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## Objet d'Art

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# OBJET D'ART

*by Zina Petersen*



It's simple. I am going to take off my clothes and my watch and my glasses (so that even if I could see what time it is, I couldn't see what time it is), and go into a studio that is seven degrees, and hold absolutely still for a million years. And Marc the artist will forget that I am anything but a collection of tones and values and shapes and shades, and he will also forget that he is not responsible for what I look like.

Mumbling, he looks at me, not the canvas; he says, "I don't like what I've *done* with you."

I do things to pass the time. I count to a thousand by fives. My brain does things with pasta, designs a better alphabet, adds lyrics to the jazz on the radio—bad idea; rhyme destroys Sanborn.

The artist I'm working for now is Marc Whiting, with a *c* because it's short for Marcel. He's not French. He's from Colorado. He has a beard, and a sweater instead of a smock, and a huge collection of colors and brushes, and paintings of me.

Because I've worked with him for over a year, so he has me memorized; he knows me naked, only. He can't seem to find a model he likes any better. He knows nothing about why. I do. I am a terrific model because there is so much more grace in my body when I am in love and composing poetry about it. He knows nothing. We don't talk, we art. He's very decent and professional.

This sometimes is wonderful. Sometimes it gets hypnotic, instead of tedious, and I can feel what is going on in the colors, and I can feel which of my shadows he's moving, and I can feel that something like my own skin is growing onto the canvas, but not quite flat or tied down in two dimensions. I feel something float

over a surface—I remember being seven, having my hair braided by someone now faceless, and the kind of relaxed it did to all my muscles and all my concentration, not destroying it but relaxing it into place. My hair had nerves then, and the air, the paint, have nerves now. Marc paints and I can feel what he's painting without seeing it.

I can usually tell when something isn't coming out of the canvas right, too, because Marc starts saying things like, "talent" and "wrong, here," and "nope, nope, nope." Usually as he's putting one brush down and picking up another one, or mashing the bristles of a brush into the turpentine cup. He says it to the canvas, and then he walks from foot to foot and squints.

When he gets frustrated like that I break my pose. Shaking my left leg, and my right leg, finding out which parts of me have fallen asleep. Calves, usually. I twist my neck around till the vertebrae crunch.

The living part of his apartment is maybe six hundred degrees warmer than the studio. I think of going out there and my goose bumps go down. I want to get some sensation back in my calves. Pain, even, anything. But I try not to flex the muscles that have fallen asleep, because they hurt too much.

The calendar is Dali prints. He tried something like that once. I know because it's still propped up and dusty in his studio instead of in some hyper-expensive gallery, like a lot of his work. Very awful. Very seventies. Like a raspberry becoming a radio. A digital watch giving birth to a little pink dumptruck. But he does figures now.

There are . . . studies and sketches and oils of me, gazing at people from all over the walls of those galleries. I wonder if Marc enjoys selling my image for money. Never, never. He doesn't think about it; he has a manager. I feel an itch run through my hair and cast a spell in my head at the manager, who sells me. I think, "Art Models From HELL." Like a movie ad with slime hanging off the title.

Here goes. I fantasize that Marc strips the paint off the dumptruck/raspberry painting and there is a painting underneath of me with my clothes on. It's almost too much.

If I tried to walk right now I would move like the little tin soldier.

The modeling stand is five feet square and about two feet off the floor, made of particle board painted black, with hundreds of

chalk marks where I and other models (over a year ago) have had hands, feet, hips, elbows traced to remember our poses after a break. The stand is warmer than the cement floor. From it I can see out the window, which is dirty. The sky is dull blue, no clouds.

I don't want to be still anymore, because I have a song in my head. I think, "All of me, why not take—" I want to sing it, wrists cocked, elbows in, shoulders tense. I want to celebrate something with it.

I will come again tomorrow and the day after. I will convince him that there is something to celebrate about me. I'll come wearing a big blue sweater: clothes, Marc, look. Look at all of me.