

The Art Collector

He wandered the rooms of the gallery. There being no sign of his friend, he decided to start his perusal of the artwork that adorned each wall. He was no connoisseur of art in general. He liked what he liked, but the nuisance of the various styles of art escaped him. There were some pieces here that he likened to something his seven-year-old niece could produce. Then something caught his eye.

He took another sip of his Chardonnay. They had provided the free booze in the hope of loosening the inhibitions to spend money. The wine was of an inferior quality. It did contain the necessary ethyl alcohol relaxant, however, so he would put up with the taste. But there it was. It was an abstract piece. He guessed they would call it modern art, but it held a simple quality to it that resonated with him. He couldn't describe the feeling, but the artwork somehow beckoned him. It wanted him to come closer.

A young lady snuck up behind him and tapped him on the shoulder. He turned around to find his friend, Cheryl.

"There you are!" He hugged her. "I thought you had forgotten."

"Never!" She hugged him back. "Where did you get that?" She indicated the glass of wine.

“On the table ... over there.” He pointed to the table with the white tablecloth and the array of glasses next to the plates of cheese and fruit. “Hey, get me a piece of the gouda, yes?”

“Yes.” She was off to find sustenance.

He resumed his appraisal of the painting. It had a cardboard placard mounted under the frame. It stated the piece as ‘Joaquin De la Fuente: Landscape 1934’ He wondered if the piece would be in his affordability range. He needed a painting for his office and this one would fit nicely. It was the proper size and the colors of the various shapes would be a nice offset to the boring wood paneling. His friend returned.

“I got gouda and some grapes.” She beamed with pride at her successful mission.

“Thanks.” He took the cheese she had placed on a napkin and ate one of the grapes. “What do you think of this one?”

Cheryl moved back from the painting to get an idea of the entire piece all in one view. She then proceeded to draw closer and closer to the artwork looking for what he could only guess was to evaluate the technical expertise in the painting. She paused and put a finger to her lips. “Stunning!”

He smiled. He had picked a painting that she approved. It was a coup of massive proportion. She was a bit of an expert.

“It’s a De la Fuente. He’s one of the lesser known Spanish Cubists.” She paused to let the information sink in. “He’s no Picasso, but there is talent here.”

“I like the coloring. I think it will go well in my office?” He looked to his friend for confirmation.

“You know, the artist went insane.” She kept her gaze firmly on the work of art.

“Don’t say.” He looked at the art himself. “Does that make it more expensive?” He laughed.

“Maybe.” She laughed as well.

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He arrived at the office early. Earlier than normal. The day had come when his newest piece of art was to be delivered. The gallery had sent someone the day before to get the mounting hardware attached in the right configuration on his office wall, and to install the lighting that would illuminate the piece from above. He called his administrative assistant into the office.

“Chloe, have you cleared my schedule for this morning?” He had asked her the day before to do it. He revealed his nervousness by asking. She had faithfully provided him exceptional support for years now.

“Yes. You’re clear until 2 PM.” Chloe closed the door behind her as she left.

The men from the gallery arrived toting a great rectangular cardboard box. They proceeded to rip the tape that held the contents of the box inside and pulled out a large rectangular frame that was wrapped in paper. Pulling the paper away they revealed the De la Fuente for which he had paid way too much money.

The men cautiously positioned the masterpiece on the metal clips that had been installed the day before. The frame snapped in place. The men then stepped back to gauge the levelling of the frame. It seemed perfect. One of the men took a tape measure from his pocket and measured the distance from the cabinet under the

painting to the bottom of the frame. Seeing that the distances matched on both sides, the men left, satisfied with the installation.

He beamed with pride. The painting both brightened the office and gave it an air of sophistication it had previously lacked. He called Chloe to come in and admire his acquisition.

“It’s nice.” Chloe wasn’t much of a modern art fan. “It looks like a pile of Legos to me.” She smiled.

“Well for what I paid; I was hoping for more than Legos!” He smiled back at Chloe’s gentle ribbing. “Is Cheryl in yet?” Cheryl was his friend from work who had helped him at the gallery. He wanted to show her the art piece in its new home. She was responsible for it being there after all.

“I’ll check.” Chloe closed the office door.

In minutes Cheryl arrived. “Ah, there it is!” She stood back from the piece to take in its beauty. “Looks like the De la Fuente we saw in the gallery.” She laughed.

“It better be!” He wasn’t in the mood to joke. It had cost him a pretty large pile of dollars.

One by one his floor mates entered to admire the painting and left. In time he was alone with the artwork. He stood and stared. The piece mesmerized. It had silently spoken to him at the gallery, but now here, in his office, it engaged in conversation. The piece enthralled. It drew him in. Inward, into himself.



