

Painting Blinkers

“The purest and most thoughtful minds are those which love colour the most.”

On interviewing possibilities for the challenge of being my Assistant; I asked them to tell me their favourite quote - as I feel it is a way of showing one's personality in the words of a more literary hero. I simply sent those away who stated they didn't know any, and mentally dismissed those who used well-known ones that they didn't really understand or live by, as their answer. When I had narrowed down the finalists (so to speak) I turned to the last in the line, and immediately felt an urge towards him.

Benedict Swift was a tall male, with normal brown hair and a normal smile (when I use the word normal, I place it on the page to help you with little imagination to picture this man). The only distinctive things were his eyes, almond shaped, one brown to match his hair and the other an intense blue of the most lurid tone. He was a classic English gentleman, but with an underlying Welsh accent which gave his voice spice and flavour.

I'm an avid lover of quotes and feel that you should know that my views can only some times be expressed in the alphabet of others.

And this was the perfect answer to my interview question: “The purest and most thoughtful minds are those which love colour the most.” This stayed with me from when Swift's mouth formed those words, and has come back during the write up of this report. The crime I am about to describe ties in divinely with that phrase.

I, Illiyana Gray, have a passion for art and anything to do with the brush strokes that knit our culture together. So when 'The Vertical' came on show in the local art gallery, I took it upon myself to perform my special skill – 'digging.'

"The Vertical" had disappeared from a gallery when I was a young girl (20 years ago now, how the years have flown). I questioned Swift about my doubts and concerns. He granted it was a little peculiar that it had suddenly re-emerged after all this time but after assuring me that art prices had soared sky high recently, he told me to let the matter rest. I often resent the trust he has in people: "the trust of the innocent is the liar's most useful tool" is a quote I particularly enjoy. It reflects reservations I have in anyone (but it is not often my self-assurance is tested!) and, with hindsight, shows how wrong my companion could be.

Being restrained from any task makes me want to interfere all the more. After some burrowing I found that the painting was sold anonymously to the gallery for sums of money I couldn't get my head around. It was my belief that the public in the gallery was viewing a mere copy for an outrageous £5 entrance fee.

"In this world, emotion has become suspect - the accepted style is smooth, antiseptic and passionless." To me this means that it is always those who feel something for the 'victim' that are a suspect.

Let me take you to the crime scene (if you can even call it that) and tell you as if you were there, not in my past, but in your present.

I walked into the Gallery at 7.26, having woken 42mins previously. It was light and spacious in the rooms with Van

Gough and Monet, always crammed with people who don't comprehend the magnificence, but I lurked in the dark rooms, where secrets are kept. Here I met a disgruntled Swift tousle haired and pale; he greeted me with a gruff nod, as if he didn't want to be there.

"I know you are waiting to be left to explore and bring back news"

A small smile escaped his lips...

"How are you so sure?" he ventured still acting splendidly.

"It is plain to see my dear Benedict, you were never one to hide body language. Your hands were twisting minutely showing you are raring to go and photograph, question and are anxious to discover. Your torso is bolt upright despite your assurance that you are sleepy and to prove you are acting: you have two of the most alert eyes I have ever seen for someone who is 'not wanting to be here'"

"Farewell, fair cruelty."

Left alone, I looked around the room and targeted a man who looked like a good place to start:

Dress: Waistcoat – mark of a man how has done well in life.
Shiny buttons – newly bought suit, or regally polished. Clean trousers – very little outside work, slow work, involving sitting

Place: Gallery – in the art world, staying at a painting for a long time each.

Body Language: Eyes – slightly twitching, picking up on minute details. Hands – thumbs spinning, showing one part of

mind is fully concentrated but other half is unaware of activity.

Conclusion: An art dealer here to debate prices on paintings, his new clothes demonstrates a sudden and recent increase in business. Walking over to him I exclaimed:

“What an unusual cuff link matching sir” (one was a smart new postage stamp the other a old pencil). He turned and smiled and quickly engaged me in a dull conversation about sentiment – how I hate it when feelings get dragged into an answer when the statement was merely a trick to find out snippets of their past.

After a long introduction I discovered he was Mr. Charles Irving, an art dealer I had read about in the paper only a few weeks ago who had shot out of nowhere when he sold a painting - the name was not released. I asked him to sign a piece of paper for me as I admired ‘his perseverance until success was reached’, a memento for me to endure. The real purpose of this was the ink, although he hadn’t painted his signature I could always trace it back to the maker and where our suspect had been recently.

