

Alternate Timeline

Declan eagerly anticipated the upcoming weekend of 26-28 July, especially since his brother, Kaleb, was visiting. It would seem he has his annual engineering conference which was held in the city this year. Kaleb is based in Halifax, and the two brothers have not seen each other in months; he shared Declan's passion for mysteries and the challenges they provided. Although Kaleb was primarily in town for the Atlantic Engineering Conference, he would be staying for five more days to visit family and friends. Declan hoped for a peaceful and enjoyable time together over the next few days.

Declan had the weekend all mapped out with a visit to the Fredericton Region Museum, the Garrison Night Market, Boyce Farmers Market, a run along the river and across the Bill Thorpe Walking Bridge, and a visit to the local art galleries and museums. All of that, along with the conference, it was going to make it a full weekend. The first stop was a gallery downtown that was receiving several original paintings by Marie Crosby in Acrylic titled 'Letters Home', based on the Afghanistan war and our troops in Kandahar; with a price tag of 90,000 dollars. The artist's second masterpiece in Acrylic titled "Time To Relax," captures the vibrant essence of her New Brunswick garden in full bloom. The painting vividly portrays life bursting forth in all its glory, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in the beauty of nature's exuberance, with an estimated price tag of around 95,000 dollars. They were being delivered today just before the Garrison Night Market and would be up on display just as the market opened.



Kaleb was not just a Mechanical Engineer; he also dedicated a good part of his time to authenticating paintings and artwork. His passion lay in the intricate details, as he found immense joy in delving deep into the nuances of each piece. For him, seeing each brush stroke or scar left behind by the sculptor was as if he was observing the artist's emotions conveyed through their art. It was akin to peering into the soul of the artists themselves. This endeavour not only fueled his emotional intelligence, or EQ, but also provided a profound sense of connection to the artistic world. So, this was the perfect art installation for him. He could witness

the creative genius of Marie Crosby, first hand.

Their weekend adventure began at the John P. Bourque Gallery, a venue named in honour of a WWII veteran from Sluice Point, Nova Scotia, who served with the West Nova Scotia Regiment. John P. Bourque, a passionate art enthusiast, sincerely appreciated the profound meaning artists infused into their creations. This visit set the stage for an unforgettable extended weekend.

Declan strolled down the main street of Fredericton under an overcast sky with a light drizzle. Just fifteen minutes earlier, a torrential downpour had unleashed 10 mm of rain in half an hour, flooding the streets and overwhelming the city's drainage. As we walk down that road of climate change, we see that this kind of event will become more common in the future. However, the streets are now clear, other than the odd lake here and there. As he walked, Declan pondered, "I wonder if they unloaded the new paintings at the gallery or did they wait for the rain to stop?" Just then, Kaleb ran across the road to meet up with him. Declan smirked and said, "Jaywalking, are we? Didn't they teach you anything at Dalhousie?" Kaleb, unfazed, responded with his usual nonchalance, "Whatever!" Then, with renewed enthusiasm, he asked, "Is the gallery open? I can't wait to see the paintings." Declan, matching Kaleb's excitement, replied, "Not sure. The Thursday Night Market started about an hour ago, so the paintings should have arrived just before it began." They both picked up the pace as they walked past the Fredericton Region Museum. The John P. Bourque Gallery was just around the corner.

The gallery was set back from the main road, leaving room for significant social events. The cobblestone design combined 10 thousand small pieces plus of coloured stones, creating a giant mosaic of the Tree of Life. As they walked up to the cobblestone base, they both stopped and took in the pure splendour of it all. It was an incredible sight to behold and a fitting design for a gallery. Declan pointed to what looked like crates being moved from an armoured truck to the side door of the gallery. He thought, "Good, the artworks are here, I can't wait to see them."

However, this singular moment in time would be ripped away from them in a heartbeat. Screeching tires erupted from behind them, prompting both Declan and Kaleb to instinctively leap to one side to avoid whatever was about to come at them. When Declan turned around, he could see a black four-door luxury sedan slam into the parked van on the street directly behind them.

On closer look, there wasn't much damage that he could see to the car, but what a considerable noise it made. People started to run over to see if they could help, including some of the gallery staff standing in the courtyard in front of the gallery. And, of course, several people were taking photos, selfies and videos for TikTok and other platforms. They were always a pain getting in the way of the people actually trying to help. That said, from time to time, the selfie squad had given him good information after reviewing the photos. Declan scanned the crowd and noticed one of his old friends taking photos on the other side of the road. Declan yelled, "Hey Tom," and waved once his old friend looked up from his cell phone. Tom acknowledged Declan with a wave and went back to taking photos.

