



*Every
Picture*

Martin Lloyd

Queen Anne's Fan



First published in 2008 by **Queen Anne's Fan**
PO Box 883 • Canterbury • Kent • CT1 3WJ

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ISBN 9780 9547 1505 2

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A CIP record of this book can be obtained from the British Library.

Set in New Baskerville 10 on 11pt.

Printed in England

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EPISODE ONE

That girl was back. Short flaxen boyish hair pushed under a floppy denim cap, her blue eyes liquid with a mysterious, searching melancholy. She was back, staring at those same three paintings again. That makes it the fifth time in eight days. He wondered uneasily whether he ought to tell someone.

From his attendant's stool in the art gallery, over the last ten years Arthur Northgate had seen all kinds of customers – students who came in every day to copy some famous painting or other; ladies in tweed jackets peering through opera glasses; bent old men smelling of cheap pipe tobacco looking for a dry place to sit; schoolchildren giggling at the nudes; he had seen them all but none had intrigued him as much as this girl.

He had first noticed her early last week. Heaven knows anybody would have been noticeable at the moment for the exhibition was not popular. It was the annual offering from the local art colleges. Not his type of thing at all. Arthur Northgate did not really bother himself with art, but he did like a picture. Something pretty to look at or something with a story in it. Most of the student stuff was a bit too daubish and modern for him. Judging by the poor attendance it was also unattractive to the usual patrons for they regularly shunned these two weeks every year. It made Arthur's life easy of course. He could move his stool out of the alcove and doze discreetly in the pool of morning sun which seeped through the skylight, never quite reaching the walls.

He had been day-dreaming about his holiday in Malta when he had heard the gentle clicking of heels in the next room. He now even recognised the sound of her approach. Always the same. She would drift slowly around the room, standing before each picture for a short time before moving to the next. It was at her third visit that he had realised that she was not seeing the other pictures. Just looking at them. To him there was an

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indefinable sadness etched into the minute smiling lines around her blue eyes. But she always stopped before those three pictures at the west corner, staring intently at each in turn; sometimes stretching impatiently onto her tiptoes to scrutinise an elusive detail. Her fresh face would gaze eagerly up, as if expecting something, some reward, some signal. Then her half-open mouth would gently close to obscure her smiling teeth, her eyebrows would lower to a flat line of disappointment and her whole body would assume a slouch of dejection.

Why she came he did not know. Each to his own taste, he supposed. Give him something pretty to look at, or a picture with a story in it – that was what he liked.

Magdaline O'Neil frowned hard at the canvas but the girl in the silver-blue ball gown gazed sedately back at her with a muteness completely devoid of insolence.

'Help me! Oh please, I need help.' Magdaline addressed the picture, 'I can't do it on my own. You can tell me. You must know something. Explain. Please, please.' No answer. 'Just something, anything. Give me a lead.' Her gaze wandered around the canvas, examining and questioning details but the folds and falls of the satin, the fine broderie anglaise on the bodice gave nothing away. It was the portrait of a rich girl on her way to, or just having returned from a society ball. She was perched on the edge of a chair in a pose of frightening precariousness but one in which she managed to communicate an elegant serenity, as if she had been sitting thus all her life.

Suddenly Magdaline caught her breath. The girl had given her something after all. She stared hard at the small feet which were protruding from the hem of the gown.

'Yes! But why? Tell me why! Oh please! Why are you bare footed? You cannot dance in bare feet.'

She put her hand to her head as the blood began to pound in her temples again. The warning sign. She should stop. You cannot dance in bare feet.

'Richard, must you dress like that? You have some beautiful clothes. Clothes that a handsome young man should be proud of and yet when you deign to visit your family you come looking like a tramp!'

The Right Honourable Richard Albermarle d'Ennessy, eldest son of Alfred Ewin d'Ennessy, the Earl of Wisdene, kept any

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display of sentiment from his clear brown eyes; he simply pushed a finely formed hand through his untidy bush of brown hair and from his six feet two inches, silently looked at his mother, the countess. His frank and handsome face, glowing with years of good nourishment and healthy exercise did not betray his irritation. At twenty six he considered that he was old enough to decide for himself what he should wear.

'They are called "jeans" mother and everybody is wearing them.'

