

quincy



a short story by
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Author's Note:

My Round Five entry in National Public Radio's "Three Minute Fiction," concluded Nov. 14, 2010. Had to be 600 words or fewer; had to begin with "Some people swore that the house was haunted;" and had to end with the line, "Nothing was ever the same again after that." Enjoy!

QUINCY



E. G. Fabricant

"Some people swore that the house was haunted. Thus began my most challenging case as a paranormal psychologist."

Frail Louisa Tumulty's fitful stirrings in her hospital bed roused her granddaughter, Catherine, from her memoir. "Gran." She seized her bony hand. "Gran! You're dreaming again."

"Oh...Cat?" Louisa managed a thin smile.

Catherine nodded. "Quincy?"

"Of course. Who else?"

"I've just begun to read. Tell me."

Louisa's gaze grew distant. "Hallowe'en 2010, and the usual report or two of the spectral cat. Then, the calls from the Capitol police about Tommy Boland, held down in their basement lockup."

"He was the retired policeman?"

"Yes—long before. Hung around Statuary Hall for years; everyone thought he was crazy, but harmless. Interviewed him that same night."

"How long before the transformation took place?"

"Couple hours in. I had the sense he was sparring with me, seeking some level of trust."

Catherine squeezed that hand. “Describe him.”

Louisa’s eyes deepened. “The map of Ireland that was Tommy’s face gave way to the high, balding patrician brow, angular features, and penetrating eyes. His was the image of that sketch done after his cerebral hemorrhage in 1848, but reinvigorated. The power of that voice and its eloquence quickly enraptured me.”

“Why did he choose you?”

“He said it was time; he could no longer hold his peace. I was merely his vessel. The party he steered from National Republican after his presidency through Whig to confront slavery and save the Union, he said, had fallen into the grip of ‘soulless, indentured mercantilists, trothed only to the power of the dollar.’ His rage was colossal.”

“So, it was the corporate orientation of the Republican Party in that election that triggered the wholesale possessions?”

“It may have been the last straw—but he was much more adamant about his heirs’ utter lack of passion and respect for the institutions they sought to control.”

Catherine looked puzzled. “Meaning....?”

“They’d spent 30 years running against government—turning it into a pejorative to further their own, undisclosed ends. For Adams; Clay; Calhoun; and their cohorts, governing was a means. Whatever their divisions on slavery, they were strong federalists, with a common vision of its potential to promote and manage progress. They believed, and lived it. In 1842 J. Q. fought a bogus, ‘antislavery agitation’ censure resolution against him on the House floor for two weeks—to get around a six-year-old rule prohibiting discussion of the issue. Point was...he had a point.”

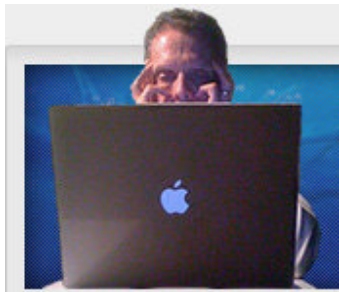
Louisa smiled impishly.

“What?”

“Remember: John Quincy Adams was a natural bridge between the founders and Lincoln, and he freed the Amistad slaves in court. What shocked and frustrated him and his cohorts most on the other side was the cynical use of empty, ignorant rhetoric about our history and origins to block change. As an immigrant’s son and scholar, lawyer, and patriot himself, he professed a stronger affinity for Obama than anyone else. He couldn’t wait to engage. After the midterm elections the following week, he set to work, rounding up John, Henry, Dan Webster, and some of the other, post-Jacksonian firebrands. Even got Abe to agree to come aboard if the Democrats held the White House in 2012. They went incorporeal almost immediately. Public discourse changed virtually overnight. In their new incarnations, their first target was anti-immigrationism. They battled; they compromised; they came together to heal. As they did after Old Hickory left office, they created the opportunity again for multiparty coalitions to displace the paralysis of ‘bipartisanship.’”

"Nothing was ever the same again after that."





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