Declan was always a suspicious type of a detective, asking fundamental questions such as 'Why,' for example, that's what was coming into his mind right now: " Why did the black sedan run into a parked van...why? Was there a problem with the driver? Or was he just distracted? ...Why did he run into a parked car? Really a parked car?" Just then, he noticed that Kaleb had his phone out taking photos also. Declan said inquisitively, "Come on, Kaleb, have you not seen a fender bender before?" Kaleb answered, "Yesbut not one that was about to break into a fistfight!" Kaleb pointed to the accident. Declan looked over just in time to see the Assistant Gallery Curator get cold-clocked by the driver of the black sedan..... and down he went like a sack full of PEI potatoes, or a 40 lb sea bass slapping the water after making an incredible jump out of the Saint John River, or should I say, Wolastoq River.

Just then, you could hear police sirens coming down the road through the downtown core. Declan, still looking at the scene, noticed the crowd had started to move away from the accident, not wanting to be pulled into the police investigation. Declan looked over at the gallery and noticed the truck that delivered the paintings was no longer there, and thought to himself, " The paintings must be inside by now, being inspected and prepared to be displayed for the start of the exhibition." He felt a surge of excitement coursing through him once more. Meanwhile, Kaleb continued to document the unfolding chaos with his camera. A group of bystanders intervened and were working on keeping the driver and the Assistant Curator separated in the middle of the road. Declan surveyed the scene, observing how every gaze was transfixed on the events unfolding in the middle of the road. He couldn't help but consider, "It's fascinating how easily people get distracted by something so minor in

nature.” Declan bumped Kaleb’s left arm and nodded toward the gallery. “ Do you want to move inside to check out the installation or... take pictures all day?” Without a word, Kaleb turned towards the gallery and quickly started walking across the cobblestone mosaic, heading for the front door of the gallery. Declan nearly had to sprint to keep up with him.

Standing proudly at the entrance of the gallery, visitors are welcomed by exquisite hand-carved glass double doors that depict a breathtaking New Brunswick landscape. The top of the door is graced with intricately carved Bald Eagles, while the bottom showcases a charming covered bridge and a skilled fly fisherman in pursuit of Atlantic Salmon. Surrounding the entire masterpiece are delicately carved fiddleheads, adding a touch of elegance to the artwork. These works of art were created by the talented Gary A. Crosby, MMM CD of DW Carving Studio in Oromocto, NB, a former military veteran turned renowned artist, celebrated for his impeccable artistry. This awe-inspiring creation serves as a captivating introduction to the exceptional art pieces that await beyond this artistic tapestry.

Once inside, Declan noticed a group of the gallery’s employees watching intently out the windows at the spectacle unfolding on the street in front of the gallery. “I wondered what they are thinking after they just witnessed their Assistant Curator knocked out cold,” thought Declan. But he also considered why the Assistant Curator got involved in an altercation that had nothing to do with him? Was he trying to impress someone in the gallery, perhaps his boss? Declan concluded that he might simply have a personality that gravitates towards drama. Meanwhile, Kaleb was already at the front desk, asking for the location of the new installation.

Just then, the gallery Curator walked over and introduced herself. “Good day, gentleman; I am Nancy Longshed, the Gallery’s Curator. I would like to welcome you to the John P. Bourque Gallery; we have several new installations this week, including the Marie Crosby Exhibit.” Kaleb burst into the conversation with an abrupt comment, “I am a Mechanical Engineer by day and an Art Authenticator by nights and weekends focusing on several masters, including Marie A. Crosby’s masterpieces, and I can’t wait to see them.” Kaleb said with a childish grin. Nancy looked at Kaleb and smiled at him, completely ignoring Declan. “Is that so? We are always looking for experts; perhaps you would consider having your name added to our authenticator’s list? We would have to confirm your credentials, of course.” Kaleb returned the smile and said awkwardly, “Yes, of course...I would love to...add my name

to your list”. Nancy motioned to a doorway directly behind her and said, “Please, we can discuss this further in my office,... you can bring your assistant with you”. Declan tried to interject, “Wait...I am not....his.” However, both Kaleb and Nancy were now walking into her office and apparently not listening to him.

