

(At Serge's. Serge is with Yvan. The painting isn't there.)

SERGE. ... and you get along with the in-laws?

YVAN. Wonderfully. As far as they're concerned, I'm just some jerk stumbling from one iffy job to another and I'm now groping my way into the world of vellum ... This thing on my hand, what is it? (*Serge examines it.*) Is it serious?

SERGE. No.

YVAN. Oh, good. So what's new?

SERGE. Nothing. Lot of work. Exhausted. It's nice to see you. You never call.

YVAN. I don't like to disturb you.

SERGE. You're kidding, you just speak to my secretary and I'll call you right back.

YVAN. I guess so. Your place gets more and more monastic ... (*Serge laughs.*)

SERGE. Yes! Seen Marc lately?

YVAN. Not lately, no. Have you?

SERGE. Two or three days ago.

YVAN. Is he all right?

SERGE. Yes. More or less.

YVAN. Oh?

SERGE. No, he's all right.

YVAN. I talked to him on the phone last week, he seemed all right.

SERGE. Well, he is. He's all right.

YVAN. You seemed to be implying he wasn't all right.

SERGE. On the contrary, I said he was all right.

YVAN. More or less, you said.

SERGE. Yes, more or less. More or less all right. (*Long silence. Yvan wanders around the room.*)

YVAN. You been out? Seen anything?

SERGE. No. I can't afford to go out.

YVAN. Oh?

SERGE. (*Cheerfully.*) I'm ruined.

YVAN. Oh?

SERGE. You want to see something special? Would you like to?

YVAN. Sure I would. Show me. (*Serge exits and returns with the Antrios, which he turns around and sets down in front of Yvan. Yvan looks at the painting and, strangely enough, doesn't manage the hearty laugh he'd predicted. A long pause, while Yvan studies the painting and Serge studies Yvan.*) Ah, yes. Yes, yes.

SERGE. Antrios.

YVAN. Yes, yes.

SERGE. It's a seventies Antrios. Worth mentioning. He's going through a similar phase now, but this one's from the seventies.

YVAN. Yes, yes. Expensive?

SERGE. In absolute terms, yes. In fact, no. You like it?

YVAN. Ah, yes, yes, yes.

SERGE. Plain.

YVAN. Plain, yes ... Yes ... And at the same time ...

SERGE. Magnetic.

YVAN. Mm ... yes ...

SERGE. You don't really get the resonance just at the moment.

YVAN. Well, a little ...

SERGE. No, you don't. You have to come back in the middle of the day. That resonance you get from something monochromatic, it doesn't really happen under artificial light.

YVAN. Aha.

SERGE. Not that it is actually monochromatic.

YVAN. Oh, no ... How much?

SERGE. Two hundred thousand.

YVAN. Very reasonable.

SERGE. Very. (*Silence. Suddenly Serge bursts out laughing, immediately followed by Yvan. Both of them roar with laughter.*) Crazy, or what?

YVAN. Crazy!

SERGE. Two hundred thousand. (*Hearty laughter. They stop. They look at each other. They start again. Then stop. They've calmed down.*) You know Marc's seen this painting.

YVAN. Oh?

SERGE. Devastated.

YVAN. Oh?

SERGE. He told me it was shit. A completely inappropriate description.

YVAN. Absolutely.

SERGE. You can't call this shit.

YVAN. No.

SERGE. You can say, I don't get it, I can't grasp it, you can't say "it's shit."

YVAN. You've seen his place.

SERGE. Nothing to see. It's like yours. It's ... What I mean is, you couldn't care less.

YVAN. His taste is classical, he likes things classical, what do you expect ...

SERGE. He started in with this sardonic laugh ... Not a trace of charm ... Not a trace of humor.

YVAN. You know Marc is moody. Nothing new about that.

SERGE. He has no sense of humor. With you, I can laugh. With him, I'm like a block of ice.

YVAN. It's true he's a little gloomy right now.

SERGE. I don't blame him for not responding to this painting, he doesn't have the training, there's a whole apprenticeship you have to go through, which he hasn't, either because he's never wanted to or because he has no particular instinct for it, none of that matters, no, what I blame him for is his tone of voice, his smugness, his tactlessness. I blame him for his insensitivity. I don't blame him for not being interested in modern art, I couldn't give a shit about that, I like him for other reasons ...

YVAN. And he likes you!

SERGE. No, no, no, no, I felt it the other day, a kind of ... a kind of condescension ... contempt with a really bitter edge ...

YVAN. No!

SERGE. Yes! Don't keep trying to smooth things over. Where d'you get this urge to be the great reconciler of the human race? Why don't you admit that Marc is atrophying? If he hasn't already atrophied. (*Silence.*)

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