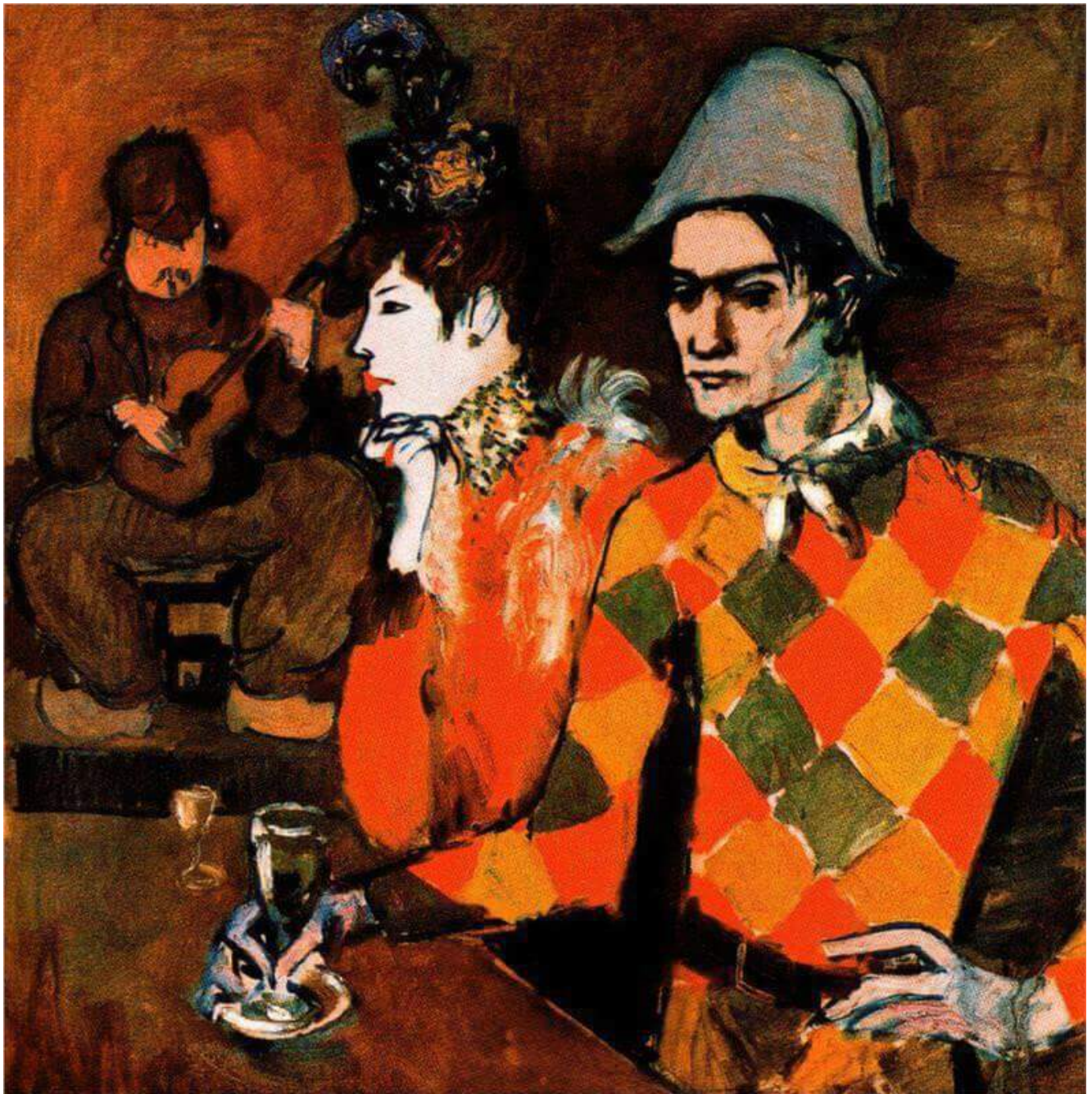


Total Immersion



Harlequin with Glass by Pablo Picasso, 1905

by [Armando Simón](#) (January 2022)

Naomi was visiting Amanda at her home, sitting on the sofa, talking. They were such good friends that they visited each other at the very least once a week and talked daily by telephone. Naomi was a short, petite brunette who worked as a

tracer for UPS, while Amanda was a redheaded nurse at the local hospital. Both were attractive and in their twenties. At the moment, Amanda's husband, Richard, was the topic of conversation.

Richard was an actor and, as with most individuals in that profession, had learned that that occupation was a sporadic one, something to the tune of "feast or famine—but mostly famine." Consequently, Amanda was the mainstay of the family's income. Except that, recently, Richard had been receiving relatively steady employment, landing one role after another in play after play, a few commercials and even a couple of television episodes, albeit "character roles." The turnaround had been a dramatic one.

