



The portrait of Lisa

In the Concord Museum of Art, there is a painting called the *Portrait of Lisa*. In this self portrait a beautiful young woman captures on canvas not only her physical beauty, but

also her inner beauty, her very essence, an achievement that is rarely seen in works of art. Art enthusiasts from all over the world visit the museum to see this painting, but they can only wonder what secrets that it might hide. Some people study the eyes of Lisa to see the sparkle that shows such deep love. Others marvel at the smile on her face that seems to hide some hidden pleasure. And some even marvel at the delicate strokes of the paintbrush that meticulously created this work.

Whenever I am in Concord, I visit the museum to see this one painting. Sometimes, I will stare at it for an hour. There is something about the painting that is almost mystical, as if it had secrets from the past that were hiding beneath its oils. I have often wondered what mysteries, what secrets it hides.

One summer afternoon, while I was standing in front of the painting, an elderly woman stood beside me and stared at the painting. She seemed as entranced as I was. I decided to speak to her.

“Hello. That’s a very beautiful painting. But I think that there is a story behind this painting, a story that should be told. What do you think?”

She smiled. “You’re right. There is a story to be told.”

I looked at her carefully and then looked again at the portrait. “Are you Lisa, Lisa Wolf?”

She continued to smile. “That’s me!”

“I’ve read all of your books and seen all of your art. You’re very talented. It’s an honor to meet you! Oh! My name is Frank Karkota. I’m a writer too. But I’ve only written technical articles, mainly anecdotes of my engineering career. I’ve only sold one novel, *Tales from a Haunted House*.”

“I loved your book. I read every book about haunted houses. Have you written anything else?”

I was very excited that a world famous author would read and praise my book.

“I’m looking for ideas, but haven’t come up with anything yet.”

I realized that we were having our conversation in front of her portrait and blocking the view.

“Mrs. Wolf…”

“Call me Lisa.”

“Okay, Lisa. Would you like to have dinner with me? It would be an honor to share time with my favorite author.”

“It’s been years since a young man has invited me to dinner. How can I refuse? And my husband will be away tonight in Manchester.”

We went to a small restaurant which was nearly empty and sat down at a table. Being a weeknight, it was quiet and we could talk during our meal.

“Frank, I am looking for somebody to write the story of my life and the story of my portrait. Would you like to write it?”

“I’ve never written a biography. I’m really not sure that I could do your life story justice.”

“I would want you to write it as a fiction because my life story is beyond belief. It is stranger than fiction.”

I was puzzled that this world famous writer would ask me to write her life story.

“Lisa, our meeting was a chance encounter. Why would you want me, a perfect stranger, to write your story? Why don’t you write it yourself?”

Lisa smiled, almost laughing. “Our meeting was not by chance; time brought us together. I started writing my life story, but I couldn’t continue because there are parts that are too painful.”

“Does your portrait play a part in the story?”

“Yes, Frank, it does? Would you like to hear the story of my life?”

I was not sure what to say, so I just stared at her. There was such a loving look in her smile and those bright sparkling eyes.

“Frank, I am going to die. It may be in twenty years, ten years, one year, or tomorrow. I cannot say. I want my story known. I want people to know my story.”

I could not refuse, so I decided to listen to the story of her life. At the time, I did not realize it, but her story would change my life forever.

“Let me start with the painting. After high-school, I went to Rivier College for a liberal arts degree. I took a lot of writing courses, as well as some science and history. Since I had interest in art, I took some art courses. One of the assignments was to do a self portrait. I got an A-plus in that class.

“Eventually, I graduated. I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to write stories that would change the world. I had so much ambition, but I had no experience in life. I never had a serious boyfriend and had never known true love. I was not ready to write, so I got a job with a company that wrote tech manuals. It would help me to meet interesting people and experience life.”

I listened to Lisa tell her life story. Her face was animated as she told of her happy experiences. But, when her story became sad, I could see the pain in her face as she continued and at times, there were tears running down her cheeks. A few times, she had to stop to regain her composure. As she resumed her story, it seemed more and more like fiction, but the pain in her face told me that the story was true. It seemed like she was spinning a yarn, and yet, there was sincerity in her face. I could not believe her story and yet somehow I could not deny it. Hours later, when she finished the story of her life, I just stared at her.