I swished away, my long blond hair dancing behind, to re-find my assistant and companion (he seemed simply enlightening after my encounter with Mr. Irving.)

“I met the overseer of the wing where the Vertical is on show. Goes by the name of Ariana Jones,” said my confidante “a dignified gal who seems to think she can get away anything.”

I was pleased with Swift’s sharp uptake on tones and poise; he had come so far since the day I first took him with me on a small job concerning theft. He saw everything, but didn’t understand a splinter of it. “Wisdom begins in wonder.”

“We also have a rich art dealer to manage, rather dull and when flattered will do anything. He shows self-doubt. I reckon he could be the winner of our art competition so to speak! I do not think he had it in him to do it himself but I wouldn’t put it past someone like him to commission a forgery.” I drawled. “He is that type.”

My naïve comrade looked confused and asked “of what type are you referring to?”

“One who has low self-esteem and desires fame and will do anything to achieve it however low that feat may be: plain, simple, soft, left out at school, family argument, sibling high achievement, bookish, dreamer really, hard exterior.”

Benedict looked astounded,

“Easy to tell my dear Ben, he lives alone judging by the creases in his shirt, and a family member didn’t tell him how; sibling overshadowing I am guessing as it ties in nicely. School exclusion was easy- he has a small, old scar on his hand, I notice when he showed me his cufflink, it has a slightly ‘lumpy’ texture which could be caused by stones in the wound, pushed over at school seemed a good explanation, then I notice a writing mark in the third finger of his left and right hand – a left hander that taught himself to be right handed (also ties in with family – traditional father?) he also had a tinge of a lameness which he would have been pushed around for at school due to lack of sporting accomplishment in those days, so I concluded school bullying. What did you pick up from Ariana?”

“Well I am not sure how accurate this is but... she is married, most likely a while as her ring is fairly scratched, but happily because it is shiny, Children maybe? Passionate about art, she

has paint on her hip – young children in her arms while paint was on her hands could fit. Welsh background listening to her accent but moved away as a child as it has faded” at this point I interjected “Ariana is a Welsh name, meaning “Holy one (less commonly Silver)””

Swift continued “she had a cross about her neck but that could just be a symbol. Mentioned many friends she had in the art world, Liv Phelps, Emma Star, Michael James, and Alan Watkins. A slight namedropper but has high self-esteem. And that’s as far as I got.”

“Brilliant! Fantastic! I am sure she will not mind me questioning her about her ‘friends’ I have met Miss Star, a critic in the world of surrealism, the area where our painting is from. It would be interesting to talk to her about the time “the Vertical” was painted, disappeared and the basic work used in paintings. I am sure she has her own suspicions about the copying of the Vertical.”

I wandered up to Ariana, surveying her. Swift had been completely correct apart from the fact that she had dark circles framing her eyes: she had been up late, working. On what, I was to discover soon.

I decided that a person from her prep school would fool her, she wouldn’t want to appear rude so would pretend she knew me and assumed she had just forgot another face from her youth.

“Ariana, Darling its you. Haven’t seen you in so long.” She looked confused thank goodness. She didn’t recognise me from around and about the world. “It’s me, Illiyana from prep school!”

“Why, so it is. How are you? We completely lost touch... Come round to me tomorrow lunch time and we will catch up, I’m afraid I have my friend Emma Star with me today. She’s a dear friend, do you know her? She is rather well known!?”

“I know Emma very well. I have met her around here a lot you know. She is a dear friend of mine too.”

I walked straight past Swift home – he looked hurt but used to it. I often just have an idea and mosey away. With an hour before lunch I decided to pursue my suspect and do so with the force of my personality: charming, well turned out and creative.

The Jones’s house after surveillance was full of hints just waiting to be given:

Walls: Covered in prints of paintings (ones that can be viewed in the gallery): *loves art and will show her career to any one in a heartbeat*

Mantelpiece: littered with songs of praise and photographs: *wants school reports full of praise to show that children are bright. On looking closer different pieces of report are stuck together, her children were good at art, religion and science in general.*

Husband opens door, Ariana wafts downstairs.

She is the one that talks and slithers up to the ones with power. “Woman is the dominant sex. Men have to do all sorts of stuff to prove that they are worthy of woman's attention” obviously how this woman’s mind works! Not the best way of thinking.