The Curator’s Office was a large room with two desks at either end. One for the Curator and one for her assistant. Nancy’s part of the office space was covered with a pile of books and reference material. Several paintings leaned up against the wall. The other desk was spotless, with nothing on the desk or floor. However, there were some huge ugly abstract paintings on the wall. Nancy noticed Kaleb looking at the paintings and said, “Those paintings belong to Tim, my assistant...He insists on bringing in his own paintings. He started swapping them out every two weeks with new ones. They’re not my cup of tea, but he is very proud of them, so I allow it.”

Declan and Kaleb settled in on two antique wooden chairs in front of Nancy’s desk. At this point, the conversation shifted to Kaleb, who began listing off his various degrees and qualifications, such as BFA and MFA. While these achievements were undoubtedly impressive, Declan found this conversation rather dull. Nonetheless, out of respect for his older brother’s hard-earned accomplishments, Declan patiently endured five minutes of what seemed like endless chatter. It wasn’t that Declan wasn’t proud of Kaleb; he simply felt that dwelling on these accolades was somewhat unnecessary.

Once all this professional chatter was finished, Nancy offered Kaleb a grand tour of the gallery, which he accepted without blinking an eye. At this point in the conversation Declan was all but invisible to both of them. As they walked through the halls of what seemed endless art, Kaleb stopped in front of an incredible landscape and leaned forward, almost touching the painting with his nose. He had a very intense, focused expression on his face. Declan asked “ Whats up?” Kaleb raised his right hand and index finger, silently asking Declan to wait. After a couple of seconds, he stood straight, turned, and started to follow Nancy again. Declan gazed at the painting, then shifted his attention to Kaleb, his mind racing with questions. “What was that all about?” As the tour progressed, Kaleb paused another ten times, each instance mirroring the previous one. With each stop, Declan’s sense of unease grew. He realized that something was wrong, but he understood that he would have to wait until the tour concluded to find out just what.

As they walked into the Marie Crosby Exhibit, both Kaleb and Declan were excited to see her paintings up close. However, for two of the paintings, Kaleb's reaction was the same as that of the last 11. Just then, Nancy's phone rang, its ringtone a lively rendition of Vivaldi's "Spring" from The Four Seasons. She quickly answered, only to learn that she was needed at the front of the gallery to speak with the police. They were requesting footage from the gallery's security cameras. After Nancy departed the exhibit room, Declan turned toward Kaleb and inquired, "What's the deal with the paintings?" Kaleb hesitated momentarily before responding, "I'm uncertain... I need to dig deeper into this. There's something off about the brush strokes. While I can't be certain, I suspect there is a 60% likelihood that they are actually forgeries... Exceptionally well-crafted ones, but forgeries all the same. But before we contact the police, I need to be sure" Declan quickly reacted. "So when will you know?" Kaleb smiled and said, "By tomorrow morning, if I work on it all night." Declan smiled and said in a sarcastic voice, "If I can help, let me know...So it looks like it's going to be a long night for both of us."

Declan started to notice similarities with all the paintings that they considered forgeries. First, they were all worth between 50,000-90,000 dollars each, for a total of approximately 900,000 CDN dollars plus. One strange coincident, was that they were all approximately the same size. The question now was....when were they replaced; before they arrived at the gallery, or after? When you think about it, there is only one answer to this question, and that would have to be; after the paintings have completed their authentication process. Like every gallery, each painting comes with provenance and authentication, and all artwork is checked before being exhibited.

With that, Declan and Kaleb made their way to the front entrance, planning to meet with Nancy once they had more information. As they turned the corner, they spotted the city police, including Declan's old friend Corporal Woods, who was engaged in a discussion with Nancy about the security footage from the front door. Declan also observed Tim, the Curator's Assistant, standing nearby, sporting a growing fresh new black eye from the altercation that had taken place outside. Declan did not want to get involved in the conversation but wanted to hear what was being said, so he moved a little closer nonchalantly.

Corporal Woods spoke directly and professionally, "If possible, I would appreciate a copy of the security footage from the front of your gallery. It could provide valuable insight into the recent events and serve as evidence of the assault on

your staff.” Just then, Tim, the Curator’s Assistant, jumped in. “I am not planning on charging him with assault. I made several comments about him and his family! And I think I deserved it, plus it was just one hit and as I see it, in the heat of the moment. So I do not want to press any charges.” Over Declan’s left shoulder he could hear three other staff members talking among themselves “ What! He is not going to charge him for assault? If it was one of us we would already be in jail!” said the front desk Receptionist. Just then another employee chimed in, “ Your kidding, right!... if it was one of us we would already be fired and flogged in the back alley! He said with a sarcastic laughter.

