

Artist's Touch

By Avily Jerome

"You didn't!" Anne gasped.

Anne Wilson's best friend, Lindsay, pleaded on the other end of the line. "He's perfect for you! Did I mention he's an artist? He'll be at the Local Artist Unveiling tonight."

"Linds, I'm forty-two. I've been on enough blind dates to last two lifetimes. If I haven't found 'the one' yet, I never will."

"I don't believe that," Lindsay argued. "If you want to find him, the one for you is out there. What if it's Theodore St. John?"

"Fine," Anne sighed. "But this is the last time. Ever."

"This is going to be great! You donate half of your salary every year to this place, and now one of the artists you help support is your date," Lindsay grinned as she led Anne up the stairs of the Center for the Arts.

"It's not half..." Anne argued, but Lindsay wasn't listening.

"There he is." She pointed across the room toward a tall, distinguished looking man in his early fifties standing under an enormous painting. Except for a little grey at the temples, his hair was still a deep black. Dark eyes, evenly spaced above a Grecian nose scanned the room until they landed on Lindsay. His full lips curved at the edges.

"Good evening, Theodore. I'd like you to meet my good friend, Anne Wilson. Anne, this is Theodore St. John."

Theodore scarcely spared her a glance before gesturing toward his painting. "What do you think? I call it Baby's Breath."

Anne studied the painting. Most paintings didn't have sensible titles, but she really couldn't see where 'Baby's Breath' came from.

"It's... intriguing," she said at last.

"Yes. My work challenges people to look deeper into themselves, to strive for greater meaning in their lives."

That wasn't exactly what she meant, but whatever. "I'm sure," she agreed.

"The East Mountain Telegraph featured me in an article, saying I'm the next Picasso."

“The East Mountain Telegraph?” As an advertising specialist, Anne was familiar with most the newspapers in the state. She’d never heard of the East Mountain Telegraph.

Theodore ignored her question. “My last painting sold for over \$14,000. This one is worth twice that.”

Didn’t he have any interests other than promoting himself?

“Um, I’d like to take a look at some of the other paintings.”

Theodore stared at her. “The others?”

She shoved aside the feeling that she was being patronized and nodded. “Yes, the others. You’re not the only artist featured here tonight.”

“Of course.” Theodore hustled her around the room, barely giving her a chance to look at the other paintings, let alone meet the artists. Suddenly, however, she spotted a painting that made her stop and stare. “Oh, this is fantastic.”

“That?” Theodore sneered. “His colors are all wrong, and his technique is terrible.”

“He paints with a passion you can feel. That’s true artistry.”

“His paintings never sell for more than a couple of thousand.”

Anne glanced at the price tag. \$2600. Not expensive as far as good artwork went, but she liked it. “I’ll take it. Who do I talk to?”

Theodore’s eyes narrowed. “Just a moment.” He stomped away.

She knew instantly she’d not be asked out on a second date. Oh well. She didn’t want to be asked by him, anyway.

Someone sidled up next to her. “Your boyfriend doesn’t seem to appreciate your taste in art.”

Anne glanced over into clear, friendly blue eyes in a ruggedly handsome face framed by longish, wavy brown hair.

She fought to untangle her tongue. “Oh, he’s not my boyfriend. Blind date.”

“Good. He doesn’t deserve you.”

Anne’s cheeks burned. “So, um, do you happen to know who this painting is by?”

The man raised an eyebrow. “You’re buying a painting and you don’t even know who it’s by?”

Anne shrugged. “Does it matter?” I’m buying it because I like it, not to impress people like Theodore St. John.”

The man laughed. “The artist’s name is Kevin Trace.”

Anne grinned. "I'm already a fan."

"Since I know that I won't be stealing you away from anyone, would you mind if I asked for your number? I'd love to take you out sometime."

Anne gaped at him. "Why?"

The man chuckled. "You mean besides because you're beautiful, smart, and not afraid to speak your mind?"

Anne found herself blushing again, but managed to maintain some spunk. "Yes, besides that."

"You have great taste in art."

Anne grinned. "Well, then, how can I refuse? I'm Anne Wilson."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Anne. I'm Kevin Trace."

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