

## **She then turned away.**

By James Salomon

"It's not that you have to achieve anything,  
it's that you have to get away from where you are."

- Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*

Loneliness can be unbearable, especially when we are not alone. It had been a long, rugged journey, she dropped her bags on the rug to sit on the sofa. It was the second Saturday of the month, and he was at the flower market. The children were at camp. A steely breeze came off the lake and in through the window.

Normally all of these elements would invoke a calmness within, but with all that has happened, she couldn't help but stare into the distance as gentle tears rolled down her cheeks. After a good moment, she began to turn her head slowly around the room. The furniture, the paintings, the objects... each piece was deeply embedded into her worldliness, her many lives. Objects sometimes keep us warm with the memories that glow within.

"Pour yourself a drink, put on some lipstick, and pull yourself together" was a line from Elizabeth Taylor that she adored and often used as her mantra.

She got up and walked towards the Kara Walker. She discovered Kara's work after the 2014 Creative Time installation where the artist made a giant Sphinx made of sugar in an abandoned Domino sugar factory, which was an homage to the unsung sugar cane workers. She later found a print of a nighttime silhouette from an earlier series called *The Emancipation Approximation*, where a woman leans on a tree stump, an ax leaning on the other side, and several African American heads lay on the ground. It was grotesque and macabre, she looked at the artwork with sorrow and humility, but it was something that she needed to live with.

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The Walker was flanked by two Tim Nighswander prints of *Amaryllis* flowers in different states of bloom. She immediately fell for their rich, velvety feel. They stand alone in their beauty, but she joined them with the Walker as part of the memorial.

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Underneath this trio shone two small sepia-lensed lamps by Tina Scepanovic, whom she met by accident. Literally. She backed into Tina's car in Kent after an opening at Kenise Barnes gallery. They exchanged numbers for insurance info and somehow became friends through the annoying ordeal.

A studio visit was imminent, and she was charmed by a pair of small sepia-lensed lamps titled "*Sprezzatura* (and the curse of competence)". *Sprezzatura* is loosely defined as the art of making difficult tasks appear easy.

Tina explained that the piece explores invisible labor in day-to-day existence; the management of household, family, emotions, and relationships. The explanation reminded her of when she was a little girl she would visit her grandmother's house, where the bathroom she would look up at a small framed watercolor of a swan, captioned: "A hostess must be like a swan; calm and graceful on the surface, while paddling like hell underneath!"

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The Ned Smyth sculptures were in the window, next to her assortment of antique globes. Ned was introduced by a mutual friend, a composer, at a party in Shelter Island. She noticed how he would often use the phrase "on ONE level... then on ANOTHER level..." when speaking. She thought it was cute and wanted to get to know more about these levels, so invited herself to his studio.

Artist studios were generally her happy place where she could tune out and really be the moment with these dreamers, these mad scientists. Ned would take these earthen materials, turn them into bronze, and somehow make them come alive. She saw two bronze twigs, configured them, et voilà.

"You take two bodies and you twirl them into one, their hearts and their bones, and they won't come undone." She loved Paul Simon. The song wafted in her memory. A certain time, a certain place.

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She knelt down to reposition her Mark Mennin marble sculpture in the corner of the window. Mark was a hulky stone carver, a Princeton rugby player who you probably didn't want to try to tackle. She would go over to his place in Bethlehem and watch him grind away, as he did everything by hand. She fell in love with his work when she went to a friend's house on the other side of the lake and witnessed a crane come in to drop down a big polished rock on the property.

She bought a much smaller "Manta", which Mark brought to her house, along with a copy of his father's sheet music, knowing what a classical enthusiast she was. She keeps them close to one another.

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*Festina Lente*, a Latin adage passed from Roman emperors through centuries, translates to "make haste, slowly." A simple reminder to her in business and in life, a balance between urgency and diligence. She learned this term at a dinner party in Rome, where an artist named Fabio Gnessi was explaining this to be the motto for his company. He collaborates with his cousin, Achille Salvagni. Together, they form the Aldus collection, which is a line of beautifully crafted accessories.

She bought a Minosse mirror from him, which references Minos in Greek mythology and a dramatic episode that involves a maze, a Minotaur, and the snacking on lots of little children.

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Her friend David was the Creative Director at Bergdorf Goodman, and John Gordon Gauld had been doing the windows for years. Every time she asked about a window that stopped her in her tracks, the answer was John. She learned he paints in egg tempera that gives a fine, rich detail when done correctly. He had a house up in the Berkshires and invited her up, and she was won over by a charming still life of three tabletop mirrors. The mirrored part was done in gold leaf so that you look in to a golden, obscured version of yourself. On the lower right is a tiny creature that resembles a mouse. She thought it was funny that society loves fictional mice but despise the real ones.