'It certainly looks as if everybody has worn yours. I almost feel as if you should be using the North Alley, not the drive. Dress like a tradesman...' She left the observation unfinished as if there were a hidden threat behind it. 'You should consider your position Richard. Do you think it is fitting for Viscount Churle, the prospective heir, to be seen running the estate dressed like that?'

'Mother, I am not running the estate. Father is as strong as an ox and has neither the need nor the intention of handing over the running of the estate to me. He has Courtney who is a fully competent estate manager and who, as I am sure you know, wears jeans on his days off.'

'We are not discussing what the staff do on their days off. That is their affair. Your father and I have always maintained a tradition of broad-mindedness with regard to our staff.'

'Lucky staff.'

'Did you say something?' She peered at him through her lorgnette and her silver grey chignon bobbed disapproval.

'Mother, you look ridiculous with that thing. Do get yourself some contact lenses.'

'And why can you not spend more time here at the Hall?' The countess smoothed down the lap of her haute couture gown and adeptly changed subject as she felt the initiative slipping away from her. 'That *taudis* you purchased in, where is it? Battersea?...'

'It's Piccadilly, mother. Just off Half Moon Street.' She knew perfectly where it was.

'Do you consider it fitting to a man of your standing?'

'It is not a *taudis* mother, it is a converted mews.'

'A mews! Why! If you had wanted to live as a chauffeur you could have moved in with Winston here. You and he have always been as thick as thieves.'

'Mother...'

'And this ridiculous art college idea. How long do you suppose

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that will last? And what good will it be to you? You are just wasting your life Richard. What good will Art be to the estate?’

Richard d’Ennessy ambled slowly across the room and peered blandly into an alcove which was partially hidden by a pilaster. ‘Grandfather bought this painting from Monet didn’t he?’ He nodded at the small framed impressionist landscape hanging in its niche. ‘I understand that grandfather knew him as “Claude” at the time. How much is it worth today mother? His knowledge of art certainly did the estate no harm.’

‘Don’t be insolent Richard. Thank goodness Charles has a sense of proportion, unlike his elder brother.’

‘Charles wanted to study agronomy mother, you know full well he did. He has always wanted to do something like that. I have always been drawn to... other things.’

‘You never stick at anything for more than two minutes... Yes John?’

It rankled with the Countess of Wisdene to employ a head butler whose surname was also a perfectly good Christian name, but the manner in which she enunciated his name ensured that it could never be misinterpreted as a display of unsavoury intimacy.

‘Mrs. Littlewood is here ma’am.’

‘I’ll see her in the blue room. Bring sherry in fifteen minutes.’

‘Very good ma’am.’

‘I shall leave you to your work mother.’ Richard flicked his hair from his face and kissed her forehead. She held his wrist.

‘You know I don’t like you doing that Richard.’

‘Yes you do mother.’

‘Are you going straight back to town?’

‘Shortly.’

‘Do try to be here for our “at home” this weekend. Vanessa will be here.’

‘Good old Vanessa,’ Richard mumbled to himself.

‘Yes, Good old Vanessa.’ His mother’s ears were like radar. ‘She will not wait for ever Richard.’

He stood on the south terrace and looked distractedly across the park. High on the opposite hillside a small herd of deer was moving in and out of sight as they browsed the Long Covert. Down on the lake the September mist lay motionless over the black water like a diaphanous blanket. Four hundred acres made the park, eight thousand the farm, not counting the two hamlets, the countless hundreds of acres of woodland leased out and

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several hundred commercial properties in the centres of the county's major towns – witness to his father's acumen.

It could all just jog along without him. He scraped his sneakers on the grey stone and worried a weed which had niched itself in the step. He could hear footfalls scrunching on the gravel and, around the corner of the South Wing ambled Blase, the head gardener. Richard nodded at him absently and Blase touched his cap and came over to him.

'It's going to be a mild winter Master Richard,' he pronounced solemnly as he bent and, gripping the weed with knurled, arthritic fingers, twisted it from its forbidden lodging with an expert jerk of his wrist.

'Is Winston in the mews?'

'Yessir. Washing that *auto-mobile* of his and letting the soapy water run all over my prize rhubarb.'

'I'm sure that must be the secret ingredient that wins you all the rosettes, Blase.'

'Yessir,' he grunted, unconvinced.

Winston was leathering the windscreen of Richard's garish yellow open top two-seater as if he expected it to give birth imminently.

