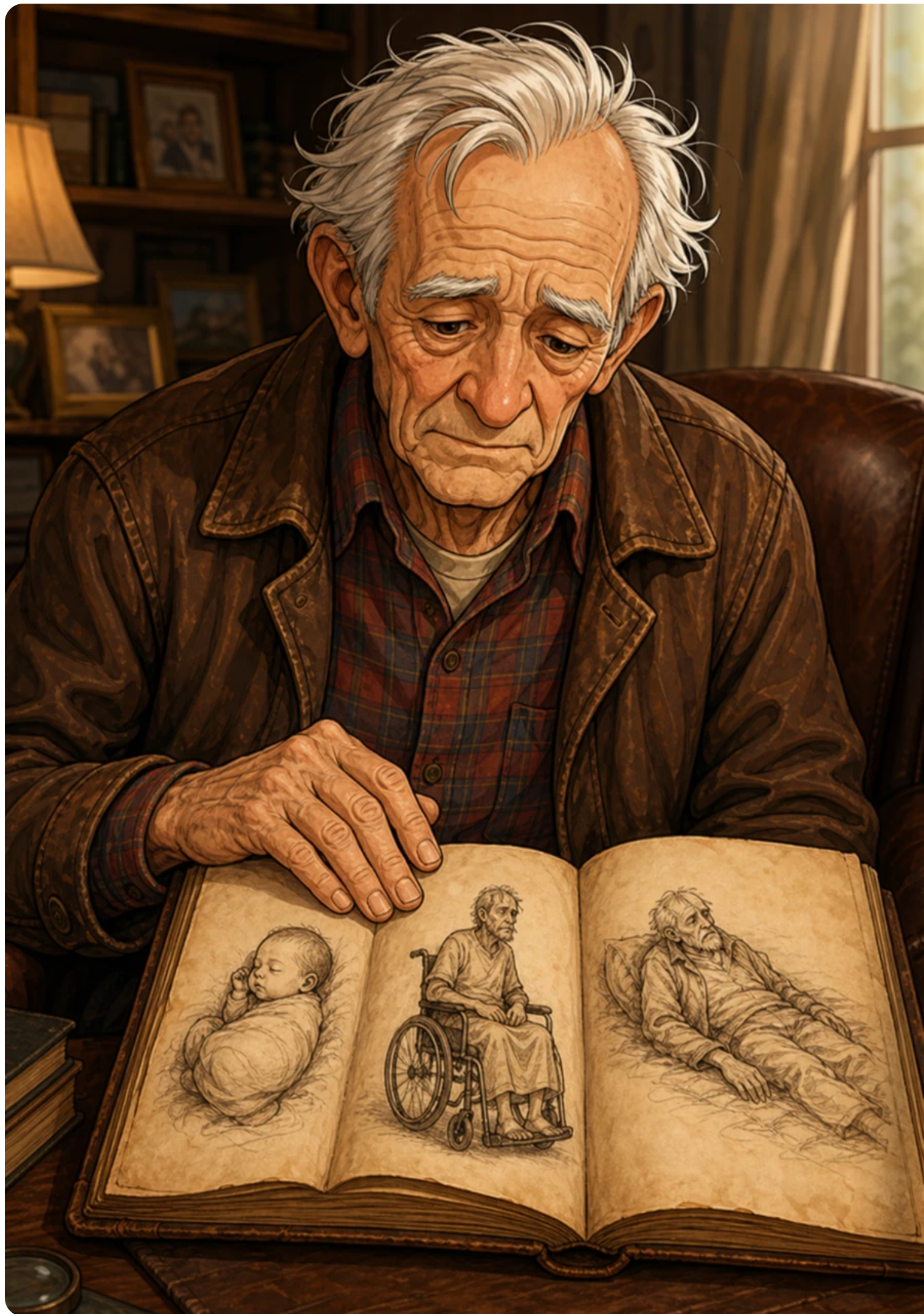




The Three Rooms of Thomas Vance

Shane Grafton



Thomas Vance runs his wrinkled fingers over an old, leather-bound journal in his quiet study, uncovering three mysterious sketches. Each sketch seems to depict a different phase of human existence, beckoning him to understand the weight of his own long life.



The room fades around him as a heavy, cold mist rolls in, pulling his consciousness into the first sketch. He feels a sudden chill in his bones, as if stepping into a place where time itself has completely ground to a halt.



He stands in a dimly lit, grimy hospital room where the walls are damp and stained with age. Five men with long, unkempt beards clad in hospital gowns inhabit the space, two resting in wheelchairs, one silently watching a flickering television screen, and two others lying on damp, unmade beds under the faded sign of Decay.



Thomas approaches the silent men, recognizing the heavy burden of physical decline and isolation that has trapped them in this gloomy ward. They do not speak, but their tired eyes reflect the sorrow of years spent waiting for a cure that never came.



Turning away from the gloom, Thomas pushes open a heavy iron door and steps into a sharp contrast of clean lines and heavy silence. The air is thick with the scent of stale tobacco, yet the room feels completely vacant of warmth.



He finds himself in a small, stark social club labeled Reckoning, where four clean-shaven men in pristine suits sit in absolute isolation. Ghostly wisps of cigar smoke drift through the air despite no one smoking, and the men stare blankly at the floor or anxiously consult their pocket watches.



Thomas walks among the suited figures, understanding that this is the cold prison of missed opportunities and regret. These men are frozen in a perpetual state of waiting, forever measuring the seconds they lost to ambition instead of love.



Suddenly, a brilliant golden light breaks through the heavy silence, and the scent of seasoned woodsmoke fills the air. Thomas follows the warmth toward a grand archway that promises a sanctuary from the cold calculations of the previous room.



He steps into a magnificent, book-lined study called Remembrance, bathed in the orange glow of a massive, roaring fireplace. Three cheerful men in their nineties, wearing navy blue Civil War uniforms and sporting magnificent mustaches, sit comfortably in leather chairs, laughing and enjoying a feast of hot roast beef.



Thomas is greeted with wide smiles and open arms as he takes his place among the merry veterans. Surrounded by the warmth of the fire and the legacy of their shared history, he realizes that the true measure of a life well-lived is found in the joy of remembrance.