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Alexis Rockman is an artist that she'd known about for decades. He just moved up to Warren with his wife Dorothy, and a mutual friend brought her over for a peek at some new work on glaciers. Not only did she admire his appreciation and knowledge on the flora and fauna, she admired his position on climate change, as he's been screaming from the hilltops long before it became part of daily discussion. She bought a small painting called "Metro" from him, which is a slice of an apocalyptic Parisian composition, complete with a decayed Hector Guimard Art Nouveau subway entrance.

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She heard about the artist Richard Pasquarelli and his lectures on OCD and hoarding, and went to see him speak at Syracuse University. Her cousin being an extreme hoarder, she constantly worried by it and wanted a better understanding.

A month later she and Richard found themselves in a deep dive on peoples' relationships to objects, and so she decided that she had to have one of his paintings. They arrived on a depiction of a broken Hummel figurine from his *Relic* series. Within the work is an augmented reality component, which he tried to explain to her. It was a compelling undercurrent but too involved for her bandwidth. He had her at the painting.

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Then there was Dozier Bell. She never met the artist but was taken away by her small escapist charcoal drawings upon discovering them at Carol Corey's. They were all drawn from memory or perhaps from a dream.

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About ten years ago she went to Cynthia Wick's studio in Lenox because she was transfixed on a painting she saw at a friend's house. She got there and came across "The Mary Janes", based on a photograph of the artist with her two sisters that her father took. Their faces are blank on an Easter Sunday. "A mask of conformity" is how she described it. She wanted the painting badly, but it was not for sale. They promised to stay in touch though never did. Years later, they bumped into one another at a party. She told Cynthia about her sister's passing and how she still has flashes of "The Mary Janes".

A week later, a box arrived at her doorstep.

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Years ago she was invited to Toni Ross' famous "Polar Plunge" party in Wainscott on New Year's Day, where gathering comes to a climax with a jump into the icy Long Island waters. Not for the faint of heart. She didn't go in, but enjoyed the spectacle, and got a chance to meet the host, who brought her over to the studio on the property. The friendship blossomed over time, and she picked up a pair of delicate weavings titled "Last Night" and "The Morning Has No Memory."

Recently she bought an abstract piece that was inspired by a Rebbilib, which is a navigational map once used by the Marshallese in the South Pacific. She found Toni's "chart" as mysterious and elegant, which, like most abstraction, has a private language. Navigation can also have a private language, as she knew all too well.

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Nicholas Howey was very close to her antique dealer, Gerardus Widdershoven, of Maison Gerard. Nicholas had a studio in Bridgehampton, right by the renowned Candy Kitchen. While visiting a friend one weekend she decided to go in and pay Nicholas a visit. He had dozens of little abstractions laid out on the floor, watercolor on paper. She was immediately drawn to three pieces in red and blue, because back when she lived in Paris, she befriended Warya Lavater, a Swiss artist who made an edition called Passion and Reason with that color combo as signifiers. These obviously came from a different place, but she made the connection and made up her mind.

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Lisa, an old friend, was once an illustrators' agent, and that gave her access to some really fun stuff. She tapped her for two of her absolute favorites: Barry Blitt and Roz Chast. Both were brilliant and hysterically funny. The Blitt she got from his studio in Roxbury, in the home where Arthur Miller wrote "Death of a Salesman". It was a picture of several famous artists and writers playing beach volleyball, used in a promotion for a Hamptons gathering. Then she picked out 4 Roz Chast eggs crafted in the Eastern European Pysanky method, one of them titled "The Little Prince at 40."  
He did not look so princely.

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Peter Gerakaris is clearly the most organized artist that she ever encountered, which says a lot, knowing Richard Pasquarelli. She met him at the Berkshire Botanical Garden in Stockbridge, where he had on display an outdoor mosaic of two owls. She landed at his studio in Cornwall and commissioned a smaller version. The gold leaf was absolutely radiant, the feathers burned like flames, and this suddenly became her spirit animal.

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In the adjacent room was wily William Stuart, whom she had been introduced through one of her Park Avenue friends. She went to visit him in Chelsea, where he was bangin away at a kitchen sink with a hammer like it was a piñata. He asked her to give it a shot, and she did, and was soon reminded that destruction can be exhilarating, like smashing plates on a floor. He said he would then cast the wrecked sink in plaster to give it new life in its' transformation. That was enough reason to have it.

The idea of smashing something seemed really appealing in that moment, but restraint was something she'd have to endure. She went over to the couch and sat back down again, leaning, head in hands, staring through the glass coffee table. There was a deep sigh, then a deep breath. "All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain." Rutger Hauer, a friend who used to visit in the summers, improvised that line in Blade Runner. She knew him as a wonderfully charming man, not the villain he so convincingly portrayed.

It was all too tangled and overwhelming. Without picking up her bags, she walked toward the door. She turned around for one last glance. She loved them, all of them, but she knew she couldn't stay.

She then turned away.