'Fancy a spin Winston?' Richard suggested mischievously.

'Bless me no sir.' Winston lowered his corduroy bottom to the running board of the Daimler. 'It's a long time since I was a lad.'

'How old are you Winston?'

'Old enough for that question to be an impertinence even from you, Master Richard.'

Richard grinned sheepishly. 'No, I suppose you would not know what to do with a car like mine.' He patted the high black bonnet of the limousine. 'You stick to your tank.'

'Do you think that I've never driven a sports car, Master Richard?' Richard's eyebrows rose in surprise. Winston chuckled. 'I'm not completely senile. The twin tailpipes means it's probably got the Rover V8 engine in it. Right?' Richard nodded. 'So it's a pig in the corners even with those tyres.' Richard was astonished at the old man's deductions. Winston chuckled and leaned forward. 'I used to hill climb in an Austin Seven Special when I was your age.' Richard suddenly felt very foolish. 'Don't write me off Master Richard just because I drive a 1937 Daimler.'

'No I won't.' Richard looked down at his sneakers. Winston always had this ability to bring him down nicely. 'How long have

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you been with us Winston?’ Winston shuffled sideways to make space for him on the running board.

‘I served your grandfather for ten years. This was his car. He said to me, “Winston, if you are going to be my chauffeur you’ve got to choose the car you will be happy to live with. And I mean live with.” And he poked me in the chest with the stem of that pipe of his. So I said to him, “If it’s all the same to you my Lord, your comfort is paramount. I would suggest the Daimler with the fluid flywheel.” “Winston,” he says to me, “I was thinking only of my comfort. The Daimler it will be”.’ Winston chuckled. ‘Selfish bugger, your grandfather.’

Richard laughed. ‘Is that why we have never sold it?’

‘We have never sold it because it still works perfectly, Master Richard. There’s too much of this planned obsolescence for my liking.’ He flicked a speck of dirt from the polished brown leather of his shoes with the corner of his chamois. ‘Spending a lot of time in the big city Master Richard,’ he said without looking up. ‘Got a girl up there have you?’

Richard felt himself flushing. ‘No Winnie I haven’t and that’s the truth.’ The man waited patiently. ‘I don’t know what I want to do yet.’ He looked at the warm red brick of the yard, the trickle of soapy water wending its unerring way to the rhubarb. He recalled the hours he had spent playing here as a child, under Winston’s uncomplaining feet, losing his tools, putting sticky fingers on the newly cleaned glass. ‘Sometimes I feel I don’t belong here. Not really. It’s alright for Charles – he takes to nature and growing things and all that palaver like a horse to its nosebag, but lately I have felt sort of unsettled.’ He looked across at the ruddy face and the silver hair. The old man said nothing. ‘So I am going to live in London and study art. Go to college. Do it properly.’ He put on a brave face.

‘Your grandfather was a one for pictures, you know. You shan’t go wrong. And you’ll be back. There’s people here who will be awful glad to see you, Master Richard, you mark my words.’

Jennifer Pye hated the tube. She hated being hemmed in but when you are only five feet three inches tall there is not much you can do. She sometimes wore her heels, which made her five feet five but merely gave her a close-up view of the next button higher up the shirt. And when you wear your golden brown hair loose, down to the small of your back, a day in the tube renders it lank and grimy. Struggling with an art folder on the escalator

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usually degenerated into a thin parody of the classic circus act with the plank as she turned this way and that to avoid hurrying passengers but merely succeeded in obstructing others.

'Excuse me. Excuse me please.' She began pushing towards the door as the train screeched into Sloane Square. 'Excuse me. Could you let me off please? Look I want to get off.'

'Got big feet for a little girl ain't yer?'

'I'm awfully sorry. Could you please just... Excuse me. Excuse me.'

She looked despairingly at the red and blue backpack which towered above her. Why did these people have to travel at rush hour? Couldn't they wait just a little while before starting their holidays?

'No good talking to him, he's a Kraut. He won't understand. Give 'im a shove.'

Jennifer reached up and shook the bulging canvas. She might just as well have been a tick on an elephant's back for all the response she elicited.

'Oh please, please could somebody just...'

'Mind the doors!'

The mass of travellers jolted as the train moved off. The German backpacker trod heavily on her foot.