Finally, she asked, “Well what do you think?”

“Lisa, I think that everything after your wedding was just fiction. I don’t believe it. You are a great writer and have a great imagination. But I can’t believe that the story that you told me is true. This is not the story of your life.”

“I didn’t expect you to believe it.”

Lisa took a napkin and wrote something on it and then handed it to me. I read the words on the napkin. It said Hillsboro County Registry of Deeds, Rolling Hills Cemetery, Bureau of Vital Statistics. She listed other official agencies. I was very puzzled and looked at Lisa. She smiled.

“Frank, do some research, and don’t stop with these sources. Dig and dig until you are convinced that my story is true. When you’re ready, I’ll send you some of the story that I started writing.”

I looked at the napkin and then at Lisa. She was smiling broadly and her eyes were sparkling. I was overwhelmed by her story. She took the napkin back and wrote down her telephone number.

“Call me when you’re ready and I’ll send you the material that I’ve written.”

We exchanged good-nights and we each went home. As I drove home, the story that Lisa had told to me echoed in my mind. I got no sleep that night as I replayed over and over again her bizarre tale. The more that I thought about, the less I believed it, and yet there was something about the story that seemed true. I knew that I had to research and find the answers.

As I research her and her story, I found conflicting information that gave credence to her strange story. More research tended to corroborate her unbelievable story and so I

decided to write her life story as a novel. I contacted Lisa and she sent me the outline of her unfinished autobiography which helped me to recall her story and keep my novel closer to the facts.

After almost a year, I finished writing the story. I called it *The Last Summer*. I sent a draft to Lisa and she loved it. She made a few corrections which I incorporated into the final story.

In the spring of 2017, *The Last Summer* will be published for all to read. I do not expect people to believe this strange story, but perhaps readers can learn some important lessons of love, and of life, and of death, and of time.

The Last Summer

Chapter 12

May 30

Each day, they went through the same routine of rising in the morning, taking a walk to the cove, watching the geese grow a little larger, and then writing part of a chapter of the book. It was a routine that gave each of them great pleasure. At the end of the day, Robert would have supper while Lisa ate her ghost-food. On this evening, after finishing supper, Robert looked out the window and observed that it was still light.

“Lisa, can you recommend another trail that’s not too long? I’d like another hike before we go to bed.”

“There’s a short trail that leads to a strange boulder. Would you like to see it?”

“Lisa, what’s so strange about the boulder?”

“You’ll see. You’ll see!”

Lisa and Robert followed another trail from the house, a trail that was overgrown and had obviously not been traveled for many years. After a few hundred feet, they came to a somewhat spherical stone about twenty feet in diameter. It was perched on three small stones that rested upon the flat granite ledge. Near the edge of the exposed ledge were two other stones that were about five feet in diameter forming a triangle with the large boulder.

As Robert examined the stones, he had an eerie feeling that this was not natural and that there was something spiritual about this location deep in the woods. He had a sense that he was in a cemetery, but could not identify why he felt that way. He looked at Lisa and she smiled enigmatically.

“Spooky, isn’t it? I used to come out here every week or so, but I haven’t been out here for years.”

“How come, Lisa? This is an interesting place, but yes, it is a little spooky.”

“The last time that I came out here, there was a man near the stone and he was praying. I tried not to disturb him, but he saw me. He looked very, very old and wore strange clothes, more like animal skins. When he saw me, he smiled and so I approached.

“He told me that the chief of his tribe died and was buried under the stone. He said that after the chief died, he was covered with earth and then the three small stones were

located at the ends of his feet and near his head. Then the boulder was put on top of the stones so that he would be protected.

“He told me that the chief was a very wise man, a very great man, who led his tribe with fairness and compassion. He gave the name of the chief, but I cannot remember it, or even pronounce it.

“He told me many stories about the chief, about battles that were fought, about decisions that were made for the tribe, about how he saved the tribe from starvation and cold winters. He told me many, many stories about this great man.

