IT IS CHILDISH

It is childish. Jack thinks, it is childish. Everyday, he paints. Paintings filled with whites and greys. Angular paintings. Paintings of barns and oceans, old white houses facing grey seas. Ocean grey cut with white caps. There are not people in the paintings. Jack tried once. He painted a schoolhouse, a white flag pole, a red flag at half mast. It seemed appropriate to put a child in the picture. He drew a little girl sitting on the school's porch. The girl was round and soft. She looked like a refugee from another painting. Jack does not like most of his paintings. The lines are not right. The colors do not fit. Some, he just paints over. A few get stored in the back of a closet. And some are so bad that Jack throws them out. So bad, in fact, that late at night, Jack sneaks them into someone else's garbage. He does not want anyone to think that he is responsible for them.

There are a few paintings that Jack does like. The lines are almost right. The colors fit and the painting looks like it should. When the painting is right, after it has dried, he puts a green cloth over it, puts the painting under his arm, and takes it to Linda's house. Linda is a good friend. Indeed, though she had never said so, she loves Jack. When Jack brings a painting, she smiles and hugs Jack. She always tells him that this painting-this painting--is Jack's best.

One day, after months of bad painting, Jack painted a picture of a brown tree, with no leaves, leaning into a harsh wind. The lines were right and the colors fit. It was, Jack thought, the perfect picture. He could not wait for it to dry. He called Linda on the phone and asked her to hurry to come look at his picture of a tree. When Linda arrived, she looked at the painting. She walked close, she walked far away. Finally, she told Jack that it was nice. Not his best, but nice.

Jack was furious. He stomped his foot threw down his paintbrush, and ran onto the porch. Linda followed him. She told him that she liked the painting. Just that it was not his best. She also told Jack that he was being childish. Did he want her to lie. Jack told her that he did not want her to lie. He just wanted her to tell him the truth. That it was his best painting, ever. Linda told him that he was being childish. She told him that he was not reasonable. This made Jack even angrier. He went into the house, picked up the painting of the tree, and brought it back onto the porch. Linda told him to stop being childish.

After Jack hit Linda over the head with the painting of the tree, and after she stood on the porch wearing the frame of the painting of the tree, Jack realized that he had been, in fact, very childish. He thought about that as he sat in the backyard of his house. And he smiled.

Ronald Reed