

The Monument Woman

I notice her as I emerge from a puddle on the path. Petite, neatly proportioned. Long wavy hair, a graceful demeanour, and a fine face. I can see her toes poking from under the hem of her flowing skirt. Her long-sleeved chemise is of lighter material. She's not really dressed for winter, though, and must be chilly even on this mild December afternoon. Indeed, despite her stoical expression, you can tell she's in pain. Her poor hands are injured; the left one is scoured open on one side, tendons exposed. The right one has been amputated below the elbow. Her solemn, kind gaze reveals sadness and shock at the sight of the rough stump, which sticks up, insolently, as if no longer hers. And if that's not enough, there's a irritating-looking mossy growth beneath her chin.

She's different from most of the angels round here. I'm not even sure if she is an angel. She leans against an oval plaque depicting the face of, I guess, the occupant of the rectangular tomb she's sitting on. I read the inscription- "SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF JAMES JOHN BERKLEY, CIVIL ENGINEER 1819- 1862". I read that the monument was raised by Mr. Berkley's colleagues.

"In affectionate remembrance of his high social qualities as well as of the uniform kindness and consideration with which he conducted his official duties"

But who is *she*? A grieving wife? No, I think she is a protector, a wingless, worldly angel, weathering vandalism and cold with serenity, defending the memory of a decent man. And bearing the scars of acid rain, frost and violence.

I like to think when boys try to hurt her, or urinate on her stone, that she loses her patience. I think she silently rises to her feet, sending them screaming and stumbling down the drive out of the cemetery gates. Immediately from the main road would come the sound of a speeding BMW, squealing brakes, a dull thump, and then silence.

She might allow herself the flicker of a smile, before reverting to her dignified stony grace.