and flesh made real. Water more than anything. Of the kind that spatters against the window in fleshy drops, the rain forecast for 8 o'clock this morning. Nonsense. Why should I believe that. Grace. But maybe I am a believer after all. "Much Madness is Divinest sense", as Emily the mad poet wrote.

My 90<sup>th</sup> year has passed slowly. Few visitors and little to look forward to except death. I'm ready to die although I don't want to. Not whilst there are birds in the garden and the distant harmonies of the populace. Perhaps today I'll go out. Maybe just into the garden. Prune the roses the gardener forgot to do. The yellow Peace Rose.

Could this be a time of peace? I never thought I'd see it in my lifetime but something in my weary, fragile bones is telling me differently. It's not in the News of course. That's full of petty in-squabbling and diversions from whatever is really going on in the world. I know the powers-that-be would want to repress any upsurge of peace and potential harmony for as long as possible. They have too many vested interests. But it will get them, whatever it is that's coming, and I'm not afraid.

## **Rainy Day Window Vision**

(1971 words)

Perhaps I'm simply having prescience my own eternal "Rest In Peace" that's not far off now, although I might live to a 100, who can say? Still, I know from experience it's a warning sign that I start to see significance in everything. I must be vigilant. I don't want to end up in hospital again.

I pick up the letter I received yesterday, for the nth time and put on my glasses. I've read it so many times I can hardly bear to look at it again. But I must. It doesn't make sense to me. It's on thin creamy paper, with a rough texture I don't like. Computer generated of course. It makes my skin crawl, which may be due in part to the message contained within it. Not good news.

Until now, since my husband died all those years ago, when we still thought we were young, I've lived alone. I haven't minded. I've had my books and my garden, my friends near and far. Many things to do and think about. And of course, my art, my painting. I haven't exhibited for many years, not since they started marketing me as an "Older Woman Painter", a kind of Outsider Artist, which for me was missing the point entirely. I'm a painter, whatever and whoever I am.

I still paint, despite my arthritic hands. In the afternoons when the sun is in the right aspect. I need more light than ever due to my aging eyesight. It often makes me sad, as few will see these pictures. I've asked for them to all be destroyed in my Will. Otherwise, I know all my work would be sold off once I'm dead and I'd achieve fame again, but I'm damned if I'll allow that, profiting from me.

The work doesn't belong to anyone, not even me. The pictures exist in their own right. I'm more than a channel for them. Once I've put brush to canvas, the work takes on a life of its own and it would be wrong to try to control that. But today, I'm not sure I can paint at all.

The letter is trembling in my hand, making it hard to read, but I'm just old. I can't do anything properly anymore. So frustrating. Not that I ever achieved my full potential, but now it's too late. There was so much I wanted to explore.

I'm staring out of the window at the Magnolia tree just coming into bud, thinking about the Spring of my life, when I hear a noise in the hallway. Is it the postman bringing me bad news again? I straighten up with care, my knees protesting. Not wanting to know too soon, but needing an explanation. I like a silent house, which it is usually, despite its kindred old age and creakiness.

I go out into the hallway, the letter still in my hand and see that the front door is open a crack, daylight patterning the floorboards. I must have left it like that last night before I went to bed. The thought horrifies me, as although I'm getting older by the second, it's not my habit to forget things like that. I have always prided myself on my memory and organisational skills. I like to think I keep a tidy house both inside and outside myself. Everything has its place, as it should, despite my incipient battiness.

The door to my study is open which is also unusual. I pass by and go to shut the front door. Then, I open it again to see if there has been a delivery, you never know these days. There's nothing but a beer can from carousing last night. I leave it there. Hopefully someone will feel guilty enough to pick it up later.

Once the front door is closed and I put on the snib for security as I always do, or almost always it would seem, it occurs to me that someone could have entered the house. I've heard you can pick a lock with a credit card. The thought chills me and I hesitate listening for sounds. Nothing. Then, I hear the Grandfather clock ticking ponderously in the living room as usual, although I rarely notice it these days. It's just there marking time. Now it seems to be telling me something I'm not aware of, as if signifying a presence. Watch out. Watch out.

