

MASTERPIECE

or Intimacy?

by Darren Van Michael

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CAST LIST

ANTON	the husband who's recently taken up painting
MOLLY	his wife, the reluctant subject

SETTING

Anton's studio.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Atmosphere is more important than getting an accurate set. A simple easel, stool, and a pool of light would work. Also, background music underscoring the pretention of Anton's workspace may play such as Billy Joel's "Waltz No. 1 (Nunley's Carousel)" and "Invention in C Minor".

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At rise, ANTON sits behind an easel, brush and paint in hand, classical music is playing in the background. Opposite him, we see MOLLY in a robe standing next to a tall stool in a beam of light from a large window on the other side of the room. ANTON studies her and occasionally puts brush to canvas. MOLLY seems uneasy in the robe.

ANTON

Ok, hold still. Just a bit more.

MOLLY

(sighing)

How much longer?

ANTON

Honey, you have to stand perfectly still. I need to get the shading correct and if you move, it screws up the entire perspective.

MOLLY

Sorry.

ANTON

Just hold still a moment more.

MOLLY

Am I going to get to see it soon?

ANTON

Just a minute longer. No, the hands aren't right. Forget the hands. I just won't do hands.

MOLLY

I'm not going to have any hands?

ANTON glares at her briefly to hold still. MOLLY stands as still as her patience will allow. She tries to subtly blow a piece of hair out of her eyes. She fails and blows again.

ANTON

Molly!

MOLLY

I'm sorry. When I agreed to do this, I thought this was going to be more...sexy. Fun.

ANTON

It will be. Just one more second.

MOLLY

One more second. One more minute. Jesus. Anton, this is not what I had in mind.

ANTON

Ok, got it. Now. Lose the robe.

MOLLY

Lose the robe? Just like that?

ANTON

Just like that.

MOLLY

(playfully)

No foreplay?

ANTON

Honey.

MOLLY

Ok. Ok. God, this is nothing like I thought it would be. What are you painting anyway? First with clothes then without? I agreed to do this because I want to be supportive.

ANTON

You are. You are. Now lose the robe.

MOLLY

Seriously, Anton. So like are you going to hang this in our bedroom or is it part of an exhibit? Can I see it?

ANTON

You are never going to see it and it's an assignment. An experimental piece. The whole thing sort of evolves. One pose morphing into another. I want it to reflect all of you. I had to capture the face first. The eyes. Now I move onto the body. So if you would please...

MOLLY

Ok. Ok.

MOLLY drops her robe to reveal that she is wearing a negligee and lacy panties.

ANTON

Molly. Really? This is a nude portrait. You said you were comfortable with that.

MOLLY

Yes, I was. I am. But I thought that was just an excuse to get me naked so we could...you know. Have fun. What do you mean I'm never going to see it?

ANTON

I just can't, Molly. It's not finished. And even then – Look, I need you to be completely nude for this painting to work so if you're not comfortable, I can get another model.

MOLLY

What?! No. I'll do it. I don't want you to replace me with anyone else. I'll do it.

ANTON

(indicating her lacy underwear)

So. Lose the...

MOLLY

It's a negligee, Anton. And it's new.

ANTON

Well, it's beautiful. Now, I have a lot of work to do here.

MOLLY

Can't you even ask me in a nicer way? Make it sexy or something?

ANTON

Honey, this painting is not sexy. It's a portrait of something primal. A raw emotion. Exposed. Possibly shocking.

MOLLY

That doesn't sound sexy.

ANTON

No, well, it's not supposed to.

MOLLY

I want to look sexy. I want others to look at it and covet your wife.

ANTON

That's not what this is about. Honey, we're losing the natural light from the window. Are you in or out?

MOLLY

I'm in. Ok. Jesus. Do you treat all of your models this way?

ANTON

That's not fair. You know that's not fair. This is my first attempt at something human. I chose you because, well, my teacher said I couldn't paint any more fruit and no landscapes. He definitely made that clear. That's another class.

MOLLY

You're going to show this to your teacher? That's weird and a little creepy.

ANTON

He's a professional artist, Molly. He's very accustomed to the naked body. Now, please, honey, lose the underwear.

MOLLY

All of this talking has really killed the mood for me.

ANTON

Good. Now get naked.

MOLLY

Good?

ANTON

Yeah. Don't think of this as sexy time or fun time. This is business, Molly. This is my art. I need a naked body for my art.

MOLLY

I liked you more when you were painting fruit.

ANTON stares at MOLLY begging for a concession. After a brief silent standoff, MOLLY begins to undo her top, but she turns her back to ANTON, playfully trying to rekindle something.

ANTON

What are you doing?

MOLLY

Getting naked for my man. You want to see?

ANTON

Molly, I've seen you naked before. Now, come on, before we lose the light and you're going to have to lose the bottoms too.

MOLLY

Um, I didn't...um, I probably should have shaved...more. It's like a rain forest down there right now.

ANTON

Honey, it doesn't matter.

MOLLY

To you maybe. But if people are going to see me completely bare then I want to look good. If I take all of this off, will you fix some things?

ANTON

Fix things? Fix what?

MOLLY

You know, groom me...down there. Fix my imperfections on the canvas.

ANTON

Fix your...? What imperfections?

MOLLY

Well, for one thing, my boobs are uneven.

ANTON

No, they're not. They're fine.

