

# The Beauty & Bile of Jolyon Tuflaw

By Nick Dockerty © 2008

*“One of the joys of the Royal Academy's exhibition From Russia has been Nathan Altman's portrait of Anna Akhmatova. Painted in 1914-15, this image of a slender woman in a blue dress and yellow scarf seated in front of a landscape of shards and splinters - cubic flower petals, triangular fields - is the Mona Lisa of the Russian avant garde. In fact, it probably is a deliberate attempt to create a futurist Mona Lisa, proving that modern art can be beautiful and beguiling. It is also a homage to a hero of free speech.”*

Art is an enduring witness by Jonathan Jones. 18 April 2008.  
Blog on [Guardian.co.uk](http://Guardian.co.uk).

So what do you think?

The first, delicate pastry closed up as quick as a fly-trap between the ends of thumb and forefinger spilling, and tiny, precious portions of crab and mandarin, tendril with dill.

- Ach.

He closed in on the other two waiting their turn greedily snapping at them and motioning toward the nearest hanging on the wall, lead with his tongue.

- Well at least they ate well back then better than this shit you give us!

And then his rotund frame gave a cheeky sort of shrugged grimace that his ill-suit translates for us in a discrete instance: one deflating air bag; puffing up now pirouetting, deftly toward his ex-editor.

Inclination could as easily slip through the fingers of ambition; just as tiny, chance events can sometimes occur, framed by high ceilings, and never be remembered, or agreed upon, or forgotten by the very subjects they were here to seen by.

For they would never quite get used to it.

One reason perhaps, of being envious of this opening select, the sensation: Taste! For many had experienced only one since coming into this world, and that was everything to write home about.

Precious the canapes, champagnes, reds whites, bottled Czech beers, The curator. Who, everyone secretly agreed, had done a magnificent job; made one last pass, relaxed, mug of tea in hand, rejected. And was gone.

- Has he?
- 20 minutes ago
- Oh fucking bollocks why the fu - didn't you say!?

**After** making his excuses to return and dodging one late arrival; the curator is floating around with a broad glass of wine and a smile, exiting and re-entering rooms, giddily paddling light switches.

Until heavy doors coming to rest, slowly, keys are dropped; a curse is the signal for the insincere light to leave at the heels of the musket-grey trench coat.

They wait, just a few minutes; must make sure.

And then: they arrive.

The first, is always a quick transition; a cry: IL EST FINI! Is the signal.

And it is beautiful. And silent. If fleeting.

A mere fraction of a second for each and strictly chronological. The paintings cease to be paintings. If we were ever to witness it; it would look as if each one is lit by a sudden burst of sunlight; somewhat incongruously coming from a fixed source behind each canvas. Each window's physical uniqueness filtering the light and moulding the properties of whatever physical interior lies beyond them.

And then the moans, yelps, gentle thuds, limbs as subjects and objects scatter; and the fruit! Oranges apples, brilliant plums blue and all thickly outlined.

And then the coruscated light show leaves us suddenly; as an inebriated journalist might. Thankfully certain oil lamps have made it. And help us in the new gloom.

A stray solitary dog yawns then stretches, quivering violently under its shaggy, matted coat.

A cactus falls limply across a woman thighs.

A copy of Le Journal tumbles over itself revealing its back page to be blank, in absence sport is replaced by finger prints of linseed oil.

Always the first discernable voices – for those who have exhibited with them before – are the dancers; their transition like spring to winter; nearly a century of gay uninhibited dance in front of millions: just a tangle of limbs, rust, and chat - full of black bile.

- Ah finally we link hands;  
- Fuck - my back is killing me!  
- Performing with you is like spending an eternity applying rouge to foul smelling pork chops in a butcher's --- eh - oh Apollinaire how are you, darling?

If transit has brought certain scars, they're soon forgotten in the excitement following transition though. New faces so familiar. Old enemies friends. Trusted alliances, lovers, bitter rivals. And the fruit. Oh the fruit.

