

Option 1: “Letting Go” by Pamela Painter

I’m standing at the south rim of the Grand Canyon taking photographs of florid purple striations, of undulating rock that sinks to alarming depths. Soon I must stop. It is almost checkout time at my hotel, and I want to take a tub and use all their emollients, a habit my ex deplored. When a young couple approaches to ask if I would please take their photograph, I want to say, do I look like the Park photographer? This happens to me everywhere—in the Boston Gardens, at the Band Shell on the Charles, among the Cape’s dunes. Always a couple in love—like this couple in their multipocket hiking shorts and sturdy Clarks. I let my Nikon dangle from the beaded lanyard round my neck, and take their fancy smart phone, heeding their instructions. “You were always a good listener,” my ex once said, “but sometimes you have to let things go.” I line the couple up in front of the Canyon’s distant north rim, its bronze wall aglow. I wave them to the right a bit. Joined at the hip, they sidle right. As I nod and press the button, they are probably thinking I am a good photographer. Then I motion for them to step toward me for another photo. Unaccountably, they shuffle two steps back—and disappear with scrabbling sounds and tiny shrieks. Then no sound at all. I whirl around for help but there is no one in sight. On my hands and knees, I peer over the cliff’s edge, but it hides the floor far below. As if to assure myself that they were once here, I look at their photographs. They are young, expectant, with squinty smiles against the morning sun. There are two backdrops, then a blur. Breathe, I remind myself. I set the phone on a wooden bench for someone to find. It is the only evidence the three of us were here.

What is the central tension in the story and how is it resolved? Which side is privileged at the end and how do you know?

The story revolves around the tension between the narrator’s habit of being a good listener and their need, but inability to, let things go, primarily their relationship with an ex. Letting things go is probably privileged, but neither side is resolved.

How is language (repetition, figurative language, diction, or other literary devices) being used in this story? How does it add to the MOWAW?

The symbolism of the couple falling off the cliff displays the narrator’s relationship with their ex.

How is the story structured, and how does that add to the MOWAW?

The structure is plain and short, emphasizing the narrator’s lack of care. When the couple falls off the cliff the narrator continues in the same indifferent tone, displaying a lack of care for the relationship which the couple that falls represents.