

PAINTED LE^o

A short story by Jade Alyse

SHE NOW HAD A NAME: *Alexandrine*. It sort of rolled off the tongue easily when she voiced it aloud, almost breathlessly.

It escaped her lips like smooth, creamy toffee, floated in the air and remained stagnant – Alexandrine now existed. And she repeated it over and over again in her head as she stood in the mirror – mulling over how she looked, how she smelled, how she tasted.

Alexandrine now thumped against her temples, against her hollow skull, pricking at her brain.

Alexandrine's unseen yet tangible perfection was the bristly sensation along her skin that made the hair on her arms rise to attention.

She placed a cordial glass of Absinthe to her lips and drank the entire contents swiftly, and the buzzing warmth of the sweetened poison melted away her inhibition.

And she idled in the mirror, ogling herself wistfully, writhing with discomfort in a subtle serpentine motion, as she attempted to mold herself into the person she had to become.

She slowly slathered a carmine hue across her plush lips and dawdled there once more. She was startled at the seductive shadowing of charcoal pigment dusted around her eyes.

Encapsulation of her own countenance was enough for anyone who eyed her long enough.

This was her performance, she thought, and her stage was just beyond the door.

In a few moments he would beckon her, and his voice would tantalize her still and she would come without tarrying too long, like an unwilling moth, succumbing to the sensation much bigger than its tiny body, drawn to the elucidation of a flame.

She tucked her long, copper hair in a stark black bob of a wig – it made her scalp itchy, but she liked the way it made her look.

She was now *Leo*.

“I hear you, girl,” he called to her. She closed her eyes slowly, sinking her teeth in the pulp of her bottom lip, bracing herself.

And she smiled – the absinthe was having its way with her, her thoughts were not hers to claim.

She was now Leo – and it felt orgasmic.

“Come to me,” he said, “I’m ready for you...”

She opened the door to the bathroom slowly and presented herself to him, standing firmly in red and black lace, a subtle grin, and perfume proven to transfix the most hardened of men.

He was sitting on the bed at the farthest point of the room, and he straightened his back at the sight of her. She swallowed thickly.

A balmy draft from the parted veranda door to the left of her, floated past her. There had always been something about the Parisian air at dusk in the peak of the summer months.

“*C'est chonette*,” he remarked, gazing at her. “You are beautiful...”

She trailed her fingers along her hips and curtsied. “*Bonsoir, Monsieur...*”

He raised himself from the bed and came toward her. “Oh, please tell me you speak English, beautiful one...”

She nodded slowly, readjusting her lips so that the French brogue was exuded perfectly. “I can speak any language that you want me to, *Monsieur...*”

He ran his hands along her arms and she parceled her lips to the sensation, and gazed into him.

“Your name...what is it, my love...?”

In her head, she repeated *Olivia* a dozen times – but that wasn’t right.

“*Leo*,” she purred. “My name is Leo...”

“Leo,” he repeated, skimming the pinnacles of his fingers along the brim of her panties. “*My Leo...*”

His lips stamped her shoulder gingerly.

“Can I interest you in something to drink,” she offered, turning to face him.

“Whatever you have to offer, Leo, I’m yours...”

He was sweet, she noted, sweet and foolish.

She sauntered across the room and he watched her closely. Any sudden movements, and he would have certainly pounced on her, she figured.

She reached for the half-empty bottle of Absinthe and a matching cordial glass.

“Something,” she mused, pouring it freely. “To take our minds elsewhere...”

“It’s well needed,” he said, clearing his throat. “What a hell of a week, I’ve had...you’re the only sensible thing I’ve experienced since I landed in Paris...”

“Travel here often, Monsieur?”

She ambled toward him slowly, with a practiced grin of comfort on her face.

“Often enough,” he replied with a labored sigh. “How clichéd is it for an artist to travel to Paris to gather inspiration...”

“Paris is a beautiful city, Monsieur,” she answered, handing him the glass. He gazed up at her, clamping his hand to her thigh.

His face glowed in the ambient periwinkle light of twilight. She smelled his nearness and got lost in the unwonted scent of familiarity.

He was slowly falling victim to Leo...Leo finally had the control.

“You will find nothing greater,” she whispered, leaning down just close enough so that her rouge lips sojourned near his.

“I’m *pathétique*,” he muttered, watching her lips move. “I always succumb to the nature and grace of a beautiful woman...there’s no greater pleasure in existence...”

She giggled softly. “Surely an artist such as yourself, Monsieur, finds *beauté* in many things...”

He pulled her near him.

