

Her eyes refused to comply, incited by nervousness to glance at her watch; the second hand raced against her heartbeat. She expected he would turn up at any moment. The gallery was not the most convenient place to reach. She knew she should have chosen a place that was easier for him to get to, but she hadn't been able to. After finding his image in the gallery years earlier, she had developed an attachment to it, and needed to experience the real and the imagined in one place. She wanted to show him the painting and explain that in some small way they hadn't been parted at all.

She changed the position of her legs, folding right over left. Then, looking for something to occupy her, she took a silver atomiser from her bag and pressed twice. The delicate floral and citrus notes of Blenheim Bouquet brought her an air of calm. It was lavender picked on a summer's day in Provence, grated lemon rind waiting to decorate a cake. It was a fleeting distraction. She leaned forward and stole a quick glance around the room to make sure he hadn't arrived and was mistakenly waiting by another painting. She knew this to be unlikely as there was only one painting of this name, but felt a need to verify his absence.

She imagined him rushing in, shirt un-tucked, sleeves rolled up, hair mopping his face. This was how he'd appeared in the last photo she'd seen of him. Sorry, sorry, he would say as they brushed cheeks in courteous and mandatory greeting. She would move along the bench to allow him space to sit down. After that she could not be sure how to proceed. Would she be bold enough to launch into her speech, apologise, feign some sort of explanation, justify an entirely unjustifiable act? Would he interrupt her, would he start talking first, what would he say, what could he say? Her thoughts were winding in ever tightening circles and with a forced breath she ordered her focus to change. Instead of contorting every consideration, she began twirling her hair around her index finger and pulling it through the length of her polished tresses.

Anaiese was practiced in hiding turmoil. It was the tug at the end of the hair twirl, pulling her scalp to the threshold of pain, that told of her anxiety, the depth of a tooth biting against her lip that spoke of frustration, the methodical stretch and curl of her toes within her heels that betrayed her fear. But none passing her by would know this.

Where was he? More than an hour had passed and she was growing irritated, even though she had no claim on impatience given the circumstances. A sudden movement caught her eye and she turned to the entrance of the room. It was him. She saw the side of his head first as he surveyed the room, his shoulder-length hair tousled just like in the photo in her bag. I'm here, Anaiese wanted to shout, turn around. But, prevented by the sensation of a blow to the stomach, she was unable to utter a sound. Instead she stood up to face him. He turned as she did so. They stood face to face on opposite sides of the room. It was him, wasn't it? She'd met him in distant memory and imagination before, his reality existing only on photographic paper. She raised a hand in greeting and forced a smile. She knew it looked entirely unnatural and hated herself for not being relaxed. But no one in this position would be. When she smiled naturally she'd been told she could light up a room. How she wanted that to happen now.