'Ouch!' She kicked back as hard as she could with the toe of her plimsolls. The youth turned. 'Now let me get to the doors!' she ordered angrily and elbowed him roughly in the ribs. He ambled aside like a dozy cow in the milking parlour.

By the time that the train had crawled into the next station, Jennifer Pye had wormed and squirmed her way to the very front of the automatic doors. More screeching of brakes, and commuters gripping armrests, pressing involuntarily against their neighbours. She stared stupidly at the doors. They did not open. Wrong side of the carriage for the doors. She thought they changed sides at Victoria, perhaps it was South Kensington. Why did things like this always happen when she was in a hurry?

'Excuse me. Getting off! Getting off!'

'Not you again. Make up your mind!'

She forced her way through the knot of commuters by tucking her art folder under her arm as a lance and then squealed in shocked surprise as someone pinched her bottom whilst she was squeezing through the closing doors.

'Pervert!' she mouthed through the glass at a grinning face as the carriage drew away. She had no idea if it was the culprit and

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cared less.

Buckingham Palace Road was thronging with people intent on their own selfish purposes to the exclusion of all else. Buffeted and baulked, she fought her way along the pavement. It would take her an extra twenty minutes now to reach her destination. By the time she arrived at the Sloane College of Art & Design she would be well down the queue for enrolment. What a way to start the academic year!

'That's just what I could do with,' she muttered grimly as a bright yellow two-seater coasted down the street, its powerful motor burbling softly. She watched the rather dishy young man searching vainly for a parking space. 'Perhaps not,' she decided. 'All right for the back roads of Nottinghamshire. That's where it would be really fun.'

The car testily shot down a side street and out of sight; Jennifer Pye was seeing it still but with herself lounging in the passenger seat as it zipped along the lanes back home. But of course Steven would have been driving it. She could remember his strained face on the platform as the train had pulled out of Nottingham Midland. He should not have bothered to have come, it had been all over by then, irrevocably. His presence had given her no pleasure, not even the perverse one of knowing that he had had to leave that girl's bed in order to be there.

'Will you write?' he had said.

'No.' And she had kept her word. But she had cried all the way to London.

London. Sometimes she hated the place. Most of the time she hated the place. Dirty, noisy, smelly, busy, friendless. Perhaps she should have insisted on going with her parents but then the temptation of starting out in the world to make her fortune at the age of twenty two had been too great...

'Jennifer luv, yer Mam and I want to talk to you.'

'What is it Dad?'

'Come and sit on the arm of me chair luv. Well I, that is, yer Mam and me have made this decision and it's right you should know straight away.'

'Will I like it Dad?'

'We're going to live in Spain, luv. We're moving.'

'Spain! I thought you only went there for holidays. Where will you go for a holiday when you live there?'

'It'll be holiday every day, luv. You know the sun is good for

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your Mam's joints. We're going to buy a little place down there. What with the money they gave me when they shut the pit and the bit we'll get for this place we shall be all right for the rest of our lives. I've seen the pension people and they say they can pay us direct down there, so we won't want for nothing.'

'What'll I do Dad? Where shall I live?'

'You've always been an independent girl, Jencie. And you're the only treasure we've got so yer Mam and me decided that you could have the money from our endowment that comes up in six months. Set you up in whatever you want to do. You've always had projects haven't you Jencie?'

And so they went to Spain and Jennifer moved into a bedsit above a pet shop and began looking for the property she needed. This was when Steven had come on the scene.

'Miss Pye?'

'Yes.'

'It's Steven Hadden from Rowbotham's.'

'Yes?' She fiddled with the telephone cord absently. She had vaguely noticed Steven Hadden as the office junior at the estate agents; she had not realised that he dealt with the clients.

'You asked us to look for a small boutique with flat over...'

'Yes that's right. Have you got one?'

'We have a selection of properties which might suit you.'

'Brilliant! I'll be straight round.'

'No.' His voice was sharp with a discreet anxiety. 'No, Miss Pye, in circumstances such as these it would be more appropriate if we discussed this over lunch, our compliments of course. Shall we say the King's Head at one o'clock?'

Steven exuded confidence and soon became a valued business adviser with an answer for everything. Jennifer thought that the boutique was too expensive, it would take all her endowment but, as Steven explained, it was on an important through route with lots of passing trade. Once she had bought it, she could mortgage it and use the money to buy the stock. She would be saving money of course by not having to pay herself rent for the flat over. She would have realised none of this had not Steven been there to guide her.

