A Change of Pace

Weather forecast for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on Saturday, March, 11th 2006: Highs in the mid 70s. Clear skies. Slight breeze. Funny how the most brilliantly perfect day that anyone could ever imagine had to exist as I returned back to his stifling city from my week of a not so springy Spring break. Maybe I am only using the word stifling out of bitter frustration. I do love Philadelphia. I love the variety of faces strolling though Rittenhouse Park on any random Sunday afternoon. I love the colorful pallet of cotton scarves on a street vendor’s table that catches the corner of my eye as the sad, smooth melody of a saxophonist’s song echoes within my ears. Indeed, Philadelphia possesses a variety of unique and treasured idiosyncrasies; ones that portray an intriguing story without using any words. However, being in Philadelphia on a day such as that of March 11th sometimes leaves me longing for open roads and skylines that are not artificially assembled. It makes me miss the crinkly whisper of the wind waltzing through leaves and branches as I stroll beneath a canopy of lush treetops.

Living only mere blocks away from the Philadelphia Museum of Art, I figured that if I could not seek out natural serenity on this exceptional day, a ten minute walk resulting in the revelation of manmade representations of beauty would be my second best option. Almost immune to the hustle and commotion of the street traffic, I ventured onward across the Parkway to reach my destination. Passing an overly boisterous pretzel vendor, I began to climb the infamous steps of the museum’s foundation. Those steps are magnificent. If Heaven has a second floor that should be its staircase. Climbing the steps
almost reminded me of sitting through the previews before a movie; I cannot wait for the feature presentation, but I also secretly love to view the samples of what is yet to come. The images from different people and activity on my ascent upward generated a rhythm of creativity and movement within my mind; one preparing me for the adventure of discovering something great.

After paying the eight dollar student admission fee at the front desk and securing the green metallic snap on button that proves I paid my fare on the top of my shirt, I realized I had no idea where to commence my visit. Never having been to this museum before, I blindly took a right turn from the entranceway on the ground floor level. Rather than stopping to patiently gaze at the first pieces surrounding me, I chose to walk straight to the back of this wing of the building and then work my way forward again. In doing so, I found myself in the contemporary/post modern section of artwork. Vibrant splashes of color bathing a canvas or sculpture enveloped me from every angle. Hazy collages of distorted photographs and black and white abstractions hung from the walls. Everything was extremely loud and striking. As much as I appreciated the intangible innovation of this section, nothing that I saw deeply moved me or created a story within my mind.

Retracing my steps, I headed onward toward the oil painting and water color area. Everything within this section appeared gentler than my previous experience. The paintings hung from the walls like branches off a weeping willow tree; soft and comforting. The fuzzy, yet picturesque, appearance of the watercolor pieces fabricated a ticklish-like satisfaction within my viewing process. Soon I came across a small room sectioned off to the work of Claude Monet. I never was a fan of Monet. I never was not a fan of Monet either. I prefer to think that up to this point in my life my relationship
with his artwork was one of indifference. Yet, my indifference turned into enlightenment as I discovered a particularly special piece.

As I came across the artwork by Monet entitled, “Under the Pines, Evening”, I was immediately consumed by its aesthetic grandeur within the delicate brush strokes. The painting reveals a scenic view of a bundle of lofty, statuesque trees rooted in an area between a grassy plot of land and a body of water. The grassy area in front of the trees and water remains rather flat in terrain. The picture appears to be depicting a sunset along the placid, blue water. Monet utilizes colors that exude jewel shades. A velvety green rush of pigment on top of the tall trunks meshes with a burnt shade of red to expose the final shadows of the sun’s ceasing portal of light. The thin trunks stem from an area that looks to be sandy in texture. The color of the ground matches that of the setting sun’s blanketing warmth, yet also portrays mixed shades of yellow, orange, and brown. Monet paints the uppermost part of the sky in a darker shade of grays and purples. Clearly, this represents the nightly hibernation of the sun as the trees prepare to kiss the moon.

As soon as my eyes fell upon this piece of artwork I stopped looking around me and became fully engulfed in its presence. Gazing at this painting provoked emotions within me that were similar to the feelings I get after drinking a third glass of wine or as I watch a favorite sitcom rerun and can quote every line. It just made me feel happy. Monet provided the perfect medicine for me on that day as I longed for the remedy to cure me of my claustrophobic reaction to the city.

Additionally, the image of this painting drew forth strikingly familiar memories of past family vacations. Every summer growing up my family would take a road trip and
pay a visit to my cousins in Plymouth, North Carolina. To this day they still live on a body of water called the Albermarle Sound. In my eyes this picture is the Albermarle Sound. When I look at it I am taken back to tall pine trees lining the sandy roads of Plymouth. I hear the whisky beat of water shooting out of irrigations systems in open fields of leafy produce. This painting takes me on a boat ride, weaving in and out of mossy trees with black water snakes hanging from their stooping limbs. I can almost feel the warm still water as I float on my back and the squishy, clay-like ground seeping in-between each toe as I stand back on my feet. The nighttime sounds of gargling toads and the splash of jumping fish return to my mind as I gaze at this two dimensional sunset. I hadn’t been to Plymouth for years since that visit in mid March to the art museum. Thank you Monet.

Leaving the museum doors and staring out onto the view of the Parkway and City Hall, Philadelphia yet again slapped me with the reality of its fast paced energy. I knew I had a stressful week ahead of me filled with an abundance of papers and midterms and that the wonderfully warm weather would probably die out toward the end of that weekend. I knew that at some point during my prospective nap that day I would be awakened by sirens on the street or random fire alarm tests within my apartment complex. However, I also knew that if I ever needed to take refuge from the burdens of the city’s chaotic demeanor, I could simply trek over to the museum for a change of pace and spend a little while under the pines.