Declan could hear Corporal Woods say, “Are you sure? The only way to stop him from doing this again is to hold him accountable the first time.” Tim said softly. “I know...I just don’t need the hassle with the job and taking time off work to go to court right now.” Just then, Corporal Woods snapped, “Well, fine...I have other things to do right now....than to try to convince you to lay charges.” He then looked at Nancy and said, “ I would like to thank you and the gallery for your help....We will be out of your hair shortly once we have the car outside towed.” Nancy smiled and said, “ Not a problem, thank you for your help, and if things change, we will give you a call,” indicating that she was going to talk to her assistant about laying charges. Corporal Woods looked over at Declan and nodded, and said, “Good to see you again, Declan.” Then he turned and walked out the door heading for the accident site.

Once Corporal Woods departed the building, Nancy looked at Tim and the rest of the staff and said in a confident voice, “ All right! Nothing left to see here, back to work.....Tim make sure you log in the last delivery.....Kim, I need the gallery’s gift shop earnings for Q4 on my desk by the end of the day. Let’s go, people... You have things to do!” Declan was impressed. Nancy was quite a team leader, he thought to himself. Declan looked over at Kaleb, and he saw something very different in his eyes. Declan knew they also had things to do. With that, he looked at Kaleb and said, “ Kaleb!.” Kaleb was utterly lost in his thoughts and looking at Nancy intently. Declan again tried to get his attention, this time louder. “ Kaleb!....are you in there?” Waving his hand in front of his face. Kaleb shook his head and said. “Yes.... Yes, what?” Declan smiled and said, “ It’s time to go....You need to do some research, and I need to talk to Corporal Woods about the accident. Plus, we need to set up a time for tomorrow’s meeting with the gallery.” Nancy overheard the conversation. “Appointment for what?” Kaleb answered quickly, “Nothing reallyI have a couple

professional questions about your artwork in the gallery,.....More of a professional development for me.” Nancy smiled at Kaleb and said, “Would 4:30 tomorrow afternoon work for youand perhaps we can go for a bite to eat afterwards?” she asked confidently. Kaleb smiled from ear to ear and said, “Absolutely...Sounds like a plan.” There was a strange pause of what seemed to be several minutes for Declan as Kaleb and Nancy smiled and stared at each other. Declan decided to break up this staring game and said, “Thanks for the tour Nancy, and we will see you tomorrow afternoon around 4:30.” He then grabbed Kaleb by the shoulder, turned him around, and walked him to the front door. It was as if he was in a trance or something.

Once out of the gallery, Kaleb headed off to his conference and research, leaving Declan to talk to Corporal Woods about the accident and possible issues in the gallery. Declan suspected he was going to need Corporal Woods and a couple of officers at the gallery tomorrow afternoon. He could feel it in his bones: something was dirty in the gallery.



Title: Letters Home

Artist: Marie A. Crosby

DW Carving Studio

Medium: Acrylic 19 x 15 inches or 48.4 cm x 38.1 cm

Description: “Letters Home” is an acrylic masterpiece that captures a poignant moment amidst the chaos of the “War on Terror” - our brave soldiers pausing amidst battle to pen heartfelt letters to their loved ones. These letters serve as a powerful link between the warriors on the front lines and the families they fight to protect, symbolizing their unwavering commitment to safeguarding not just our freedom, but that of the entire world.

Time To Relax

Artist: Marie A Crosby

Medium: Acrylic

Specifications: 18 x 14 inches or 45.7 cm x 35.6 cm

Time To Relax, This captivating acrylic painting beautifully captures the abundant biodiversity of New Brunswick in its serene, untouched state. Peering through this enchanting portal into the New Brunswick garden, viewers are greeted with a breathtaking display of life unfolding during the spring and summer season. The vivid array of colours bursting into full bloom is a truly mesmerizing spectacle.