“Drink, Monsieur,” she encouraged, tipping the bottom of the glass toward his mouth. “Let’s get lost...you will feel better...”

He murmured her name in the hollow resonance of the emptying glass.

Yes, she thought, learn my name, let it sink in; repeat it over and over again.

Then she backed away from him, erected proudly, as the balmy draft shuffled a few strands of her counterfeit black hair.

She reached behind her and unhooked her black lace bra with ease and slid it down her body. She scrutinized his face and grinned.

“Is this what you came here for, Monsieur,” she queried demurely. “Is this what you wanted from me?”

He nodded slowly, spellbound.

“I want you to say my name, Monsieur,” she offered, unsnapping her garters delicately. “I want you to feel it, remember it...you’ll find none better...”

“Anything...” he breathed.

“And I want you to paint me, Monsieur,” she mused, standing stark naked in the burgeoning moonshine. “I want to be your art...”

He carried his painting kit with him wherever he travelled, as though it were a sensitive body part or an exhumed treasure from centuries passed. He reached inside an aging brown knapsack for his palette and a flat brush, and he stood near her, gawping her nude body with a painterly reflective eye.

He dabbed his brush lightly in the green and then in the ochre hue, and slathered it across her collarbone, creating a serpentine path downward, through the narrow passageway between her breasts. She inhaled deeply.

“Don’t move,” he instructed, eyeing her chest vigilantly. “I want to make you immaculate...”

He stopped just short of her navel, then daubed his paintbrush in the vermilion and coursed a horizontal line along her pelvis.

“Do you like the way this feels, Leo?” he inquired, allowing the paintbrush to run its course.

She nodded. “Yes, Monsieur...but this is too formal...I want your hands to do the painting...”

“Very well, amour,” he replied, rolling up his sleeves. “Whatever you wish...”

He slowly began to canvas her body with his hands, his dark eyes salivating over the last masterpiece he would ever create.

And she smiled, feeling the cold metal of the titanium ring on his left hand, glide up and down her body.

“Does your wife let you do this, Monsieur...?”

He paused momentarily and glared at her. “Pardon...?”

“Your wife,” she repeated. “Do you touch her the way you’re touching me...?”

He gazed down at her body and allowed his hands to continue their exploration, leaving the question unanswered.

He then grabbed at her arms, slightly hoisting her feet a few inches from the ground. She stared down at him, licking her lips, grinning at him. It was the first time in years he’d shown anything more than cowardice.

“Is this the way you want it, Monsieur,” she questioned, giggling. “Is this the way you want me?”

He threw her small body backward against the bed and he pinned her wrists down ardently.

It was the first time a spark of recognition reached his eyes – it was the first time he showed anything other than his sordid temperament.

“*Problème*, Monsieur...?”

The wet paint created a frantic composition in the bed as his lips attacked her body, as his hands kept her trapped there beneath him, in a sea of the temperate Parisian warmth and the perfumed aroma of the red poppies by the window.

And he seized her there, more than once, sealing their nectars of irrevocability into the soft Egyptian fabric underneath their thrashing bodies.

And over and over again he cried out, “*Leo, Leo, Leo,*” and the screams evanesced into the soul of her.

She was Leo – and Leo had her vengeance.

An hour later, she loomed over his dormant body and watched him as a tear rolled down her cheek.

She slid into a pair of jeans and a slinky white tank that she’d hidden in a cupboard in the bathroom. She kept her wig and makeup intact.

She crept out of the room, a small brown knapsack lapped over her shoulder, and as she stood in front of the elevator, she slowly reached into her pocket and uncovered a diamond ring, which was engraved with “To my Olivia” on the inside.

She slid it down onto her left ring finger and smiled, shrugging indifferently.

The elevator doors poured open slowly, if almost dramatically, and there she was, the artist’s *Alexandrine*, in all of her Parisian beauty.

Olivia bid her “*Bonsoir*”, they swapped places and Alexandrine glanced back just once as the elevator doors closed behind her.

Alexandrine Bellerose entered the artist’s hotel room, and found him slothful. She floated over to the bed; she wanted to tell him about the strange woman she’d seen in the hallway.

She attempted to rouse him. “James...James, my love...”

The paint that mantled his body had only begun to dry and it now covered her hands.

She projected a vanquished wail, and like a record teetering on its edge, he sputtered, “*Leo...Leo...Leo,*” cyclically, until his voice faded to nothingness and a ruinous dribble of greenish liquid escaped his gaping mouth and trailed down his cheek.

Now they both would never forget her name...

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