"And it's all due to this new workshop that he attended," Amanda explained. "We're sure of it, Naomi. It has to be. Before he attended the workshop, he would get a role from time to time. Nothing steady. But, since the workshop, he hardly goes a month without landing a role in a play for a dinner theater or in a studio."

"Well, Richard's a good-looking man. I'm sure that has a bearing on it, too."

"Actually . . . no. According to him, good looking actors are a dime a dozen, all of them model types. It was the same in Los Angeles and in New York and it's the same here in Orlando."

"Still . . . it can't hurt," Naomi said. "Anyway, tell me about this workshop. What's it about?"

"It's a new acting technique that they teach called, Total Immersion. I'll swear by it, at least about it being effective in securing a part for Richard, but, Naomi, it's driving me crazy!"

"I don't get it, what do you mean?"

Amanda sighed and tried to collect her thoughts. It was so hard to explain and yet so easy. "Do you remember a while back that you came over a couple of times and you said afterwards that Richard was acting strange?"

"Yeah. He couldn't make his mind up about anything and then, he'd be impulsive. He seemed to get over it, though. No permanent damage. Don't tell me that that workshop made him that way."

"No. Actually, that was the time that he landed the leading part in *Hamlet* at the Eola Park theater. When the run ended that was when he seemed to get over it."

"I hate to show my ignorance, Amanda, but I've never seen *Hamlet*. I don't like Shakespeare. I have trouble understanding the language they speak."

"In a nutshell, it's about a Danish prince who has to avenge his father's death, but he's all ate up with indecision, except that, now and then, he bursts out in fits of impulsive action."

"Ohhhhhh." Naomi frowned as it sank in. "Are you saying that Richard kept acting like this Prince Hamlet? I mean, when he wasn't on stage? I'm confused."

"Yes and no. This technique of Total Immersion calls for an actor to totally immerse himself in the personality of the character he's playing. Not the character, mind you, but the personality. And he's got to keep it up continually when not acting on stage or in front of the camera, so it'll soak in. They even suggest that you do it before you even audition for the role. Richard says that in the old days they used to refer to people who did that as 'staying in character.' It's based on Peter Sellers-"

"Oh, I love him! He was such a great actor!" Naomi brightened at the name of one of her favorite actors.

"Yeah, well, it seems that every time that he got a role in a movie, he'd stay in character all day long. With no letup. It used to drive his family crazy. Anyway, a few years ago, somebody noticed this and wondered if maybe that was the secret of his great talent and formed an acting school based on this idea."

"Well, you say he's doing well in his career now-"

"The thing is . . . it's also a little spooky. He really does absorb those little quirks of the characters that he plays. It's almost like he's a chameleon. And he does it so easy! It's almost like he's not, well, aware of it, except he is. Oh, it's so hard to explain!" She made a face of frustration.

"Now wait a minute. Richard still remains Richard."

"But only when he's not going to audition for a role, or acting that role. What worries me is that actors tend to be a little schizy anyway and Richard's no exception. I'm not exaggerating, Naomi, he really does graft those qualities into his own personality. Totally."

"He confessed to me the other day that he's gotten so good at this Total Immersion thing that it's become addictive—yes, girl, that's the word he used, addictive! He insisted that he became the character, that he was the character."

"I'm sure it's not as serious as you make it out to be, Amanda. It isn't as if Richard's gone a step further into *The Twilight Zone*, you know. Listen, girl, what you simply have in your hands now is basically a workaholic who brings his work home! Doctors, lawyers, teachers, business executives, even bodybuilders, they all do that, you know. You're making it sound more than what it is."

Amanda straightened at this insight. "Yeah . . . ! I hadn't thought of it in those terms. . . ! Yeah . . . ! You're right!"

At this point, the subject of their conversation walked in through the front door. Richard in his twenties, with curly blonde hair, was a pleasant sight to both ladies and as friendly as always.

"Hey, Naomi! How are ya?"

"Fine, Rich. We were just talking about you."

"Oh-oh."

"Hi, honey!"

"Hi, babe." Richard walked in towards the two friends sitting in the sofa, when he stopped and adopted a mild, pensive air.

"Huh?" he muttered, then an "Ah!" came out of his mouth.

"I'm sorry, Naomi, I don't know where my manners are. I want to introduce you to a friend of mine." The girls glanced at each other nervously.

"Ah! Yes! He reminds me: actually, a very good friend of mine. In fact, my very best friend-"

A light went on in Naomi's mind.

"Harvey!" she blurted out, grinning.

"Why, yes, his name is Harvey." Richard's face remained bland. "See, Harvey, it seems that she's heard of you."

"Oh, I love that play!" Naomi said. "Ever since my Daddy took me as a little girl! I've gone back to see it twice."

"Did you get the part, Richard?"

"Yes, love, I sure did."

"That's great," Amanda said, with sincere joy.

"Naomi, why don't you join us for dinner? You can help us

celebrate. Harvey would like to get a chance to ask you if you've come across any female pookahs."