He approached the painting, responding to its lure. He was especially focused on a part of the piece where the triangles met some trapezoid like objects. The geometry seemed off. The artists had given the viewer a more three-dimensional perspective it seemed. The scene reminded him of something. Something far away from the landscape that the piece used as its title.

He mused about his past as he beheld the work. The art gave him passage into times long past. Some of those memories that it evinced were of the pleasant variety. Some were not.

“You’re two o’clock is here.” Chloe poked her head inside the door.

Had he really been staring at that painting that long? Was it two o’clock already? “OK. I see. ... Send them in.”

His clients entered the office and sat in front of his desk. He carried on a conversation with them, but afterward he couldn’t recall what they had discussed. He had spent the entire encounter fixated on the artwork behind them. The art had held him tightly in attention. The art would not let him go.

Days followed with him spending less and less time at home and more and more time in the office. He would eventually surrender to the call of the painting and sleep in his office.

His clients kept calling on him hour after hour. He did his best to accommodate their needs, but his primary focus was the art. The art was his number one priority.

Chloe opened the door to the office. "Can we talk?"

He stood staring at the art piece. "Hmmm ... I guess." He didn't even look at her.

"I'm worried about you." Chloe folded her arms and cast a serious visage.

"Hmm ... why's that?" He kept looking to the art piece. He would not look away.

"Your clients are complaining. They think you're not listening to them."

"Hmmm ... " He had no words for that.

Chloe closed the door to the office and left him in his destructive reverie.

The office, now quieter, he delved deeper and deeper into his art piece. The work was pulling the darkest and deepest fears and regrets from the most profound recesses of his psyche. The times he had failed people. The times he had failed himself. There were those he had hurt. He began to wonder if his life had meaning. He imagined his life lacked worth.

The painting asked if there was hope. Would he have a life worth living in the future. It provided no succor. The future would be more of the past. There was no indication that he could escape his vileness. He was soiled with the stain of imperfection. He reeked of failure and desperation.

The painting indicated that there was a knife of sorts on the cabinet below him. It was a letter opener, but it would do. He start-

ed slicing the blade across his neck in hopes of exposing the arteries and veins hidden underneath. The opener proved too dull. The painting insisted. 'Use the point. It is sharper.'

He stabbed and drug the point of the metal object across the neck. Blood began to flow. Not enough, for the artwork. He needed to stab harder and deeper. He obliged the all-knowing all-powerful art piece. He stabbed deep. More blood than before emerged from his body. The artwork applauded.

The door to the office opened. A woman shrieked in horror. It was Chloe. Close behind his assistant was his friend Cheryl. Cheryl tried to wrest the letter opened from his hand.

"No! I must appease it!" He pointed to the artwork. She must accede to it. It would not allow this insubordination.

With one final push, Cheryl pulled the metal opener from his hand. She turned to the painting and using the opener, she shredded the artwork from corner to corner of the frame.

He screamed. "Noooo!" He fell in a pile of bloody flesh on the floor.

Chloe took the scarf from her shoulders and applied it to his wounds. "Call 911!"

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He had spent a couple of nights in the ICU, then a couple of weeks in therapy. The doctors had worked miracles. They had exorcized the demons the painting had instilled in his mind. He could return to work.

His office mates applauded as he walked from the elevator to his office. Chloe was waiting, a cup of coffee in hand.

"Welcome back!" Her smile was infectious.

“Thank you.” His eyes betrayed the gratitude that emanated from his heart. His ‘Thank you’ was constructed for more than just a cup of coffee. “I’ve brought something with me.” He indicated the large rectangular item under his shoulder. It was wrapped in brown paper.

“Another piece of art?” Chloe looked troubled. She did not want a repeat of past events.

“You’ll love it.” He smiled. “It’s really me.”

He set the cup on his desk and took a large swig of the coffee. Placing the rectangular object on a chair he began ripping the paper away. The paper gone, revealed a work of art underneath. He gingerly placed it on the wall where the other piece had resided, then stepped back to admire his newest acquisition. “Isn’t it marvelous!?” He beamed his pride.

Chloe looked at the art piece. A smile slowly graced her face as she took in the details of the work. What lay before her was a velvet painting of the nativity. There was Joseph and Mary with the baby in the manger. The wise men and shepherds were there as well.

But the focus of the painting, the figure in the foreground, was what had caused Chloe to smile. It was the image of Elvis with an electric guitar. He was kneeling before the blessed savior in the manger. “I LOVE it!” Chloe told no lie there.

“It’s Elvis, giving the gift of Rock and Roll to the baby Jesus, get it!?” He giggled. “This is much more my speed, huh!?”

“You ain’t nothin’ but a hound dog.” Chloe closed the office door. Her fears about a relapse fully subsided.