I sauntered into the main room, and met a whole host of people. Emma Star was the one I was looking for, and I spotted her.

Shirt - Tie Dye, multi coloured

Trousers – casual jeans

Hair – Down, clean, wind swept

Her casual attire compared to everyone, showed me who she was, vivacious, charming and out going, by the use of her bright clothes and comfort in wearing the wring clothing type, but it was all a lie knowing her she would be wearing black and grey, she is justly shy.

I walk past her many times surveying her up and down.

She seemed like a straightforward girl - your average human. She did have long nails (not that those are bad, but they had a huge amount of dirt under them!). I engaged her in a conversation and learnt about the history of “The Vertical”.

I left soon after that as socials aren't really my thing and I headed to the gallery. At 7.03pm the gallery was shut, and the shadows came out. With a few fellow crooks I was able to scratch a few fibres of paint from the top left hand corner of the painting.

I had an hour and 16mins to utilise. So I decided to brave the world of technology! Not a happy prospect, it taking most of the detective's jobs away. And I couldn't ask Swift for help, always talking of history and never looking forward, but he

does occasionally sprint ahead with an idea so great that I cannot judge him to harshly.

Sitting at the machine, as I call it, I skimmed the web for the latest auctions to see if I could follow up on C. Irving. The lists were endless but I did not deter from my self-set task. I would not the Internet defeat the notorious Illiyana Gray, detective, mastermind, genius, and recreational artist.

Charles Irving had been furiously buying and selling paintings from a set “the Vertical” belongs too.

- Horizontal
- North
- West
- South
- East

And he had recently sold an unnamed painting that wasn’t any of the following that he hadn’t bought from anywhere I could find, forgery? Could be.

I rushed to Ben’s house with an idea and favour.

I hurried in with the key I had made – he didn’t know I had it but what if I really needed him.

Though the door into the sitting room I flashed.

It was a cramped room, small but full of armchairs, and the walls lined with books the size of tome-stones, illustrating Benedict’s passion- history. Every wall was lined with articles that had anything to do with the past. But one which was used for an investigation. Currently plastered in “the Vertical”, Irving and Jones and Emma Star’s number. I added to this a small sealed plastic bag containing the auction records and the paint sample I had stolen from the museum with a sticky note labelled “please analysis.”

Emma's bungalow was a little way from centre of London.
After an insightful conversation I noticed things about her:

Clothes dark – she felt comfortable about me to show who she was. She felt safe in my presence.

False nails- odd really, as she has long strong ones could have painted them, no opinion.

Bag on table- had a full day of artwork.

Nothing else really.

I grabbed her wristed as said “time” and hurried off my fists closed.

I dashed back to my friend's home. As I walked in he rebuked me for breaking and entering and having my up in front of the police. And then stopped when I reminded him I was the police.

He did however give me the results of the paint, so he couldn't have been that mad.

The paint proved this was no art dealer keeping the painting till the time was right. This was forgery, but in disguise. The paint from “the Vertical” showed to be artificially based, and this would not have been around in 1801.

But after I few more visits to suspects and people in the art world and the lab. And proving it was not Ariana as she had not trace of paint in her house (I am afraid I did some midnight trips to my suspects home)

I had the answer.

I stood in front of Benedict Swift and announced:

“I think you will find the Miss Emma Star was your culprit.”

He looked as amazed as I had felt when I had worked it out myself, you would not have thought that a wallflower would have drawn her way into court.

“I know this because:

She had dirty fingertips and nails, long and strong, when I next saw she had not only completely covered her nail but also had guaranteed herself hidden finger tips from the paint, which aster analysis proved to be difficult to wash off.

Then I noticed a small door in off her corridor that I slipped into when going to the bathroom, I found papers, and official documents, magazines and more, a room where paper of importance where kept, where no drink had ever step foot. But there was a watermark on the desk made recently by cold water. She had been working n something in there out of the usual that had left a mark from a water glass and the paint proved to be water paints.

Finally I noticed something on her watch, when I was checking to see if she had been traveling lately. She had not, been at home for a long time.

On the pretext of looking at the time I extracted it and evaluated the strand. It presented it self to be a paintbrush bristle that had been bought and used recently.

So there you are, didn't even ask someone to do it, she did it her self, and didn't quite finish tidying away.”

Honor Bailey

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Shell C Mr James

“You are a marvel!” Ben said astounded