

The Tailor's Dummy

It was the tailor's dummy that finished it.

To begin with I enjoyed the process. I had time to think, to meditate even, practising the breathing, focussing on a point in the middle distance. I was turned away from him so my facial expression didn't matter so long as I maintained the pose. I could shift my gaze or ease the muscles of my face. Not much though – you'd be surprised how many other muscles move when you grimace!

He hadn't said how many sittings he would need. After about five or so the novelty was wearing off and the warmth of a golden October chilling to a grey November. The heater in the studio wasn't quite coping and the goodies he provided at breaks became fewer and less luxurious. Initially he'd bribed me into patience with cherries and chocolate. This wasn't a paying gig you understand. I was meant to be doing it for love. I understood the boundaries. No amorous or affectionate touching during a sitting. Only, ironically, after my clothes were back on. Then they might be removed again, or not. Increasingly, 'not'.

As his concentration on the work deepened, his interest in me waned. And I understood that too, the absorption of the painter. But I was human and I missed the laughter and the loving.

Then came a point when he needed me to pose only now and again to check a line or a shadow.

'Will I see it when it's finished?'

'Of course'.

The day came for me to view the painting. I had not seen it at any stage. When I pressed the buzzer on the street door, he took some time to answer. I reached the top floor. Opening the door, he apologised, 'he was busy, he'd be with me in a minute', and disappeared into the store room. Left alone in the main studio, I looked around. The easel stood empty, frames and canvasses were stacked against the wall. Where was it?

I looked across at where I had lain all these weeks. The light fell on a tailor's dummy. Some drapes lay beside it on the floor but it stood there blank and lifeless. Had it been one of those adjustable wire ones I might have handled it. They at least have a lightness about them. But the hideous solidity of the thing appalled me, not even flesh pink but a sort of faded envelope buff.

He emerged from the store.

'Oh yes, you want to see the nude?' almost absent-mindedly.

He turned over several of the stacked canvasses. Far from giving it pride of place, he wasn't even certain of its whereabouts. My excitement evaporated. I no longer wanted to see it and left the studio without saying a word. Back at street level, I glanced up and saw the tailor's dummy framed in the window of the alcove where I had posed.