

JOSE DE JESUS RODRIGUEZ

Untitled, 2016

Acrylic, airbrush, sculpy, and oil on canvas, 49 x 48 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

PAUL SKENAZY

Temper CA

A memorial? Grandpa was a crotchety bastard who made Dad's childhood a horror and put an end to mine. It would be good to see the old man six feet under.

I told Dad I'd be there by Friday afternoon.

"Come to the house," he said.

"What house?"

"Ours."

The last time I saw our—Dad's—house in the mid-1990s, the windows and sliding doors were gone, the paint chipped and yellow. The roof split under me when I tried to climb to the second story. The surrounding woods were a tangle of broken branches and narrow paths that led nowhere.

"Are you camping out?" I asked.

"Just come to the house."

* * *

I was sitting at a stoplight that afternoon when I burst into tears. Once the crying started, it didn't stop. I couldn't predict when the bawling would come on: at my desk, cutting radishes and jicama, watching Jon Stewart. Bourbon didn't help.

I thought of calling Mom for sympathy but she was off on her annual month of volunteer work in Yosemite, far from a phone line. My one and only Angie was in Houston. She'd become the golden girl of the American Culinary Institute, financial handywoman who patched up accounting leaks that were costing the company tens of thousands of dollars. Her rescue missions for ACT were lined up like planes waiting for a runway: Houston, Las Vegas, Boston. She'd disappear for three- or four-week immersions in one school after another, then fly home for a week in town with me. I felt pinched into the intermissions of her life like someone stealing a kiss during TV commercials.

The two of us had learned long ago that we ended phone calls feeling farther apart than when we started talking. Saturday night I called her anyway.

"I don't get it. You hate the man."

"Right. The tears are crazy."

"Do you need me to come home?"

I paused, staring at the calendar. It told me that Angie was off to Las Vegas in less than a week.

"I'm not even sure I'll get out of here on time," she said. "There's talk of a law suit."

It was July—not the skin-scorching July I knew as a child growing up in Temper but the overcast chill of San Francisco summer mornings. I was at my kitchen table feasting on my usual Saturday breakfast of self-loathing, wondering why I needed to drink myself into a hangover every weekend Angie was away. Dad's call was a relief.

"Joy, your grandpa died last night."

"He finally drank himself to death?"

Grandpa Isaac presided over Temper General, the family store, and the mines and houses my ancestors accumulated over the last 150 years. When I knew him he smoked cigars and drank bourbon, every day. "Never before noon," he liked to say, though only about the cigars.

"Seems that way," Dad said. "I wanted you to know. You used to be close."

"Not that close," I said.

"Don't rewrite the past on my account," Dad said.

I let that go.

"How's Boise these days? The camera store? Madge?"

Madge was wife number three.

"Fine, fine, and fine. But I'm in Temper. Been here for a few weeks."

"Doing what?"

"Visiting old friends," he answered. "The memorial and burial will be next Saturday so your uncles and their families can get here. Come. Stay a few days."