

connected to Ian, fifty years posthumously. He is some part of who I am. What part I remain unsure.

Fifty years have slipped away since he fell still in their Pebble Beach home. Fifty years of grief and hurt and anger and silence.

Love

Rita lived out her life on the Monterey Peninsula, under her ramshackle Pebble Beach roof. Her home, once noisy and buoyant and animated, fell silent after Ian and in the years after her children grew and moved. Joe died in 1993. Her visitors in those fifteen remaining years, mostly mail carriers and garbage collectors, found a smile on her round face, a bit of loneliness in her gait. An occasional visit would bring a son or daughter or grandchild. The phone would ring here and there. But those middle hours in the day crawled by with little resolve. She nonchalantly got breast cancer one year too. She beat that in her mid-seventies without batting an eye. Or without telling us. She got out of the hospital declaring herself cancer-free. We didn't know she was cancer-full.

Ian's detonation remains evident in my father still. He's quiet and remote and solitary. I am as well. He's the only sibling to get married and have children. He had a forty-hour job, a mortgage. Coached my soccer teams and taught us fly fishing. He is restless though, living with a hushed desperation. I find myself similarly growing restless as years wane and restraints tighten.

At sixty, my father's lived longer with me in his life than without. He's never acknowledged Ian to me. I've never questioned. I don't ask. Not once. I'm too empathic, too clumsy to pierce that tightly closed wound. There's still time. But how much longer.

Rita called everyone *love*. It's a British term that traveled with her across the Atlantic. For Rita, the landscape she saw and the people in it were a reminder there was kindness and joy in this world. Nazi bombs set ablaze her childhood and her oldest son ended his own life. But life was teeming and bountiful and every day was to her astounding.

She died quietly on a summer morning in her neighborhood hospital. The same hospital she'd walked to countless times to take in the koi in their pond or a bowl

of soup in the cafeteria. No doubt it was a foggy morning, the sun yet to break through.

She was thankful to have been given life and content to be at its end. She was at peace with all it had taken from her. She'd return to Ian. Forty-two years she'd posthumously waited.

I was absent from her deathbed. I picture a generous nurse present to hold her hand as she willed her last breath. Eighty-one years after her lungs took that first gulp of air in a London hospital.

It's come time to get her back to the salty air and coniferous pines of Monterey Bay and her nearby home in Pebble Beach. Restore her place among the changing tides and the delicate light at dusk painted by Steinbeck's words. Extricate her from that baseball card riddled closet and lay her next to Joe and Ian.

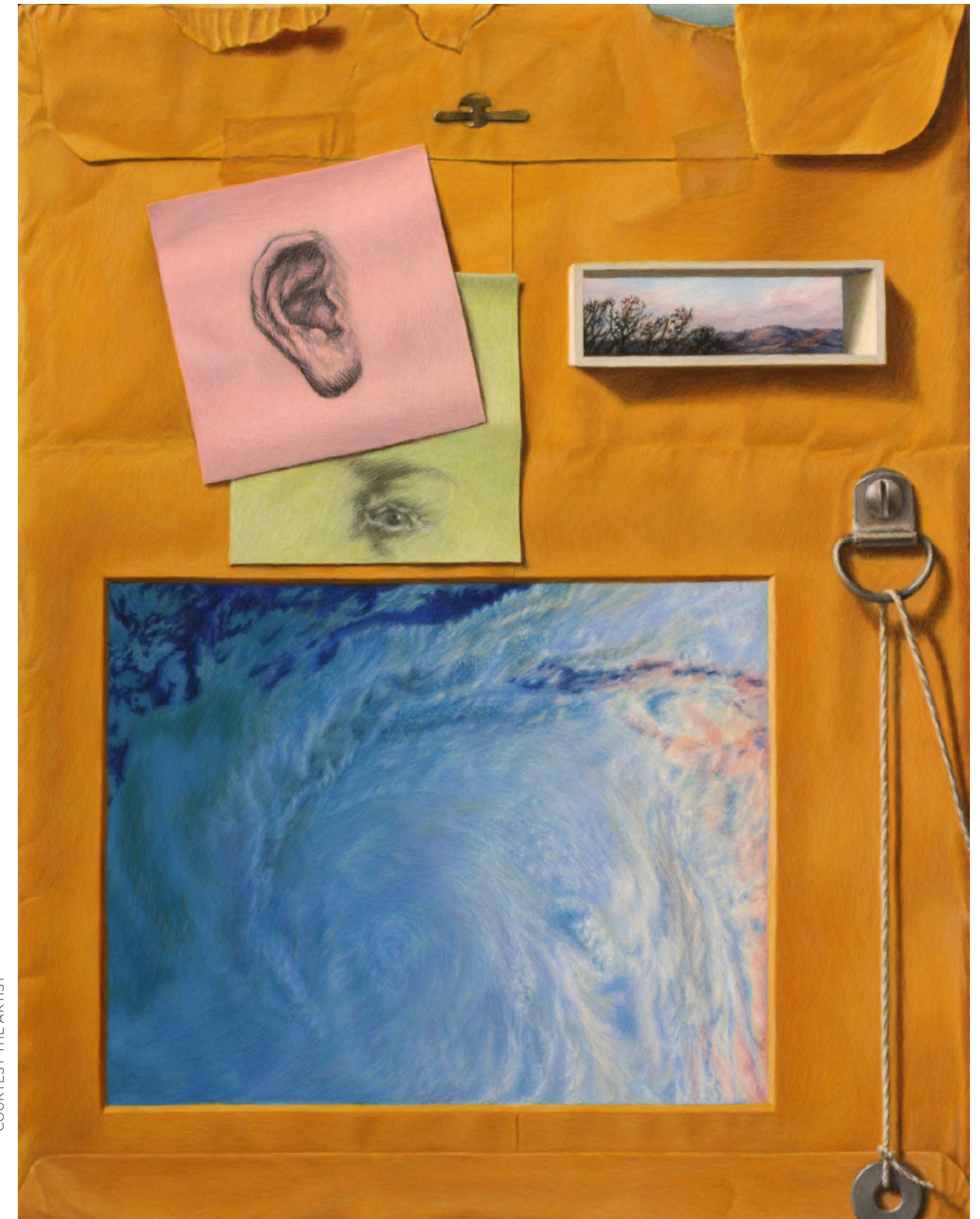
They occupy Cementerio El Encinal in Monterey. The "Cemetery of Many Oaks." I found them there online. It's next to El Estero Lake. It's also next to Dennis the Menace Park. Rita took us there as grandchildren. The park and the cemetery are adjoined on a map. We didn't know it, we were children, but this was Rita's introduction of us to Ian. He'd been there for close to thirty years before we bounced on the adjacent jungle gym. She could see where he rested as sand filled our shoes in that park. She was showing us the summation of her life. Joy next to grief. Hope next to sorrow. Her life filled with both. She escaped Hitler and now had grandchildren in a park.

She led a hard, sometimes wonderful life. Grief is heavy. Love is scarce. But Rita knew where it lay, and the balance always tipped in her direction.

A Northern California native, **Sean Stiny** studied English Literature at the University of California, Davis. He's a writer and burgeoning craftsman. He labors in marketing and escapes outdoors as often as permitted. He lives with his wife, a third grade teacher, in Sonoma County.

STEVEN CARRELLI

Pieces of the Storm, 2007
Egg tempera on panel, 13 x 10 in



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