

# The Candlestick



The Diner was empty....

Scott took a seat at the right-side counter, on the 4<sup>th</sup> shiny red vinyl covered stool in.

“Hi Hon!” the curly-haired, red-headed, gum chewing waitress said, emerging from the doors that continued swinging slowly. “What can I get you?”

“Just coffee,” Scott said, settling in, looking around a bit. It was just past Midnight and he had just been out driving around, his mind wandering as it often did back home or at school.

“Cream & Sugar, Hon?” Betty asked. Scott had noticed her name on the tag.

“No thanks, just black!”

Scott’s grandfather had gone back into the hospital a couple of days earlier, for the third time, and that was on his mind. Scott had spent the summer here in Tampa with his grandparents, who had retired here a year earlier. It was his mom’s father and Scott had flown down to visit. His sister, who was in college, had also visited for a week in the spring.

Putting Scott’s Coffee down, Betty noticed an unfamiliar older man walking in, taking the first seat, two stools away from Scott. She took his coffee order too and brought it to him. He appeared to be about 60, balding with short grey hair and glasses. Scott and the man were the only ones in the Diner and it wasn’t long before they made eye contact and nodded.

In a couple of minutes, being reminded of the cool breeze blowing off the bay and admiring the cashmere texture of Scott’s white sweater the man glanced over saying.... “That’s a nice sweater!”, I have no recollection of what Scott said in response, but he obviously politely accepted the compliment. I don’t even know why Scott was out driving around after Midnight, but as I said, he liked being alone and would often skip school driving aimlessly to be that way.

“Are you a student?” The older man said, analyzing the young person’s appearance, thinking that he might be studying graphic design at the nearby Tampa Art Institute.

“I just got out of high school, back in Maryland,” Scott answered, not even realizing that having repeated a couple of grades, he already looked old enough to be a College student. Scott lived a very troubled home life. His Manic-Depressive mother for some reason had rejected him since he was a little boy. Who knows why she never held or hugged him, and never told him she loved him while he was growing up? Perhaps she did, and it could just be that Scott, with his own problems, just felt she didn’t, but either way, Scott was certain that he was not loved.

“Do you like art?” the man asked, probably still thinking that Scott must be artistic or creative by the way he dressed and his calm, gentle demeanor.

“I’ve never thought much about art,” Scott answered, thinking that his car back home was the only thing he liked. Scott had also always felt that he didn’t really like himself much either.

Moving over to the stool next to Scott, the older man settled in and said “You know, I’ve been an art collector since I was your age. By the way, how old are you?”

“I’m 19,” Scott said. “Actually, I just turned 20.” Then he added, “I flew down here in July after school and my Birthday was last month. My grandfather’s back in the hospital and probably going to die. We are very close and I don’t know what I’ll do when he dies.”

“Well, if you’ve got a few minutes, there’s an interesting painting I’d like to show you!” The man volunteered. “I bought it years ago in Switzerland. I live down by the docks by my boat. Actually, it’s more of a small yacht.” He chuckled.

“Sounds OK!” Scott said. “I’ll take a look.”

Finishing up his coffee, the man said “Follow me, it’s just a mile up the road after the turn. Just pull in behind me and park.”

Scott drove up behind the man’s car, and stepping out, he could see the big white Yacht just off to the right with a few dimly glowing lights, the boat gently rocking in the water. As Scott studied the pulsing movement of the Yacht, the man walked up and pointing to an entryway with three steps and a yellowish light above the door saying, “Come on, it’s this way.”

Entering and closing the door behind them, the man said, “I can’t remember it ever being this chilly in October.” Adding, “Oh, just toss your sweater on the couch.” As the man walked to the bar, Scott carefully draped his sweater on the armrest and sat down, “Would you like a drink?” The man asked, dropping ice cubes into a glass and pouring Scotch Whiskey over them.

“Do you have Coke?” Scott said.

“Sure!” The man said grabbing another glass and getting one from the mini fridge. He put the two drinks on the Coffee Table and sat on the other half of the meticulously clean beige suede couch. “Here you are, my friend!” Realizing he didn’t know the boy’s name, he asked.

“I’m Scott!” Scott said. “What’s yours?”

“You can just call me Jack!” the man said.

“Wow, that’s my Grandfather’s name,” Scott said perking up. “His real name is John, but everyone else calls him Jack, except us kids; we just call him Poppy!” “He’s the only one in the family who really pays any attention to me, so I’d have to say he’s my favorite. I spent the whole summer with him, but he’s really sick now.”

Scott glanced up at a large painting on the wall across from the couch. It looked like some sort of Greek Goddess, trying to cover her nakedness with a silk cloth.

“That’s Lilith!” Jack said. “Legend has it that like Eve, she was Adam’s lover too!” “But she was more of a free spirit and Eve was more traditionally minded.”

‘I’m not religious.’ Scott said, walking over to examine the painting. ‘But of course, I’ve heard of Adam and Eve.’ He said, admiring the woman and her uncovered breast.

‘Let me show you some more,’ Jack said standing up, gently touching Scott’s arm to show the way to the dining room. They looked at several paintings and two small statues, and then Jack said.... ‘Come over here Scott, I’ll show you my most prized possession. It’s by the staircase, so I can stop and think about it for a moment every night just before I go up to bed. It is very calming.

Halfway up the curved staircase, on the right wall, hung a dark painting, about 14 inches high and 18 inches wide in a plain frame, and they both paused to look....

It portrayed a darkened Study with books of various sizes lining shelves on the back wall. Over to the left, was a simple desk and chair. Not a powerful desk with carved legs, just a plain wooden desk with writing instruments and cubicles to store papers, stamps, scissors and things.

There was a large leather chair, probably a dark maroon color if there had been enough light to tell, between the bookcase and a Fireplace. It was obviously where the person whose study the painting portrayed would sit to relax after their day’s work was done. The chair and a hassock where the owner’s feet could rest faced the soot-covered slate hearth off to the right.

Above the desk, and farther up than you might expect, was a small four-paned window covered with grime and smoke, obviously having not been cleaned in ages.

Sunlight pushed hard through the dingy window, igniting hundreds, if not thousands of tiny dust particles as they danced lightly in the air as the sunbeams raced towards the mantle above the fireplace, lighting a half-burned Candle in a brass candle holder with a little finger loop to carry it. A fading plume of smoke rose slowly up from the candle, and the obviously just used snuffer rested next to it on the mantle.

‘What do you think?’ Jack asked, again touching Scott’s shoulder to get his attention.

‘It’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.’ Scott answered continuing to stare intently, thinking that the person’s life the painting portrayed must have finally ended, but he said, ‘I really can’t describe exactly how I’m feeling at this moment.’

‘Well, Scott, that’s the best painting I can show you, and I was sure that you would like it. I’ve always felt its powerful message, and it was a really good investment, I can tell you that.

Scott stayed for a couple of more hours, chatting and enjoying Jack’s companionship and realizing that they had so much more in common than he had first thought back at the Diner.

When he left and drove back to his grandmothers’ house, she was still up and said ‘Where have you been Scott.... The Hospital called.... Your grandfather passed away just after Midnight.’