

A Sin for God

© Copyright 2012 Perry Solomon

“You know I can kill you.”

“And so do you.”

The artist laid down his brush for a while to ease his heart of his aching laugh. Never had he heard something more cynical than what his subject had just uttered. It appeared to him as if he were a lion being answered by a lamb and his subject an unwilling prisoner before the jury. Of course, the artist couldn't have the overflowing wig of His Honour but had at least a pair of owlish glasses that contradicted the diabolic look of the eyes behind. Presently, he mixed a great slop of Prussian blue with linseed oil and buttered the canvas with the paste.

“You know,” said the painter brushing the cloth and shaking a finger, “I could have as well used something inanimate. You could be saved, the inexplicable I desire of, though. I can go to any extent for achieving what I will. I am a devotee of perfection.”

“To the extent of murder?” asked the model, posing for the artist, with an incoherent smile.

“Tut-tut, a sacrifice.”

The artist drew in a longer breath to speak further. He liked the odour of the oil and the flesh that filled his studio, a dimly-lit studio that it was, odour was more or less similar to darkness as darkness is more or less similar to death.

“I, the Artist, want to see creation in my colours, breathing emotions out to any lover of art whose likeness they may well resemble. While study of nature is crucial, the study of the living nature is indispensable. The woman of nature is, I believe, more beautiful, with all her vines and weeds, growing about her, covering her nakedness, all the birds, building their nests in her golden locks, and all petty animals, collecting food to store in her bosom, removed. It is my duty to strip of this beauty off its dead parts and study at its clean face.

The subject sighed, “You will pretty well kill her by dispossessing her.”

“Pray don't suggest me. I know, anything good could have served my purpose, but it's not for purpose alone that I paint. Art's for art's sake. I am attempting something that none on earth has ever attempted yet and I daresay none will ever. I deserve praise for this. It will hurt you much now, but, helpless that I am before my person, the ultimate product will do the work of exalting your pains, pains that you knew before you had them, pains that are old and familiar and yet, unknown.”

The master of art took to some kerosene to wash his bristles. His only no.2 round brush had performed wonderfully well in defining the iron nail tops, and if brushes had backs, he would surely have patted this one with pride. He still had to work on the blood marks. For this, he made some alterations in the posture which made the subject writhe with sudden spasm, pain following. The artist liked it that way.

He began mixing three parts of crimson to a part of lemon yellow. It exactly copied the colour of the substance the subject's body was oozing. In a sweet, mellow voice, he began, "I shall set you free, but not until my work is done. I have some final touches to add and gratitude to express for your hard work. I owe a great deal to you (I can't forget the realistic beard you wear) and to your usual words. Couldn't have done better had it not been for those precious interjections. I ought to reward you."

"Give me death." the weaker being demanded.

"Ha, you make me cry with laughter. I thought you would ask for freedom and you asked for the simplest version of it. To tell you the truth, not much of my work is left."

"Not much of my life is left either."

"Do you want a prayer?"

"I want God to forgive you."

"It is for the God."

"No, the Satan, the Satan!"

"I despise your want."

With this, the painter laid down the final brush marks. He added some more depth to the corners of the eyes and more sparkle to the tears dropping down. He picked up the highlights on the thorns, softened the effect of the lips a bit and then, suddenly, took to calligraphy. With sweeping brushstrokes, he completed characters in Hebrew, even though he didn't know the first word about them. His enormous painting of seven by five was, ultimately, complete.

Weeks later, Detective David and the force came to search down the old, abandoned house at the turn of the street in pursuit of someone they believed had committed a hideous crime. They were all in despair, but not when one of the men forced through a door to discover the secret of the attic studio. All they had found was the stinking corpse of a man in loincloth on a crucifix and an oil painting that had not yet dried.