The Diorama

“I Love it!” she says, clapping her hands together, round eyed and wide mouthed with obvious delight. Then, all doe-eyed and innocent, “But, what exactly is it?”

Shelby rolls his eyes and sighs, “It’s a Diorama, Tess. It’s… art.”

For Shelby, there was nothing that emphasised the misery and isolation of a solitary life more than cooking and eating alone. He knew when he had pursued her, that Tess was not possessed of a rapier wit, could never offer him the stimulation of an intellectually challenging mind. No, she was blessed with far more obvious attributes, made for altogether more earthly pleasures – pleasures that the lonely Shelby was increasingly desperate to enjoy.

Now, after weeks of his charm offensive and coaxing, she had finally agreed to dinner at his country cottage and up to now, the evening had gone well. So much so in fact, that he had chosen to share his secret passion and led her to his workshop.

“OK, so what are they doing?” says Tess, bending over a large glass case to study the scene inside. Six tiny voles and six field mice are skilfully arranged in tiny robes and seated on little chairs, either side of a young squirrel, all on one side of a table. They are cleverly posed in anthropomorphic positions, pointing and gesturing, as if time has frozen around them in the midst of a feast. The table is decorated with the residue of their meal, with miniscule plates, cutlery and goblets all made to scale.

As Tess examines the Diorama Shelby studies the perfection of her full bottom and pinched waste, so beautifully wrapped in royal blue denim. She turns her head suddenly, catching him in the act and smiles coyly.

His cheeks flush automatically when her eyes meet his, and he is momentarily lost for words. Recovering a little, he crouches down next to her, in front of the Diorama. “Well, obviously this scene is a three-dimensional representation of Da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*.”

“Does that mean that the squirrel is Jesus?” She asks with a giggle leaning so close that he can smell the wine on her breath. Her laugh is musical, and it relaxes him.

“I wanted to emphasise his importance in the image, and if I made one of the others the squirrel it just wouldn’t have worked.”

“You did all of this by yourself?” she enquires, “with no help?”

If not quite awed, Shelby is certain from her words that she is deeply impressed. “Yes. Yes, I did,” he smiles, elated at her appreciation for the quality of his work.

“Did you make their clothes too?”

He nods.

“And the table and chairs?”

“I did.” With each question asked and answered, he sees the growing wonder painted on her face and his own smile widens with satisfaction.

“But why did you use animals instead of people?” The change is as unexpected as it is sudden. The slightest of frowns ripples on her brow and her eyes seem to cloud with confusion. He is momentarily discomfited.

“Well, obviously…” he begins, his hands in front of him now, palms up in supplication, his shoulders hunching defensively. Could it be possible that she actually didn’t understand what he was showing her?

They both stand and she is facing him now, trying to read him, a vague uneasiness passing like a cloud across her Barbie features. He clears his throat, drops his hands to his sides and speaks, slowly and carefully.

“All the animals in the Diorama were caught around the farmhouse, in the fields and by the river. I have never worked with people, I think they would be difficult, yes, certainly a challenge, but the scale would mean I would need a much bigger place to display them than this workshop.”

He studies her face as the implications of his words sink in. Her semi-permanent pout opens slowly into an ‘o’, her pretty, pointed chin dropping almost to the tanned chest revealed so splendidly by the open buttons of her primrose blouse. “You mean… you mean that these are stuffed animals, not toys?”

His tone is dry and even when he answers, well aware that another one is now slipping through his fingers. “They are called *mounts*. I have removed their skins and carefully stretched them over anatomically accurate moulds that I have created for the purpose.”

She looks at the Diorama, then back at Shelby, then repeats the sequence. She raises her left hand to her chest, fingers splayed, pearl manicured nails flashing in the workshop lights and begins tap, tap, tapping her chest, sending little quivering shocks through the open cleavage of her ample breasts. She is panting now, her breasts rising and falling with the rapid expanding and contracting, still quivering as she taps faster. The warmth and relaxation that followed the meal and the wine is now evaporating amidst a rising panic.

Shelby is not panicking, he is aroused. Consumed by the sight before him, all rationality has been bypassed, his conscience gagged. Animal lust overwhelming the higher functions of his mind, he has but one purpose, one intention. Consequences are problems for another day, his conscience firewalled by his desire, he moves to act.

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Shelby removes the roast from the oven, flipping the door shut with a nudge from his knee. “Take a look at these potatoes, Tess,” he beams, placing the sizzling tray on the table between them.

He sits down at the table and gazes lovingly across at Tess. “Isn’t this great?” he asks, “Just you and me, what could be more perfect?”

She says nothing, but the broad smile on her face says it all. He leans across the table staring into those unblinking, beautiful, big blue eyes. But what’s that? Her left eye is turned slightly more outward, almost as though she has a lazy eye. “Don’t worry Tess,” he says sitting back and folding his arms. “I’ll fix that tomorrow.”

“Now, shall I say grace?”