“The old man said that he came out here every summer on the anniversary of the chief’s death. He said that the chief died many, many summers ago, too many to count.

“He wanted to remember the chief and he wanted the chief to be remembered by others, like me. He said that this stone is a memorial to the chief. He said that the chief was his father.

“I asked the man how the stone was moved because it probably weighed tons. He told me that the medicine man had great power. I walked around the stone and when I returned the old man was gone. I don’t know where he went. It really spooked me and I never came out here again.”

“Lisa, do you think that it was a joke, somebody playing a trick on you?”

“I wasn’t sure, but why would anybody do such a thing? Now, I realize that he was a ghost, a ghost like me. But even now, I cannot figure out why he appeared to me. I realize, though, that it is sad to be forgotten! He wanted somebody, like me, to know that his father lived and was a great man.”

“Lisa, I didn’t believe in ghosts until I saw you. Now nothing would surprise me.”

Lisa continued, “This stone, this memorial, has been here for a very long time. Look at the trees around this site. They are well over a hundred years old. No machine could have got close enough to do this. I can only wonder how many hundreds or even thousands of years ago this was done. And I can only wonder how it was done.

“And then the question of why it was done. Is this a gravestone, as told by the strange old man? Perhaps he does not want his father’s life to be forgotten. This stone, and what he tells strangers like me, will keep his father alive for generations to come. I’m a ghost and I should have the answers to these questions, but I don’t.”

It was beginning to get dark and Robert was really spooked. Even Lisa seemed spooked by this strange place. The sun had already set, but Lisa had no problem finding her way back to the house. Robert followed her closely.

When they got home Robert sat at the computer and did a search on his digital encyclopedia for stones like the one near his house. He found a dissertation about stone structures in North America and discovered that there are other stones like it. Some people believe that they are a chance grouping of stones left by glaciers millennia ago, and others believe that they are manmade or even supernatural.

An hour later, he and Lisa went to bed as normal. The strange stone left more questions than answers and Lisa's description of the strange old man only deepened the mystery of the stone.

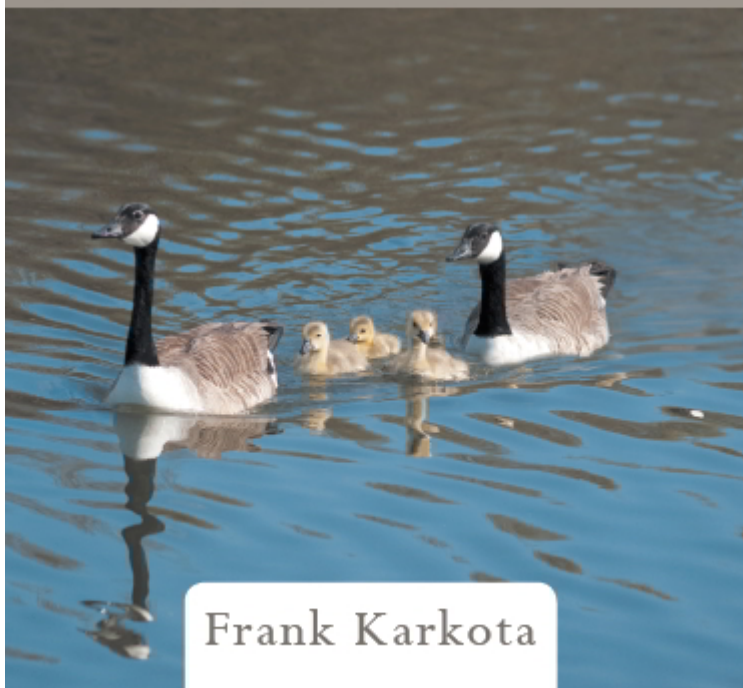
"Lisa, it is sad that people so often live their lives and are forgotten when they die, leaving nothing behind."

"Robert, just as long as one person remembers me, or you, or that chief, it means that we made our mark on this world. Of course, it is better to be remembered for a good deed than a bad one."

"Perhaps you're right. I'm tired and need some sleep. Good night, Lisa. I love you."

"And I love you too, Robert."

The Last Summer



Frank Karkota