The following afternoon, precisely at 4:30 pm, Declan made his way to the front of the gallery, where he found Kaleb admiring the stone walkway leading into the John P. Bourque Gallery. Both Kaleb and Declan had spent most of the previous night and morning going meticulously through all the pertinent information to unravel the sequence of events that transpired the day before, from the accident to the paintings displayed in the gallery. Kaleb had confirmed that all the paintings in question were, in fact, forgeries! It was now Declan's turn to unravel the mystery surrounding the forged paintings. The gallery had no idea any of their paintings were fake. Declan did not want to alarm the thieves that he was on their trail. Declan had talked to Corporal Woods in the morning and found out that the driver of the car mixed up in the fender bender and assault of the Assistant Curator was, in fact, a member of an organized crime family out of Montreal and Toronto called the "Hells Creations." He suspected that they would be involved in the art heist as well. It all started to come together now, and he could see in his mind how it was done.

Moments after Declan and Kaleb arrived, Corporal Woods arrived with several plain-clothes officers. He quickly sent all but two of them to cover all the gallery's exits. The last two were to go into the gallery and act as potential art lovers. They would be needed to arrest the art thieves working inside the gallery.

Once everything was in place, it was time to set the trap. Declan and Kaleb walked into the gallery at precisely 4:32 pm and walked up to the front desk, where Nancy was waiting. Declan knew this whole thing was about timelines. He needed to be in the right spot at the right time to catch the thieves. The gallery closed at 5:00 pm, and the thief would be leaving shortly.

Nancy smiled, unaware of what was about to unfold in her gallery, and said. "Welcome, gentleman. It is good to see you again, Kaleb; I see you brought your assistant. Will he be joining us for dinner?" This time, Declan jumped into the conversation. "Sorry, Nancy, I am not Kaleb's assistant...I am his brother and a detective in this great city." Nancy looked shocked and a little confused. Kaleb quickly explained that he had noticed 11 of their paintings were forgeries and had to spend most of the night confirming it. He went on to explain that there were several details of the paintings that were missing or off; such as brush strokes and, in some of Marie Crosby's paintings, some fine details. For example; in the painting "Time To Relax," one very small detail was left out. There was a small flower that went over the window frame with three peddles on the original. The gallery's painting had only two

peddles over the window frame, making it a forgery. Kaleb passed Nancy a stack of papers listing all of the issues with each painting.

Nancy was now in shock and, with a confused voice, asked, “What...What are you talking about?” After glancing over all the documentation, she said, “This can’t bemy assistant cleared all of the paintings in question.....and he knows what he is doing.” Declan said, “Well, that is true. He does know what he is doing.” Just then, Tim walked out of his office with one of his ugly paintings under his arm. He looked at Nancy, smiled, and said, “See you tomorrow with a new one of my exquisite paintings.” He started to head for the front doors.

Just then, the main doors burst open, and Corporal Woods blocked Tim’s exit. Declan reached over and pulled the abstract painting from under his arm, laying it on the table and flipping it over, removing the paper backing to reveal the original “Letters Home” painting created by Marie Crosby. Nancy was shocked. “Wait.... what....you have been stealing from us all this time?” She said in disbelief. Declan chimed in “Yes...He has; every two weeks he would change out one of his paintings with an original hidden in the back. All of his bizarre, poorly created abstracts never caused anyone to think differently. No one would question him as his paintings were horrible. Everyone, including you, just looked the other way. It’s not that this was your fault, but rather, the paintings were so ugly that you were hoping the next ones would be better. It was the perfect scam.” Declan looked over at Tim and said, “Not to worry, we picked up your partner in the car from yesterday.” Declan then looked back at Nancy and said, “The accident out front was a distraction that allowed him to quickly switch the paintings in his office before walking outside, where he made it look like he was there all the time. That’s why he refused to lay charges. It was all part of the plan. Unfortunately you have a bunch of forgeries now, but perhaps the originals are still in Tim’s apartment. ”

“It seems the case is all but closed, the art thieves are in custody, and perhaps the original paintings are still at Tim’s apartment”, Declan was thinking as he watched his brother and Nancy go off to dinner. As he started to walk down the road along Officers Square, someone called out to him, “It may of been about the art this time but I know murder is on the way!” As Declan looked up, he could see John Brennan pointing to the Walking Bridge. After looking towards the bridge he turned back to talked to John.....He was gone! Declan considered to himself “Typical of John,... he was a ghost after all”.

What if Declan and Kaleb hadn't been at the gallery at that crucial moment? Imagine an alternate timeline where the thieves escape without a trace!