- Watch out you almost stood on my dog you oaf!  
- Sorry Madam -  
- Hello I'm Anna  
- Pleased to meet you Anna I am A Smoking Man.  
- As I can see -  
- Anna, Anna!  
- Sergei Diaghilev... I haven't seen you since St Petersburg when was it...  
- Oh Rumanov's little show? Spring 1932 I think you'll find. But don't you remember it was more recent -  
- You haven't aged –  
- Oh I'm ok. Nanny's a bit faded now but we're alright really. Come, come we have much to discuss. Please excuse us Smoking Man old chap...  
- Hi I'm Bathing the Red Horse. And you two?  
- Clearly. And quite naked too. Sorry - oh Varvara Petrovna it is you!  
- Meyerhold. And both of you looking so well!  
- We are, we are. Aren't we? Yes I am. Me too! That's good then!  
- Oh do stop it you two!  
- We will, we will.

**And** then it begins. Always among the nameless and the untitled.

- Why wait for a critic to tell you what is beautiful when  
- Emancipate the trained artist from his chains and the result is by its nature: beautiful.  
- What he didn't think about that is is that he would die, and I would live on slowly decaying for centuries but not essentially changing.  
- We are the artist. That is all. We do not think for ourselves. We are bound.

- No! Picasso was a right fatty.
- Nearly - we are surely but the reflection of the artist.
- Or his footsteps.
- We are his fingerprints!
- Of course we aren't
- No we owe our existence to those who commissioned us.
- Don't be stupid! We owe it to those who taught our creator.
- We owe our existence to our collectors – and keepers. I wouldn't fancy my chances on the streets of Moscow.
- We're in London, darling.
- My reputation is sullied just because my creator chose to keep a certain company during the war.
- Count yourself lucky mine suffers because I came along in the period after he produced his so called finest work. I mean really – why does a man change his mind like he changes his socks?
- A man can change his mind as many times as he likes.
- My name is Ekaterina yet I am but the Lady at the Piano, for all eternity. But look at me, beautiful, elegant, well read, a fine pianist – why didn't he
- Oh do shut up. It's the market that decides.
- A true master is the market.
- Why is my whole value as a human being just a reflection of the market?
- Oh come on we don't exist.
- When was the last time you had your cheeks done?
- it's been awhile but I had my nails touched up in 1972.
- Did you notice she flew business class?
- Yes, but just look at the size of her thighs. She wouldn't fit in economy.
- And I'm sure I'm worth more than her.

- Liberté, Liberté chéreeeeeeee  
 Allons enfants de la Patrie!  
 Allons enfants de la Patrie!

- Oh just ignore them they'll go away in a

- Qu'un sang impur  
 Abreuve nos sillons!

- Ah oui... et quelle surprise: bués encore!!

- et faites l'argent à partir de ma merde  
 ha hahahahaha

- Well if you divorce the artist from responsibility this is what you end up with!

- Merde sortant de votre extrémité!! hahahahah

- NO it's purely as it was but an, an, an acceleration in the supply chain; people don't want to have to wait for anything. What. What.

- Merde sortant de votre extrémité!! hahahahah

- WHAT THEY LACK in knowledge they replace with egotism – all creation and it's appreciation begins and ends with ---- oh good they've gone

- Trash aren't they? I mean she's from the same stock but at least she has dignity.

- She's just a sad old trout who needs to get laid.

- Ooh you are awful. She is awfully quiet though.

- And that blue dress, so tired.

- Yes it's so easy to be dignified if one has nothing to say. And indeed says nothing. Ever.

- Sorry you were saying?

- My very earliest memory is of he, standing naked with an erection! Creating me with an erection! And every now and and again he would would rub his you know and spit on my chest. Always had a chill there!

- You're lucky. He did my left eye first then left me for months in his basement. Leaning on a step ladder next to a piece of bread. The rats, oh the rats! I have a panic attack whenever I see something on four legs now.

- You're lucky to have eyes!