"Sorry, Harvey," Naomi joined in without missing a beat, smiling and staring up at the empty space next to Richard. "But if I see any seven-foot-tall girl rabbits I'll be sure to send them your way." She now also remembered that Dodd always, compulsively, invited his friends to dinner.

And so it went the rest of the evening, right through dinner. Amanda, seeing Naomi playfully join in, felt relieved, as if a weight had been lifted off her shoulders. Several times they could not swallow food for the laughter.

Many weeks later, when the play ended, the seven-foot-tall invisible rabbit vanished and Richard never referred to him again, although he did talk about the play and his work in it.

One day, Amanda returned from work, hot and tired. She had barely kicked off her shoes, her hot, aching feet silently thanking her, when she felt Richard's arms circling her waist, followed by a nibble on the back of her neck.

"Mmmm," she purred. "It's just what I needed after a day like today." She reached her arms behind her. Richard became even more amorous. "Mmmm, wait honey, let me take a shower first. I'm all hot and sticky."

"Mmm, good, so much the better. I like you hot and sticky," he countered and began to guide her to the sofa.

"Here?" she asked. "Not the bed?"

"Here. Now." He began to take off her clothes, as his breathing got heavier.

Afterwards, as they were playing with each other, Richard suddenly got up, picked her up in his arms and took her to their bedroom. And then he took her again.

Later, he cooked dinner for both of them and they ate their dinner on trays in bed. He then removed the trays to the kitchen and afterwards they both took a shower together, something that they had not done in well over a year and this led to some exciting, slippery lovemaking in the shower.

Amanda felt like she had died and gone to heaven.

She slept soundly that night.

It was a few days later that Naomi stopped by on her way to work to drop off a novel which she had recommended Amanda should read. Richard was dressed when she came in, Amanda having gone in earlier that morning to work.

She was surprised when he held her hand and looked longingly at her.

"Naomi . . . there's something I have to tell you. I have to voice it because I can't hold it back much longer, I feel like I'm about to burst. I think you're beautiful and desirable. At night I dream about you."

Naomi was surprised at Richard's confession and not unflattered. She both welcomed his revelation and, yet, immediately wanted to leave.

He slipped around behind her and held her tight, whispering at her. "I have wanted to make love to you for the longest time. Every time I come near you and smell the way your hair smells," he did so now, "I can hardly see straight. I've wanted to hold you tight for the longest time."

"Richard, n-no, don't. This isn't right," She tried to maneuver herself out of his arms.

"I know it's not right, but it's what I want to do. I've held it in for too long."

"Richard, no! Amanda is my friend and she's your wife. She

loves you.”

“And I love her. I really do. But I want you. I want you very, very badly.” He began caressing her and kissing her. “And I think that you want me also. I can tell.”

Richard had hit the mark, for Naomi had often admired his looks, though she had masked her attraction. Once or twice, she had had very intense dreams regarding she and Richard, at a time of night when consciousness has let down its guard. More than once she had flirted with him and he flirted right back, though it had been a harmless flirtation. Now, she pressed her body against him and held his arms as she tried once more, with mere words, to end the inevitable.

“Richard, please let me go.”

“You want me as much as I want you,” he said between kisses.

“Yes, I admit it, but that doesn’t mean that we have to give in to every feeling, like we have no control over ourselves!” His arms were behind her, pressing him against her.

She found herself in Amanda’s bed with Richard, where they spent the whole morning and afternoon, leaving before Amanda returned from work.

Although Naomi was sporadically eaten with guilt, she, nonetheless, met with him on many occasions afterwards, at her place or his, for additional lovemaking. She felt very strange and uneasy whenever she talked with Amanda, knowing that she was regularly sleeping with her friend’s husband, and, then again, she occasionally felt a pleasure at having stolen Amanda’s husband. At times, she had to suppress an urge to cry out to her friend, “Amanda! I’m sleeping with you husband! It’s something I’ve wanted to do for the longest time and now I’m doing it and God, how I love it!”

It would have surprised Naomi even more to learn of Richard

having slept with four other women that month—the same Richard who had heretofore been faithfully monogamous.

When the run of the *Don Juan* play ended, Richard abruptly and inexplicably ended his affair with Naomi and the other women, leaving them bewildered, or angry. He never even thought of them again.

It took Naomi a long time to cope with the altered situation and for weeks found excuses for not visiting Amanda at home, where Richard might be present. Eventually, she pulled herself together, but not before thinking very bad thoughts of Amanda's husband (she did not think badly of herself, of course). When she finally did come for a visit, she learned from her friend that, in the forthcoming month, he would be trying out for the lead role of *Othello* in the Shakespeare Festival at Lake Eola.

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Armando Simón is a trilingual native of Cuba with degrees in history and psychology, and feelings of déjà vu. He is the author of several books (*Very Peculiar Stories*, *When Evolution Stops*, *A Cuban from Kansas*, and others).

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