With apprehension, I place my hand on the study door, and push it open inch by inch, half expecting it to be slammed in my face by an intruder. Someone who thinks I've got money under the mattress like old people do. He's wrong there. I assume it would be a man, no doubt ready to hurt and rape me. I've seen the bruises in the media. A flame of anger sparks in my belly at the thought that someone could do that to me, or to anyone. I should call the police I think, as the door swings open without a sound.

Facing me are my bookshelves, my history in print and photographs. Nothing unusual there. I can't see anything disturbed. Can't hear anything expect the tock of the clock. I prevaricate on the threshold. He may be hiding behind the door ready to attack me for the money I haven't got. Because of the arrangement of the study, I can't see my desk and panic hits me. He could have taken what I was working on. My catalogue. The only thing that will be left of me once I've gone.

Rage flares in me, my flimsy muscles tensing, and I step into the room, uncaring about what may occur, ready to confront it. As I do, I see a flash of black fur as a cat streaks past me into the hallway and down the stairs to the kitchen in the basement. My heart interrupts itself with shock. I've never seen a thing move so fast. I remain standing in place, thinking I'll have to let it out, now I've that closed off its escape route. I follow it; relieved it's nothing more than a frightened animal.

In the kitchen, the cat is hiding under the dining table, which is choked with dirty pots and pans, plates and bowls and a vase containing a bunch of rotting purple irises. The washing up I've been avoiding for days. My least favourite chore. The room is beginning to smell. Not so organised after all.

I imitate the high-pitched tone reserved for calling cats, "Here pusscat, come here. Here puss puss puss." No response. I bend down with some difficulty, to get a better view and the cat crouches further back against the wall. There is no way I can

reach it without moving the table or crawling underneath, and I'm not likely to do either. I sigh, and instead fill the kettle, lighting the stove with a match. I wonder if the cat will be enticed out with some milk. I take a saucer out of the cupboard and go to the fridge.

There is no milk and the fridge is virtually empty. Just a few jars of mustard and jam. I must go shopping. I'll have black coffee with sugar to take off the edge. As for the cat, I can let it out into the garden and hope it finds its way home, wherever that is. I open the back door. Cool morning air comes in, driven by the on-going precipitation.

The letter, as I know by rote now, is about an upcoming assessment by the "Older People's Care Team". Since I was in hospital they've been bothering me about this and I have tried to dismiss it, but now they are saying that I may "lack capacity" due to my mental health. They're talking about moving me into a residential home as they think I can no longer look after myself. I am outraged. I haven't told any of my friends, I feel so ashamed. And there is no mention of me being able to continue my painting. I don't suppose the home would have a studio.

At the end of the missive it mentions that I "may be entitled to an Independent Advocate", although I am not sure what they mean by that. They clearly think I'm too far gone to be able to speak for myself. It could however, be useful to have someone to vouch for me. I should ask Cynthia, who although 20 years younger than me, appreciates how it is to be an artist, being a sculptor herself. She's also known me a long time. She knows that the housework can always wait. And that there's nothing more important than the work.

Still standing at the kitchen door, the rain dampening the doorstep and my slippers feet, the forgotten cat, bolder from being ignored, sneaks past my legs and dives into the herbaceous border, its tail aloft.

## **Rainy Day Window Vision**

(1971 words)

I focus on the Magnolia again, its pink-tinged waxwork white blooms offering themselves up to the burgeoning morning light, despite the continuing downfall. I decide I will paint today. And I will use oils. The thick, buttery texture like clotted cream and the depths of lucid pigment are what I need. The certainty of the paintbrush in my hand. There is too much life to be missed. I may be in the last phase of my life but the sensuousness of it all still entrances me. The patter of the rain on the flagstones in the yard. The startling crimson of the Camellia, its petals even more velvety than a rose. The acrid taste of my soon-to-be-brewed cup of coffee. The sweet perfume of roses yet to bloom.