- Stop stop STOP!

The bickering dies down. A skinny man in an oversized suit; the copy of Le Journal now safely back in his right hand – has thrust himself right in the middle of the group.

- Only man sins. Not the artist

- Oh god here we go...

- Who let him in?

- Only man sins. Not the artist!

- And woman?

- Oh do shut up Marie!

- Faith or faithless. Surely the artist and we must presume by definition, the agent, must be exhumed of all responsibility. All that is needed is evidence of will being asserted and that that something has a beginning and an end and we presume a certain determination during the process. That is good enough for me. All else is skill, education, practice and judgement.

- And luck!

- Oh yeah look at my luck!

- She said something!

- Amazing!

- To want to leave your mark on a canvas, on a sheet of music or on the page from a blogging doggerelist to Hugo, from Kraftwerk to a minstrel, from a Chinese Picasso copyist to the dollar they earn for it. What price does the world pay for that? Surely better

than for the burning desire to want to leave your mark as a man on the bodies of millions of real flesh and blood people

- But we are real!

- I feel real!

- So do I!

- I don't - I feel shit.

- She speaks again! Catch me if I fucking faint!

- But you must see that at least a canvas captures all mans tears.

- And woman's!

- Yes. The Unknown Man is right. Although I am not as forgiving of those who attempt to create art who have not first served their apprentice. He is right. We are but

determination and facsimile. And sometimes oil and spit. And cotton

- Rubbish! What romanticism! And from the Man Picking Fruit from a Tree! We do no work. We pay no taxes. We are purely objects, manufactured objects. We do not derive from inspiration or from a vacuum - for what artist could breathe in a vacuum? And The Landlord certainly cannot justify the rent for one. No. We serve no other purpose than to remind the public that all is commodity and everything is in its place and has a price.

Thank you very much

- Oh listen to those two!

- Gloomy bastards...

- They'll be banning laughter next.

- Yes! And let me tell you - I work - I sell fish. Thank you very much. Does anyone want one?

- Oh whatever next!?

And so our little play will go on. Until sunrise and our subjects reluctantly climb back into their chairs, on their beds or in their landscapes ready to serve the public for the opening day tomorrow.

Not before composing themselves and the objects that have made the transition with them of course. Fixing their hair, replacing all the fruit, plumping up a pillow and then creasing it again. Which tends to take a couple of hours, at least, as, I am sure you can imagine these things generally do.

**And** what am I tomorrow?

- And what am I tomorrow?

- And what am I tomorrow?

In a state of undress Jolyon Tuflaw would look like he was hewn from a red cabbage.

But for the moment Jolyon has found his chair.

But for this moment; this Private view, and he, the pre-eminent art critic; so to garnish this canape of knowledge with a thick purple shirt, matching corduroys and serve with custard coloured socks and matching scarf, and sandals.

Imagine the violent aplomb at which a chef slices a red cabbage in two and the two halves gently coming to rest. And that, is where we find him.

A chair that's sufficiently out of the way so that no-one will notice him. Yet he had noticed it on his first pass. Its grey moulded plastic, a plinth beckoning him, lovingly. Four itsy merlots and thirty two years of astringent, witty, dry-art-criticism-in and he succumbs.

He doesn't fall asleep anymore, he can't seem to. But he has found something more rewarding than sleep. And more natural. Just as he found the way to flick moist tousles of his white hair from writhing upon his chiselled nose; say as Zeus once removed great cities from maps. Or great elephants from their breath. Or as nature has now removed most of said hair and kindly finished our scant description of him with a wilted looking trilby.

A kind of self-hypnosis – if he were to believe in such rubbish – a routine and a mantra.

- And what am I tomorrow?  
- And what am I tomorrow?  
- And what am I tomorrow?

Until. Until. Not so much a sleep, as a wake and not so much awake as asleep.

In truth, were we being totally objective we could describe it as a kind of intense deep, sulk. Or a synoptic Lovecraftian slept – if you were so disposed; but, for the modern world and its critics: if there is no time left for us then these are no times at all.