MOLLY

They're uneven, Anton. You've never noticed that my boobs are different sizes? One is a C and the other is almost a D.

ANTON

Honey, this is crazy. Your boobs are fine. They're like beautiful ripe clusters of grapes.

MOLLY

Grapes? What the hell kind of description is that?

ANTON

It's Song of Solomon.

MOLLY

The Bible? You have a half-naked girlfriend here and you quote the Bible?

ANTON

I was trying to be poetic and it's the first thing that came to mind. I'm sorry. The light is fading. We're really running out of time.

MOLLY

Just promise me you will fix a few things.

ANTON

Like your uneven boobs?

MOLLY

Like my boobs. And down there. Give me a nice trim.

ANTON

If you thought this was going to be sexy time, why didn't you do something with all that...down there?

MOLLY

Because, Anton. I did do something with that down there...for you. I did enough, but if I thought this was going to be on display I would have taken a bit more care. I shaved my legs. I wore a negligee. I groomed...a bit. When you asked me to do this, I didn't say a word. Didn't ask for anything. I'm asking for this one thing. Fix me a little. Maybe a heart shape or something. Nothing too porno though.

ANTON

Ok, ok. Whatever. I will make both of your boobs D cups and I will give you a neatly groomed lawn not too porno. Whatever that means. We good? Now, please, honey. Please take off your clothes, turn around, and pose for me on the stool.

MOLLY

C Cup. Make me a C Cup. And don't get frustrated. This is important. It's important to you. It's important to me.

ANTON

Whether you're a C or D cup is not important to me, Molly. Whether you have a Mondrian-inspired pubic painting between your legs is not important to me right now. What is important is that I need a naked body in this light for my project on Monday. Why is it so important to you that I correct things? This isn't plastic surgery.

MOLLY

Who's Mondrian? And it's not correcting things. But when you think of me I want you to see a little more perfection than is there. Like if I painted you, I would do the same.

ANTON

Mondrian is that guy who painted all those shapes. We saw that exhibit last month? Wait. Like what? What would you correct?

MOLLY

Well...I don't know. You are a little moley on your stomach.

ANTON

What? Moley?

MOLLY

Yes. You have a lot of moles. If I were going to correct something I would get rid of a few of your moles.

ANTON

You have a problem with my moles? My mom had a tanning bed when I was growing up. Ok? I liked having a little pigment in my skin. I may have overdone it a bit.

MOLLY

No need to get upset.

ANTON

Who's upset? I'm not upset. We're really confessing things now. Maybe I'll just do a little more fixing on this painting. Maybe I need to take off a few pounds from around the hips.

MOLLY

Ah! You bastard. I was not criticizing you. I was just saying I want you to see me with fewer flaws.

ANTON

What flaws? I never even saw your flaws till you brought it all up.

MOLLY

But they would have come out in your painting. When you're painting, you're studying me. Every minute detail. When you're over there behind that easel and I'm over here for hours standing naked, you really get a chance to see every detail, every little mark, that's when I stop being your wife. Then I'm just a piece of fruit or a landscape. And you get to document every inch of me. And I just stand over here like a...dumb peach. Or a sailboat. I want you to see what you think I am not what you see I am!

ANTON

You know what? I'm not going to "fix" anything. In fact, I'm starting over.

ANTON takes the canvas and tosses it across the room then replaces it with a fresh blank canvas.

MOLLY

No, I want to see what you had there.

ANTON

No, you don't. It's terrible. Because of me. I don't have the ability to put you down on this canvas the way I see you...or the way you want me to see you...or the way you want me to think I see you. A simple stupid human hand. I can't even draw a hand!

MOLLY

I can't even get my husband to have sex with me!

ANTON

I don't know how to paint anything else. All I've painted before this was a bowl of apples, two bananas on a paper plate, and a solitary pineapple on the dining room table.

MOLLY

On a scale of dining room pineapple to bowl of apples, how was this one coming along?

ANTON

It wasn't quite a pineapple yet, but I think it was close. I was only looking at the face before. Maybe the hands. I don't do hands well.

MOLLY forgets she's been covering her upper body with her hands and walks over to the first canvas. She picks it up and looks at the painting.

MOLLY

(trying to comprehend what she sees)

Is that my nose? Are those ears?

ANTON

Hands. They're supposed to be hands. I'm not done.

MOLLY takes the painting to ANTON's easel and replaces the blank one.

MOLLY

Don't start over. Just...you never noticed how lopsided they are? Look. Uneven. This one is much larger than this one.

ANTON

I don't see it.

ANTON

(lifting up his shirt)

I really have a lot of moles?

MOLLY

I've always thought they were cute. When you're asleep, I try to connect the dots and make pictures with them. These here form a little dog I call Reginald.

(an attempt at inspiration, crossing with the stool downstage slightly)

Paint what you see. (Beat) Do you get grades in this class you're taking?

ANTON

Kinda. Not letter grades but he does give feedback.

MOLLY

What does he think about your fruit?

ANTON

He said Thomas Kinkade would be proud.

MOLLY

That's not a compliment, is it?

ANTON

"Uninspired and pedestrian."

MOLLY

Really? That prick. Well then, let's really shock the hell out of him.

She removes her underwear and sits with her back to us, putting her feet up and spreading her legs wide open to ANTON. ANTON starts to work.

MOLLY

Once you're done, we're totally having sex.

ANTON

You bet we are.

BLACKOUT
END OF PLAY