

Tithona

A Mini-Drama

by [Evelyn Hooven](#) (August 2021)



The Painter and His Model, Henri Matisse, 1916-17

Seth and Rhoda are in their forties

Rhoda

This time, I'd like you to stay through after-dinner coffee, mingle with the guests.

Seth

Most of the time, I've hardly known them. Though one couple I do know got uninvited, you said, on short notice.

Rhoda

I'd heard they'd be moving into their guest cottage, renting out the main house.

Seth

I thought they were friends.

Rhoda

Mostly yours ...Look, I set this one up for you. These guests might want portraits of themselves or their kin. They have means, but you could start with prices that are modest, build from there.

(Silence)

Rhoda

I didn't get to see your painting. It passed so quickly from studio to purchaser. Did the gallery even show it? As a sample for the guests, maybe you could bring a photo or one of your final sketches.

You got a good price and could build on that: smaller ones and larger, color values that differ, varying frames— hexagonal, even curved, some that leave a side margin for writing. You

could perfect your handwriting and try distinctive quills, shapes that could become a signature style.

Seth

A small, start-up assembly line.

Rhoda

If you must put it that way.

Seth

Doesn't matter how it's put. I can't do it. Besides, my final sketch isn't suitable.

Rhoda

There's always flattery: your profile, the expression in your eyes, tilt of your head—

Seth

I can't. Can't do assembly line, networking, self-promotion, entrepreneurial launching.

Rhoda

You can't force or fake it, suit the way you come on to your target— at least for a while until...?

Seth

I thought, after our early retirement, *this* would be the time we looked for. No more ad agency, no more confinement to Sundays and evenings, always tired, starting, stopping, opening and closing like some gruesome mechanism.

Don't you find it a treasure now that day-job and true calling are one and the same?

Rhoda

Still, if your work reached the big auction houses, it would free us more of budgets and pensions, push-pull, either-or, not-yet. Even one major auction could do that.

(Silence)

Seth

How is your own work coming? Lately you haven't shown me anything.

Rhoda

My stories get shorter, seem to dissipate before they can build towards a novel.

Seth

Maybe snagging the big accounts, making the best conquests wasn't so wrong for you?

Rhoda

I began to think, three weeks ago when your painting sold immediately for a good price, *you'd* be my big account. But if you're on some ultra-high road, so idealistic and pure ...

Seth

Not that. I said some things are not possible for me. I need to keep with what I *am* able to do.

Rhoda

You're so unforthcoming.

Seth

Maybe there's some other painter who'd fit better into your network.

Rhoda

Maybe you'll get to know more people. Maybe your purchaser will want other works.

Seth

He's a friend of the gallery owner. Not the most frequent collector. A classicist.

Rhoda

I seem to remember your painting had a strange name.

(Silence)

Seth

"Tithona."

Rhoda

You're so secretive. Even the names.

(Silence)

Seth

Tithona is my own invention, sister to *Tithonus*. In Greek mythology he hasn't one. My classicist especially liked an invented character making a first ever appearance in his painting.

Rhoda

Tell me a little more.

Seth

Aurora, Goddess of the Dawn, falls in love with the mortal Tithonus, grants him immortality.

I've imagined him asking for this gift also on behalf of his sister, close to his age, almost a twin. Though he loved

Aurora, he had a dread of loneliness and wanted a familiar mortal to share his fate. No one, goddess or mortal, thought to qualify the gift of eternal life with eternal youth. The former mortals wither; infirmities, scars and folds ravage them. They can neither rejuvenate nor die, are condemned to continue their decay.

I doubt this is what your guests are looking for.

Rhoda

You really don't care, do you, how you come across socially?

Seth

I'm afraid you're right. I'm not comfortably socialized. But just now I need for you to listen carefully.

In this myth, a goddess, though generous, was careless. In my own invention, one mortal overvalued the thought of a near twin to ease loneliness. This twin would have been content with the transitory, the fleeting; a gift was bestowed that she didn't require. The difference between them exceeds their bond, becomes a wound.

She sees through the lens of the ephemeral. In modern terms, nothing's beyond "re-invent yourself, move on, alter the strategy, accelerate." All her world's at stake. She is lost in her disbelief. The impossible is happening. Astonishment consumes her.

That's what I tried to paint. It's what I'm just beginning to understand.

As for my own personal artist's hope for immortality? A dream that consigns one to effort no god could mitigate, nor can anyone share. A strict labor that is also a joy.

(Rhoda cannot process what she has heard. She slowly tries to get her bearings. Silence)

Rhoda

I thought you told me this work had some writing on it.

Seth

Not at the painting's margin. It's underneath, just below the frame.

From Chaucer, a voice speaking to the Earth:

"Lo, how I vanish

Flesh and bone and skin."

From Tennyson:

"Here at the quiet limit of the world."

Rhoda

You could do other myth-based paintings. Maybe one of the dinner guests knows a classicist. Theme-based exhibits are big these days.

(Brief Silence)

If all those words aren't actually *in* the painting, couldn't you remove them?

Seth

The painting no longer belongs to me.

END

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Evelyn Hooven graduated from Mount Holyoke College and received her M.A. from Yale University, where she also studied at The Yale School of Drama. A member of the Dramatists' Guild, she has had presentations of her verse dramas at several theatrical venues, including *The Maxwell Anderson Playwrights Series* in Greenwich, CT (after a state-wide competition) and *The Poet's Theatre* in Cambridge, MA (result of a national competition). Her poems and translations from the French and Spanish have appeared in *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, *ART TIMES*, *Chelsea*, *The Literary Review*, *THE SHOp: A Magazine of Poetry* (in Ireland), *The Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Vallum* (in Montreal), and other journals, and her literary criticism in Oxford University's *Essays in Criticism*.

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