Yet for men like Jolyon surely all memories are similarly triumphal. That is; they certainly entertain none that are a bit gloomy or at all negative or in any way just positive or even happy. They are all triumphal. Like their regular dinner party guests.

And so why these easy reveries? You may ask. Well I for one can only gasp as one might upon being thrust a copy of the Gutenberg bible instead of a London Lite upon exiting Piccadilly tubestation.

Did David slay Goliath? I fear not. For if we were to anachronistically displace the two and examine the body more fully we would find a blood clot and point our fingers at his sedentary life style in his warm cave and chronic over-eating. Still I digress. And still.

Jolyon is still. Save his eyelids, which flicker playfully. His irises roll up and head into the cave for security.

And what am I today?  
And where?

He is sitting in his study; happily ripping open letters with an ornate carving knife. And discarding the irrelevant with a sigh. Expectant of something. And there she is. The white envelope tossed over his shoulder; slams against a row of books and flutters serenely to the carpet. Elbows plonked on the heavy desk. Letter firmly grasped. Jolyon brings his shoulders upwards as if to shrug but holds them there.

- Oh.

And then his whole torso deflates with such an exaggerated fullness.

- Oh what

- Oh what fucking bollocks. Ha ha what bastards! I'll show them

Quick as a flash and on his feet.

*You were right about Foucault!* Of course I fucking am. Fuckaults!

*And overall you were the strongest candidate but we couldn't help but notice that you were in a certain state of insobriety.* Well gentlemen if you've ever had to get the train from London to Glasgow you

- Oh what's the use?

- Sorry sir?

- Look I didn't think you needed to book a bloody seat at this time of the day. And I certainly don't do peak-times boy. Why has your company sold me a ticket if there are no seats?

- Oh they tend to oversell as not everyone turns up. But we're approaching the bank holiday.

- Oh what's the - But I can't stand all the way to bloody Glasgow.

-Your best bet sir is to head toward the buffet car, there's more space there. And then wait for a seat – I'll keep an eye out for you.

- I pay all this money so I can stand in the buffet car!

- They have crates – if you ask nicely for them.

- Crates!

**Since** the ban Jolyon had got quite used to travelling by train – quite enjoyed it in fact. But little saunters up to Oxford every now and again seemed a long way from this. Even with a seat this train seemed to be designed to give as little space to the passenger as possible.

Struggling along the increasingly cramped interior eyeing fellow passengers with a mix of suspicion, disgust and sorrow. Jolyon feels a distinct yet such a generic sourness he

hasn't felt for a long time. And it's one of those witless ones that can only do the soul harm.

Why is your journey so necessary? Why do people want to travel in this country? Why don't you just phone them and take the dogs for a long walk over the heath instead? Why put yourself through this? Surely you can't have imagined it would come to this? Why do you need to start eating your sandwiches we've barely left Euston? I bet you're not working on the lap top! Go on you've just remembered you forgot to do something many years ago, leave your seat and throw yourself out of the nearest door...

Approaching A Man Struggling to Exit a Toilet.

His pathetic expression discernable through the small gap in the door. Feeling similar panic and a rare sense of social responsibility Jolyon impulsively lashes out, punching an oval button with a sweaty palm. Only for the door to close; and a trap door to open - sending the man screaming into hot-chip-fat.

I wonder where he was sitting?

He's beginning to enjoy this. And from here to arrival in the buffet car, every small jolt represents an opportunity for Jolyon to lash out at heads or throw his whole body into the space of the blank eyed unseeing Seated Dead.

Displaced:  
Two laptops.

Spilt:  
A hot executive's coffee; a kids' juice - managed to squeeze the carton too.

Dislodged:  
A baseball cap.  
A kippah,  
And a veil.

Almost decapitated:  
A hoodie.

He feels no remorse – and this is certainly no time to be politically correct.

