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De Konning's Model

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If my memory serves me, Dr. Armsworth will visit today. He comes every Tuesday. Don't ask me why. I guess he's got his own reasons, his own stifling aesthetic, his own boring order, his own preconceived formula. Who knows why people behave the way they do?

I've been here five years, three months, and fourteen days—and he's always visited me on Tuesday. No, there's nothing wrong with my memory.

He's an average, static identity, and he's so boringly predictable. Today, for instance, we'll talk about Mother, and he will ask if I remember what happened to my wife. If I answer his questions correctly, permeate my answers with intellectual character and submit them to his external discipline, he may allow the orderlies to set up my easel

near the big window. He may allow Nurse Turner to give me the De Kooning book—it helps me to remember Mother.

She was De Kooning's model and mistress during the early fifties. I use the color reproductions in the tattered book as informal guides when I paint my wife. De Kooning's theories are in there too. He was a continual identity.

Dr. Armsworth has never really studied Modern Art like I have, and so

he only notices in my painting the slashes of brilliant red and the bold black stripes. He sees a schizophrenic's therapy, the meanderings of a sick mind—on canvas, in living color. But the color isn't alive for him. I tell him that my refusal to submit to his external discipline is, in itself, a discipline and that the painting embodies a continual identity, completely separated from my own continual identity. But he doesn't see it that way. He cannot see it that way. He says the painting—the only one I've worked on since I've been here—is by its very nature linked to me. He says that if I finish it, I'll be able to remember what happened to my wife, remember the action or reaction that put me here five years, three months, and fourteen days ago. But what does he know about Modern Art? Art is my life. He's never even seen Roualt. He can't accept my wanting the paint to build up so that it stands at least six inches from the canvas itself. I try explaining to him that I want a stained glass feeling. But he won't listen. He will not admit that a true Artist ought not be restrained by aesthetics, or rules, or morals, or preconceived formulas. He's an average, static identity, and he's so boringly predictable. No, there's nothing wrong with my memory.

Of course, I remember my Mother, even though she left my drab Father for De Kooning when I was quite young. She could see Modern Art and the Modern Artist in their pure, continual identities. She had large brownish-green eyes, almost Oriental, almost Romanesque, that seemed to float out at me—not quite round; indeed, if anything they seemed flat. Yes, now that I remember, her eyes were flat, like a carp's, like a Pit Viper's, clear and flat. But she had vision. When De Kooning offered, she joyfully accepted, leaving behind me and my Father and our pleasant boring middle-class home in Kansas City and moving forward into De Kooning's exciting paint-splattered studio in New York. Now her clear eyes stare from museum walls in every major city in

De Kooning's Model

by Jerry Harris

America.

No, make no mistake, there is nothing wrong with my memory. I remember visiting her once in New York, just before Father died. She had completely immersed her continual identity in De Kooning's theories and work. And even though I never met him, De Kooning's influence on my Art is clear. I remember in detail my visit to his studio. I remember that Mother slapped me until tears distorted my vision—making the studio come alive with liquid colors—when I insisted that Father was a “good” man. “No,” she screamed, “he’s neither good nor bad! He just is! He is what he is! She taught me a valuable lesson that has served me in my struggles for continual identity, my struggles of becoming, of being a true Artist: Any moral paradigm destroys the power of a continual identity, and this power of self is the source of Modern Art, the very soul and spirit of the true Artist. I have tried explaining this idea to Dr. Armsworth, but what does he know about Art? Oh well, if I answer his questions correctly, permeate my answers with intellectual character and submit them to his external discipline, he may allow the orderlies to set up my easel near the big window. He may allow Nurse Turner to give me the De Kooning book. It helps me to remember my wife.

My wife! Let me count the ways! Ha! Ha!

Of course I remember her. She wrote fiction. She wrote and

wrote and wrote. She wrote for twelve years, eight months, and two days. That’s how long I put up with her. She had no vision, all she ever used her eyes for was to question my every nuance, every attempt for continual identity. She had blue--soft, catlike blue--eyes, evaluating eyes. But she never saw; she was always too busy using them to ask, “Why?” She wrote several award-winning novels, and they were all nothing more than camouflaged versions of her only question.

In many ways she was very much like Dr. Armsworth. She made me laugh with her silly, blue-eyed absolutism. I remember the silliest comment she ever made: “There is Justice in the Universe.” What Rot! For years she tried to harness me to her average, static identity, her ignorant value system. “True Art is the capacity to love another human being,” she told me over and over and over. But what is love? I know nothing of love. I know Art.

I wish I could remember what happened to her. Maybe she moved back home to live with her Father. Dr. Armsworth asserts that if I can remember what happened to her, I will begin to get well. Get well? Who is sick? My silly, stifling wife certainly was!

I don’t appreciate Dr. Armsworth allowing the orderlies to truss me up in this stifling white jacket. He must be trying to rob me of my essence, to take away my power, my Art.

Mother was right. The average static identity cannot understand nor accept the true Artist. And Dr. Armsworth is an average, static identity. He’s boringly predictable. If I answer his questions correctly, permeate my answers with intellectual character and submit them to his external discipline, he may allow the orderlies to set up my easel near the window. He may allow Nurse Turner to give me the De Kooning book.

If I had a sharp-edged palette knife, I could slash my way out of this stifling white jacket. My life is Art. I am Art! I want to do what I do!

I hope Dr. Armsworth allows me to work on my painting. I might be able to finish it today. I hope he allows Nurse Turner to give me the book. I need to see it. I remember a brilliant red horizontal in *Woman II*, and if my memory serves me, Mother modeled for it. I want to paint a jagged, red horizontal just like De Kooning’s below my wife’s distorted chin, letting the red build up, letting it drip down to cover her pale breasts.