

# Buried Layers

By *Stanley Kelman Jr.*

## To my father

Beneath decades, the plaster sighs,  
its breath held in whitewash and forgotten lies.  
A hand once steady traced truth in spirals,  
the basement's gallery breathing newsprint whispers,  
politicians, lovers, fractured athletes,  
each brushstroke a laugh against the wall.

We lived there, didn't we?  
Among figures painted bold as regret,  
friends gathering near the flicker of talent,  
each mural a fragile ember of belief.

He was good, wasn't he?  
Good enough for the galleries he never dared to touch.  
The walls hold their coats,  
thick with time's conspiracies.

Da Vinci left tree roots tangled in stone,  
the pre-Raphaelites etched laughter on Red House walls,  
and somewhere, Olmsted's fresco fades  
to marble workers gritting their teeth beneath fresh veils.

A history buried, but not erased.  
Whitewash is heavier than it looks  
each stroke a mourning cloth,  
each layer a denial.

Still, the pigments whisper through cracks,  
the drunken truths, the brilliance erased,  
by fear of its own reflection.

What lives beneath a surface?  
An oil-slick scream of Picasso's crouching beggar,  
her bread forgotten, crumbling in her hands.

What's hidden grows louder:  
a circus rider balancing,  
a locomotive tearing through Murnau,  
a tree aflame, its roots twisted,  
new life from what burned.

Artists bury themselves,  
don't they?

Neurosis or hunger,  
or the weight of knowing they could be more.

It's easier to whitewash,  
to pretend the basement never hummed  
with the attempts of creation.

The walls were never blank,  
just waiting.  
For hands to peel away the paint,  
to see truths etched in altered clarity.

For the stories to rise, jagged and blue,  
like Dora Maar in a crooked mirror.

Do we rebuild or let it lie?  
Resurrect the canvas with new fervor,  
or let the buried things stay buried?

Even Picasso couldn't stop himself,  
painting over, starting over,  
erasing landscapes  
to find crouching figures with hidden hands.

The murals you left behind are still there,  
beneath coats of silence and decades of doubt.  
And I can't decide if I should strip the whitewash away,  
or let your unfinished wall of impermanence  
stand as your only finished work.

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