He's beginning to enjoy this as suddenly he feels like the only passenger on a train within a train, again. Slicing through England's sleeping body. Unstoppable. Passing stations like judgements. Saying 'Sorry!' like making critical diagnoses.

But, he can hear singing now. Something's swaying. Is that me or the train? And then a collection of bright twinkling lights up ahead? Are they signals? Is it Branson's gay charisma? Is that the buffet car?

They're wigs. They're hammered and it's a hen party. Fuck.

The breaks come on just as Jolyon can make out what it is they're

- ♪ ♪ ♪ ... Open the bar open the bar open the bar open the bar YESSSSSSSSSS!

- Ooh he looks like a fat little Jeremy Clarkman.

**It's going** to be a long journey.

- Are you married Jeremy?

- I have seven wives. One for each day of the week. Double gin and tonic and a glass of red please.

- Ear don't push in you fat toff

- Yeah we've been waiting for ages

- Fuck off. Thank you. How much? Christ-on-a-bike!

- Yes come on! He's no better than the rest of us!

- What's your real name Jeremy?

- Jolyon

- Aw Julian how

- No J-o-l-y-o-n

- Lollipop? Ha ha

- No, jay – oh. Oh Jeremy will do

- Look where are you lot going?

- We're off to Blackpool of course! gotta change at Preston. Sandra's getting married in two weeks.

- But why would one want to get married at all?

- He's a boxer.

- Oh well that's fucking different then! Ha ha. For a moment I thought you were going to say because 'She loves him and he's a good man' or something similarly sickening. Good grief there are no good men. Just good professions. And boxing seems as good as any. I'll drink to that.

- Yess! Go Jeremy Clarkman!

**At** this point we should give Jolyon and the Gin a bit of time to work their magic. Ok that's enough.

- So what do you do Kate?

- I'm a nurse actually.

- Oh really. A nurse. Good. It was is, such a noble profession

- Oh it's not I can assure you -

- Really, why?

- I don't I don't really want to talk about it now. I'm on holiday!

- That's fair enough.
- So what about you Jeremy? Let me guess...
- A lawyer?
- Good grief no. But my father, Verl was.
- What kind of name is Verl?
- An expensive one.
- Ha ha ok what is it oh one of those head fund managers in the City?
- Ha ha if only my darling. I'd be flying to Glasgow in my own helicopter.
- Aw would you give me a lift?
- Yes of course. I'd get James to hover and keep her steady above the train and I'd descend on the rope ladder swing into the buffet car and sweep you off your feet – and order a gin and tonic for us both to drink on the ascent back up.
- Ha ha brilliant. Would you fly me to your private island?
- Nothing, would give me more pleasure.
- Ear Kate why are you chatting to the twat for? Come on we've got a round of AfterShocks in.
- Do you want one?
- What on earth is an After shock? Sounds dangerous. Go on then.
- So what do you do Jeremy?
- Well at the moment it's more what I used to do. I'm afraid I'm being somewhat put out to pasture shall we say. I used to be the Art Critic for the Guardian until, well, poor sods can't really blame them they never make any money and everything's going on the that bloody internet nowadays.
- Oh Art critic. Wow. That's brilliant. Oh I know... who is it Matisse? the Dancers? There's a poster of it in our staffroom. Ha ha I know it's a cliché but I don't know much about art but I know what I like!
- It is a cliché. But, I feel, that that is all we can ever really say about it all.
- You think so?
- I know so.
- So what makes a good critic?
- A good critic is one who relates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces.
- Wow did you write that?
- No some French bloke. But maybe I'll write something about you - about us
- Would you?
- Yes, of course
- Aw. So where are you going today?
- I have a meeting with the editor for the Glasgow Herald. Hopefully, well, you know see if I can teach those jocks a thing or two about art.

This is the moment between them. Jolyon looks into Kate's eyes and she, for once, does not look away. The time is now.

- Anyway do you would you fancy going to see the real version of Matisse's Dancers - The Dance? It is fabulous.
- Really? Yeah I would actually.

