

Bits of Olive

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Before it happened, Allan had spend five excruciatingly long months attending the final details of his master piece; weird, one may think, since he had finished a fully praisable oil—clearly first-class—just twenty-three days after the first brush. Annabel, his daily muse and loveable companion, constantly emphasized the wholeness of the artwork and often commented on both, the artist and the picture, about each having in them particularities that rendered them unique, odd, and above all beautiful. But Allan relentlessly discharged her complements as they were, he thought, exceedingly influenced by the overwhelming seduction of her own features competently imprisoned in the canvas and, of course, the profound love between them.

Them—there were three of them by that fifth month: the artist, the skilled tamer of nature's facets; the muse, source of everything that is worth seeing and capturing; and the art, the piece itself, which is the ultimate offspring and true evidence of the marriage of both former parts. Together they were, and together they should have remained in perfect undying harmony, in what should have always been a circle of perpetual comfort and support.

The lady dressed in oil sat there, waiting for the artist to place his signature in between the creases of her new but vintage skirt to declare her finished; still the painter kept such merits denied. It is not that Allan was ill-intentioned or sadistic; on the contrary, he was experiencing, to a greater extent than anyone else, the dreadful suffocating grasp of that little monster called Anxiety, who sits in the back of one's tongue ready to arrest each breath before it can make it through the throat. He, the artist, the creator and lord of all framed in the canvas, didn't know why, but the piece was not yet done.

The rascal reason for this unaccomplishment kept eluding him. Sometimes, he maintained, there was something odd imprisoned in the painting, something that, of course, he had not placed there willfully. Some other times, there was this something, he claimed, that was unmistakably missing, something essential for the art to be. It bugged him bad not knowing what it was. It seemed as if this fault moved, as if it changed at will. Allan chased it constantly. He thought he could sniff it and would fancy seeing it crawling up her skirt and making its way pass through her navel and up to her breasts. He felt it mocking him for not being able to actually spot it. Only after the longest hours of striking summer days sitting in front of the canvas in his studio, and only after having grown a great number of gray hairs—which, by then already had colonized his beard too—he narrowed it down to the eye section. There between the smoky lines of her irises lay the reason for his uneasiness, and the cause for the agony of the three.

Those were the caramel pupils he knew. Her gaze had not decayed on the canvas. It still communicated that loveliness of her, and all her tenderness. Allan had worked hard on this section and had actually thought he was satisfied with his performance. With every slight brush he had cast a little piece of his life with his first love; a base of gold was that light reflected from the water overflowing on the sink of their first apartment. Then there was a dark goldenrod which he spread in circles, like waves in a smooth rock pound. Those stood for that warm summer day at the beach when he, just waking up from a pleasant dreamless sleep, saw her lying next to him on the sand. Maroon carried those sentimental sunsets he had shared with her. There were also what seemed to be footprints on the beach of her iris, varying in side and tones of saddlebrown and chocolate. They all reminded him of tiny arguments they had faced and left behind. He had gently captured his passion for her in flashes of hazel and brick. And on top of all these, bits of olive celebrated the few hours in the last months that he had spent with whom he should have cared for the most.

Allan knew nobody would understand these many layers on her eyes the way he did. Perhaps people wouldn't even discern them, but he didn't mind. He knew they were there. His beloved knew they were there. Even if it was mere fancy, he enjoyed those moments profoundly in her eyes. There they lived.

Methodic as he was, he neither altered his design to add realism nor departed from the original coloring of her eye, so to retain the steps he had taken in the making of these eyes, he kept a journal of these especial moments—many of which got irredeemably lost in layering of colors, just like some memories exile others from the mind and replace them. Shaped like little haikus, they remain written on a little green notebook as evidence of the building of their love. They linger as reminders of the sowing, watering and growing of their ardor.

But what then? Allan asked himself, what then was so disturbing about those eyes? It had been months since he first asked that question, and the doubt had been even longer readable in his manner. Those eyes were everywhere, and nothing he did ever relieved him from picturing them in mid air. Sometimes it was one eye; some others the second joined to fully gaze at him, hanging by an invisible thread. Allan would eat them in his cereal and sleep on them. He would

play and see the iris reflected on his glasses, sing about each memory they represented. When he kissed, he kissed her eyes. Hours poured with him there touching, hitting, nursing, cursing, loving them. And of course, Allan also worked on his eyes. In a way, he seemed to prefer no other company than that of his bidimensional creation. It always made him feel fervent. If anything, the whole mystery of the eyes made him more involved with his art. Allan always found the greatest joy in solving problems and pushing his abilities to the extreme. By then his art was the true and only master of his heart.

