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Art by Lou Peters
As soon as I saw the painting
I knew it was the best in the exhibition.
Whenever I could get away from the
paper, I had spent my time at every
amateur showing around, hoping to
make a discovery like this one. It was
truly a work of art.

The title was "Last Scene." It was a
seascape of what I imagined to be the
New England coast. But it was much

One Touch of

more than that. It was the Sea in all its
might and fury and solitude.

As I studied the picture, there seemed
to be something reminiscent about the
technique. The longer I looked, the
surer I was that this was the work of
someone I knew well. It was clear to
me that a master's brush had added a
touch of genius to the work. His style,
his technique were woven into the
baser fabric of the painting almost as
though he had signed it. But his name
escaped me.

In the frame was a card neatly typed:
Loretta Freeman
South Seaside Road
Larkhaven, Maine

Larkhaven was a little fishing town
50 miles up the coast. I could be there
just after dark. I called the paper and
said I would be back in the morning.

As I drove northward along the icy
New England coast, I began to realize
the possibilities of the situation. This
kind of story was what I had hoped for
ever since getting out of college. The
position of art critic was open on the
News-Herald, and a story like this
would get me the job. It could mean
the end of hanging around dreary
police stations, interviewing pompous
politicians, and chasing fire engines.

The Freeman home was at the edge
of town. It looked out over a long
stretch of desolate coastline that, even
by moonlight, I recognized as the scene
in the painting. In front of the ram-
bling white-frame house was a weath-
er-beaten sign: Room and Board.

Luckily I had brought along a small
piece of luggage.

A lovely young woman of about 25
answered my knock.

"Can I help you?" she asked. She
smiled but her eyes looked past me
with the vast, vacant stare of the blind.

"I'm looking for Loretta Freeman,"
I said. "They told me in town she might
be able to put me up for the night."

"I'm Loretta Freeman, but everyone
calls me Laurie. Won't you come in? I
have a lovely room overlooking the
ocean. We don't have many guests this
time of year."

She walked confidently up the stairs

to a large, comfortable room with a
high bay window.

"Will you be having dinner here?
We're having a boiled dinner—corned
beef and cabbage—and it should be
ready any second, Mister . . .?"

"Williams," I said. "Fred Williams.
The dinner sounds wonderful. I'll wash
up and be down in a minute."

"The room is two dollars and dinner

is a dollar fifty. If there's anything you
need, just call me."

When I entered the dining room, Miss
Freeman and two men were al-
ready at the table. The older of the
two had the weather-beaten look of a
New England fisherman. The other—a
short, bald man—was the great Fred-
erick Votella.

Of course—it had to be Votella! I
was a fool not to have recognized it
immediately.

"Come in, Mr. Williams," said Laurie
Freeman at the sound of my entrance.
"We haven't started yet. This is my
grandfather." She indicated the old man
at her right, who nodded mutely. "And
this is Mr. Davis, our star boarder. He's
been with us since Summer."

I could see a flicker of recognition
and fear in Votella's eyes. We had met
several times in Boston.

"Nice meeting you, Mr. Williams,"
he said, concealing any hint of surprise.

There were several paintings in the
room and I studied them as we ate.
Each bore a sharp resemblance to the
one I had seen that afternoon, but these
lacked that indefinable quality that
separates the craftsman from the artist.

"I see you collect paintings, Miss
Freeman," I said.

"Not really," she laughed, "those are
my own work. You see, I've just re-
cently lost my sight. For a little over
a year now I've been going blind. I fin-
ished my last painting just this Fall."

"Which one is it?" I asked. "I would
like to see it."

"It's not here now. I sent it to Boston
for an exhibition. Mr. Davis said it
was better than the others, and I hoped
that, since it was the last, it might win
a prize. It would make closing the door
on that part of my life so much easier."

"Well, this certainly is the place for
painting," I said brightly. "Have you
ever tried it, Mr. Davis?"

"Not lately," said Votella. "My busi-
ness is insurance. I'm just up here for a
short rest."

"He's just being modest," said Laurie
Freeman. "He was a great help. He
kept me going when I was ready to

give up. Each day when I got tired, he
would send me to bed and clean my
brushes for the next day. I couldn't
have finished 'Last Scene' without him."

After dinner we three men went into
the parlor while Laurie washed the
dishes. It was easy to tell what had
happened. Each day after she had
grown tired, Votella had gone to work

molding the girl's last chance for recog-
nition into a masterpiece, and she had
been too blind to know.

The story had human interest. It was
better than I could have hoped for. The
wire services would grab it up.

"Pardon me, Mr. Williams," Votella
said, "but I thought we might have a
little talk while Miss Freeman is away."

"I've been wanting to talk to you
too, Mr. Davis," I replied.

"As I sat here watching you just now,
you somehow reminded me of myself
at your age. Have you ever wanted to
be an artist, Mr. Williams?"

"I studied painting for two years, but
I'm afraid I don't have what it takes."

Votella paused to light his pipe. "I
think you are wrong, my friend. I be-
lieve every person, in his own way, can
be an artist."

"Without ability?" I asked.

"You are thinking only of painting,
sculpture, music, literature. But what
is art? I have just recently made the
discovery myself."

"I had thought you must have known
long ago," I said.

"No, it wasn't until I came here for a
rest that I found out that art is just
giving pleasure. Every real artist has
this as an object whether he works in
oil, or music, or clay, or deeds. So you
see, God has given all of us the oppor-
tunity to be great artists. It is just the
size of the audience that varies. But
then, would the Mona Lisa have been
less of a masterpiece if only a score of
people had seen it? I think you have
the opportunity to become a genuine
artist, Mr. Williams."

We were silent while I pondered his
remarks. Later, Laurie Freeman came
in and sat down to her knitting.

"I hope you two have found some-
thing to talk about," she said. "I'm
afraid things have been pretty dull here
for Mr. Davis since Winter came."

"We were discussing your painting.
Mr. Davis has just convinced me that it
would certainly win honors at the ex-
hibition," I said.

"I'm glad you agree with me," said
Votella. "I have great respect for your
opinion as an artist."

by James C. Miller

Genius



"The lovely young woman smiled but her eyes looked past me with the vast, vacant stare of the blind."

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