

He caught her gaze, passed a hand through his hair and looked behind him, as if he didn't realise she was waving at him. He must recognise me, Analiese thought. She'd emailed him a photo. She was even wearing the same navy dress. It was him, wasn't it, she asked herself again. She clutched her bag wanting to check the image she was carrying and wishing she didn't need to. She remained standing as a blonde girl came into view, rushing over and reaching her arms around his neck. Analiese watched as he slid an arm around the girl's waist. She sat down on the bench, hiding her embarrassment by looking at the floor as they passed her.

It could have been him, she told herself. She'd always thought she would know him by instinct alone, and was disappointed to realise she was wrong. The hair, the eyes, they were so similar to those of the young man in the photo. The age too would have been about the same. A silly mistake, she told herself, acknowledging and blaming her nerves in equal measure. There's still time. There could be an infinite number of reasons for his lateness. There were always delays on the buses and trains. He might have overslept. Probably he'd been out the night before, exploring London and his alarm hadn't gone off, or he hadn't set it.

Analiese was prepared to wait for him as long as she needed to. She'd never known if this moment would come. She'd dreamt of it year after year, replaying a multitude of scenarios in her head. She'd been with him in nightmares, waking in shock, in fear. She'd woken smiling after a night with him, only to discover he wasn't there. She would wait because she needed resolution. She needed to talk about what had happened. She needed to know how he felt, what he wanted. She wished to ask him about their future. When he arrived they would sit together talking long into the evening. They would walk from the gallery to the village, where they would have an early dinner at the new Italian place opposite the flower shop, or drinks at the pub. After that she knew what she wanted to happen, yet dared not anticipate it.

As time continued to stretch, Analiese fell into a pattern: casting her eyes to her watch, the entrance hall, the painting. She watched as the dulled tones of dusk crept into the room through the skylight diffusing the vibrancy of the painting, and marvelled at how the young man in the centre of the work still refused to retreat into the shadows, instead using the sunset tones to convey an intimacy Analiese hadn't witnessed before.

Piero Di Cosimo, you have indeed created a captivating character even if the title "Portrait of a Young Man" fails to indicate so, she thought, examining the protagonist from different angles. After spending so long with him in one sitting, Analiese felt closer than ever to the depiction of this man standing proud against a pure blue background.

She'd found the painting years earlier when she'd come to the gallery in search of solace, looking for a place where she could sit with her shame, rather than hide it. She'd never been sure of exactly what it was in the painting that reminded her of the young man she was now waiting for, but each time she'd sat before the portrait, she'd found him there.

It was the oldest painting in the gallery and when it was originally bought had been attributed to Leonardo Da Vinci then later to Bolraffio and finally to Piero. The portrait was painted on wood using