

#7 Last Light

Painting: Out of the Rain Artist: Michele Kondos

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Well, old girl, I knew you'd be awaitin' for me here, my favorite spot on the cabin porch in the evenin'. Best place to get in out of the rain. Best place, too, to catch the sunset in all its brilliance, even on the coldest of days, even on the hottest. It's just right today with the sun's rays fannin' out through the last of the rain clouds.

You know, don't you? I thought so. Today is the day. Just give me a few seconds while I light this cigarette. Last one I got. Yeah, don't look at me so, girl. I know they ain't good for me. And you want me to hurry up. I'll get there. But you see, it's more the light from the match that I need, not the smoke. Just like that there sunset. Just one big blurry, furry-edged brightness. Like this match head. There, see how it flares up and glows? That's one the thing I can still see. Well, sorta. Lord knows, I ain't seen my old rusty can of a face in so long I cain't remember what I look like. Just as well. Seems it weren't nothin' but sunburn, dusty creases, and this scraggily old beard anyway. Not a handsome critter like you, old girl.

Well, the sun's about to slide behind the ridge. Let's go for one more stroll down to the cottonwoods along the crick. Cigarette's out. I'm ready. Man alive, my joints is creaky. So's my chest, acreakin' and aweezin'. Not much left of this old rancher, for sure.

This rain smells dang fine, don't it? A prelude to the comin' winter. Always loved the sound of it patterin' on my hat brim like it's doin' now. Fresh and earthy. Think that was my first mem'ry from when I was a little bitty kid. What a wonder this old homestead is. Couldn't live anywhere else but in these mountains. Lived through thunder boomers that shook the ground like

earthquakes, blizzards that buried cattle, fierce dust storms, endless bugs, and the sweetest sunrises and sunsets the good Lord ever produced. Loved and lost dogs, horses, and the only woman I ever would have married.

Sure wish I could still see you, old girl, the way you would cut across from one side of this dusty path to the other, through the alfalfa and sniff out the grasshoppers and deer and butterflies. Loved your bright eyes, black and grey brindled coat, that smile that only a dog can smile.

Wish my steps weren't quite so stumblely following you. It comes with the territory of being older than dirt, I suppose. So glad you came back for me, old girl, to accompany me along into the sundown. The light is fadin', wobbly with the shadows of golden cottonwood and marsh willow leaves on the breeze. Though I cain't see more than the vague blur, it's the smell of dirt, rustle of grass, and the habit of my feet that show me the path. Here's the crick, just a few yards away. Its burble comforts me, always has. This is where I'll stop.

It's been a good long life. No one left to share it with me now. Cain't ranch no more. Sold off the livestock. Buried my last horse in the spring. Wept over that one. You, old girl, left me right after that. Wept then, too. Just gonna sit down here against my favorite cottonwood. The rain's stoppin' now, and the sun is brilliant, peerin' between layers of dark cloud.

Ah, yes, this spot is fine. By mornin', if not sooner, I'll be courtin' that sweet woman I lost long ago, if that's allowed on the other side. Want to see my horses, and you again, old girl. Yep, today's the day. I know it's time. I'll miss this place, but I'm content. Just gonna lean back, close my eyes, and fade away with the last of this earthly light.