The next few months were a whirl of painting and papering, carpeting and carpentry as they converted the former greengrocer's into 'Fashion Pye' the newest and trendiest boutique in Nottingham City. Well not quite in the City but near

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enough to the centre, Steven assured her.

She came to rely upon him more and more. He was there when the man came from the council and started asking about why she had not applied for 'Change of Use Permission.' Steven had taken the papers away and done his magic and she knew she need no longer worry. It was Steven who had found the builder for her late one Sunday night when she had discovered the rain dripping into the stock room through the old porous lead flashing on the chimney.

And eventually, inevitably, it was Steven who had climbed into her bed one afternoon when he should have been at the office and she in the shop. He was dynamic, he was energetic, she was trusting, she was blindly in love.

When Jennifer had discovered that working in your own business meant no free time, Steven had found Julie, his sister's friend, who 'could do the job standing on her head'.

When the hoped-for customers had not materialised, Steven had found an agent to finance the loan necessary to buy the new season's stock. Whatever she needed, Steven was able to provide it. How could she have been so stupid?

Popping into the shop, unannounced, one afternoon, she had not even questioned Julie's flushed face as she had hurried down from the stock room. It had not occurred to her that Julie might not have been alone.

When the enforcement order had arrived from the Council's Planning Department, explaining that she should sell vegetables or close the shop, she had realised that the council must have made some kind of bureaucratic mistake. Had not Steven already sorted this out?

Then one afternoon when she sat alone, wondering where Julie had got to and unable to contact Steven at the office; alone in a deserted shop before which Steven's 'passing trade' passed but did not stop, a shop crammed full of stock which nobody wanted to buy but for which she was paying an outrageous rate of interest, the building society's bailiff called and within an hour she was out.

The Right Honourable Richard d'Ennessy, Viscount Churle, had felt neither right nor honourable as he had dodged the early shoppers in the King's Road. He had not been right to use his car in London at this time of the morning and had committed a dishonourable act in parking it in a private road near the

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Embankment. And now that he was inside the towering black brick monstrosity which proclaimed itself to be the Sloane College of Art & Design he felt distinctly out of place.

All of the students and most of the lecturers appeared to be years younger than him. He had never thought of himself as old at twenty six. They also all knew where they were going and what they were supposed to be doing. They had no time for somebody who did not understand directions like, 'The reg. list is by the refec.' or, 'Try the sec's. office on the Mez.'

He would have one last try. That girl with the big folder, just squeezing through the doors. She looked as if she knew what she was doing. He would ask her.

'Excuse me, could--'

'Oh shit! My best jeans! Just look at that will you?' She fingered the loose flap of her pocket where the door latch had ripped it. 'I shall sue the college for a million pounds.'

'I am sure you would win,' he observed with feeling. He felt his breath had been taken away by this little bundle of energy.

'Hold that a minute!' The art folder was thrust into his arms and he watched her fresh face frown and pucker in concentration as she fished a safety pin from her bag and twisted around to repair the rent. A neat body, Richard observed as the denim tightened across her pelvis. A bit Botticelli – heavy around the abdomen. And that cascade of golden brown hair...

Poor lamb looks a bit lost. Jennifer eased the pin through the welt of the denim. Nice dresser, those clothes must have cost him a packet. Long legs, cosy and snug in corduroy, broad shoulders casually wrapped in a lambswool rollneck. Cultured talking voice, I wonder what subject he teaches?

'Thanks duck!' She grinned impishly. 'First day at school?'

'Yes, I am rather lost.'

'Where should you be? What's your department?'

'I'm doing the Art Foundation Course. What are you doing?'

'Advertising and Fashion Design. Second year.' He felt her eyes sweep him from head to foot with a detached curiosity. 'Art Foundation Course? Oh you'll want the Daubers' staff room. Down the end of the corridor, up the stairs, blue door on your left.'

He returned her art folder, a little confused. 'I don't think I'm looking for the staff room. I am looking for Enrolment.'

'Enrolment? What for? You mean you are a student?' He

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nodded self consciously as if being addressed as a student in the corridor of a college of further education were somehow incongruous. 'I thought you were a lecturer.' She gave a little grunt which defied interpretation. 'Follow me.'