I had been replaced. I only realized I could not let her steal my place when she had already taken it. Allan knew the difference between us at the beginning. We were art and flesh, alike just by aesthetics; but soon model and model intertwined, love and love. And so Allan learned that the source of the disturbance was not on the canvas. She was not the problem. How could she be? She still unchanged sat there, still bearing the same smile, the same gaze of playfulness and passion. The problem was not the "I" in there but I, the real one, the one that used to smile. That I was not me anymore. I lost that "I". That "I" was driving me insane. I was having her periods. I was sweating her hips and dieting for her. But he only observed her.

I had to change to realize and realized that I had changed. But it was only natural that I had to be the one changing. No one can gaze with love at two who were once one: I the one, mine the other; one the thief, the other one giving away willfully and blindly what was ours. Ours was no more; it became theirs. Love. I, in that relationship had been removed by then, traded for my mere outline plastered on the canvas: what I used to be, but I am no more. She is but a layer of me. And yet he loves her more.

When he named her Annabel, I knew I had to end it. By then, I was just the phantom of an idea, the mirror of a muse that was but is no more.

The discovery of his notebook came to me by chance. I had finally convinced Allan to unglue himself from the painting to take a bath, and I sneaked into his studio when he was not there. We faced each other as I opened the door and entered. She sat there governess of the room, stoic, hateful, unwholesome. I approached her and confronted her, but there were no words from either party. We just stared at each other for a minute or two. Then I caught a green flash from the corner of my eye. His notebook rested on his desk at plain sight. Going to it came to me naturally, like a gossipmonger is innately lured to open an envelope stamped "top secret." She saw me taking it, and maybe wanted me to take it. She was laughing as I took it, like she knew it would ultimately break us. Allan would be absent for at least half an hour. I had replaced his blades and nagged him about needing a shave. I knew that would buy me at least half an hour. You can do much in half an hour. I read for half an hour.

It had been going on for months, and I had denied it. The feeble pillars of my world finally shattered under the flood of clever phrases and puns in those little haikus. Some of them were stolen memories from our life together. Some others were mere fantasies. My knees trembled as I read, and my skin grew sore. I learned about his time with her, his drinking, singing, playing, reading,

dinning, and writing. He had also written about how he dressed her. God knows what else had happened in that room. A mouthful of air went too deep and made my eyes watery, and the long sigh that followed was so downhearted that it let my weeping flood the page. When the ink became too damp and blurry to read, I glanced up, and she was there, smiling to my face and saying "I've jailed him" with her eyes in bursting orgasm. Full awareness finally consumed my sanity to the bone. A rush of blood made my face feel on fire, but then I heard the bathroom door, followed by the first steps on the staircase. By the time Allan went in the studio, I was already in our bedroom.

If love is to be expressed in absolutes, then he loves her all and loves me none. Being sure about his preference only made our coexistence more painful. A muse's agony is married to her artist's disregard. We died in that set almost six months ago, when he began with her. We broke up as I removed my hand from my chin, disrupting pose. His affection for me started fading the very moment I stood up from that chair, and she captured him as I walked off the frame. This most innocuous act sealed our fates. That was the moment I left the picture, but the other two resisted their parting. Their moment lingered; it expanded perpetually. Art does not die.

It is killed. May murder never be better justified than by its exercise against the theft of love and exile of one's destiny.

Time after finding the green notebook, never mind how much exactly, I made my case strong and got Allan to host an event with me. All he had to do was to shower and shave.

When the day came I was agitated and energized. I told Allan it was the excitement of seeing old acquaintances and my parents back again. Most arrangements were already made. I had cleaned the entire house, even those minuscule places my mother always picks on. Little cooking was left, and I had bought plenty of wine: four bottles of red, one of white for my mother. There were two bottles of the King's good old whiskey, cheese and crackers.

Allan stood up from his chair, collected his towel and walked downstairs to the bathroom. I couldn't breathe the whole time he walked. The bathroom door closed and rumbled heavily as if it weighted three tons and was made of iron. I gave it a hundred and twenty seconds, and then entered the studio. The fool was still smiling. I thought about carrying a weapon but ultimately decided to do the job barehanded. The masochist never screamed. I tore her up toe by toe, brush by brush, until I reached her head and those pretty eyes of hers. What started months ago, finishes right this moment. I hold her by the neck, and I can feel her pulse pumping at my grasp. I surrender to the impulse and put it in my mouth. Glory is in ripping her with my teeth. I can flavor every little memory. I eat her, and she's filling. My blood pumps hard with each bite. I chew. I chew. I chew. I hear the shower water stop running. Chew. Chew. Chew. I swallow her at the echoing sound of the steps on the staircase. She is gone—he opens the door.