

Five Uneasy Pieces

by Dave Clapper

Her friends all notice his long, slender fingers and comment appreciatively on his perfectly groomed nails. She just wishes he'd put the damned guitar down once in a while and use them on her.

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She reminds him that she has a degree, that she'd like to use it. He wonders aloud what his own degree has to do with managing a customer service department. She throws a plate of spaghetti at him that splatters on the wall. He informs her that she's just made more use of her BA in Art History than he's made of his in English Lit since graduation.

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Property was a problem. Neither of them cared much for the possessions of monetary value. Each, in fact, offered the other everything in the settlement. Everything but the contents of the studio. At first, it had been due to finances. She'd needed a canvas to start a new work. He offered her one of his finished works to paint over. What began as an act of love came to symbolize their marriage, each painting over the other's works, usually but not always by invitation. But the divorce changed that. Eighteen-layered canvases were prized by both of them, regardless of whose work appeared on top. Their son came home from college for a weekend of laundry and turpentine every canvas. Reconciliation sometimes comes from unlikely sources.

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He discovers a new passion for painting. He talks at length with his new-found knowledge about chiaroscuro and vanishing points, surrealism and triptychs. She politely nods. His spirits dampen until he finally asks of her why she can't take more of an interest. She eyes him and is surprised to see that he's genuinely clueless. She

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lowers her bifocals, puts down her crossword, and rises. Taking his hand, she leads him to the attic. In a far corner are several canvases stacked one against another and gathering dust, each bearing her signature.

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He died within three days of her. The greatest surprise came in his burial instructions. He wanted to be interred with her most beloved possession, which required a specially designed coffin. Until then, the children hadn't known their mother had ever played the cello.