- Well there's a special Private view of this 'From Russia' exhibition that opens next week. I am going to do a piece for... for... Well in my capacity now as a freelancer. Would you come with me?
- Ear Kate we're nearing Preston why are you still talking to that twat?
- Yes I would. Yes really I would. Look have you a mobile number?
- Oh I don't do mobiles. Hold on –

Jolyon slaps his jacket pockets exaggeratedly then his trouser pockets and then back up to his inside jacket pocket and he pulls out an old piece of paper folded like a letter. He looks very surprised to see it – and he opens it out and...the train slows to a standstill. Kate finds a pen and hands it to him.

- Oh seven eight one four three four nine six eight
- You too Kate get this down you!
- Oh seven eight one four three four nine six eight one did you get that?
- Yes I think so, look I'll call you early next week it's on Thursday.
- Ok ok
- Enjoy Blackpool's pleasures!
- We will.

Jolyon is now sitting on a crate. His Trilby, momentarily displaced by a bright purple tinsel wig. Preston, in her wisdom, disappeared into the fog 20 minutes ago. He is staring at the slightly yellowing letter intensely. His lips moving.

5<sup>th</sup> March. 1979.

Dear Jolyon,

Forgive my directness for it is the only way I know how.

It is with some sadness that I must inform you that Professor Rufus Vincent died of liver failure one month ago.

I have taken on his position.

I know you are nearing the end of your thesis and have been very closely monitored by Professor Vincent but while your assertions are all thoroughly researched and are no doubt, true – 'a priori' at certain levels. But, and again forgive me, was that you in the purple suit clearly asleep in Professor Ongine's 'Dans un vent spécifique tous les effondrements de structuralism' lectures?

An extensive revision is required, yet I fear that any amount of redrafting at this stage would only result in prolonging the inevitable – that is a style of thesis more suited to 1934 – some years before Derain started the series of paintings in question.

I would like to meet you at your earliest convenience to discuss this and to suggest an alternative analysis technique on your chosen subject that I feel would bear fruit.

Yours sincerely,

KA\_\_NURSE! 07814 349681

Doctor Patricia Margaret-Manfred

**Jolyon** is still. Save his eyelids, which flicker playfully. Every now and again an iris rolls down from the cave.

- I don't recognise him.
- Me either.
- Anyway, look at his eyelids, he's sound asleep.
- Yes. - look it's just so wonderful to see you again. I never thought we would ever meet like this again.
- I am always 26 as you will be 34 and yet there is 39 years between us.
- Oh so you do remember
- Of course I remember what do you think of me?
- How weird was it that our esteemed hosts completely by chance lending us both out to such a provincial backwater?
- Not so weird when you consider who we were meant to impress.
- But still - don't you think?
- It was meant to be?
- Well, yes
- Ha! Don't start that, that again. Yeah let's get married, honeymoon in the Royal Academy London for a few weeks in front of millions and then what wait another 30 years until we might just see each other completely by chance. Look at the Blessing of the Young Couple Before Marriage. At least Monsieur Dagnan-Bouveret had a sense of humour. Seemingly completely besotted by each other for over a hundred years and now look at them. First time they do a show for ages and he runs off into the arms of the Girl at the Piano. She's but a child! Time, and the young make fools of us all.
- But Anna I really
- Sergei stop. Can't you just enjoy it for what it is?
- No I can't and I won't! That's it with you isn't it?
- What?
- Anna Andreyevna Akhmatova – you poets are all alike. Challenge everything on paper and yet when it comes to your own life you're quite happy staying exactly as you are – in case you ever lose your ability.
- Nonsense you do talk such simple rubbish sometimes.
- Then, Gorenko, marry me!
- Look Sergei – I can assure you - I've had quite enough of husbands in my other life. Here, I am free, in my way - if it is only for a few weeks once every 30 years and subject to the confines of this gallery. But this, is my space, for me! Can't you enjoy that?
- No, I cannot.
- Then leave!

- Leave! Are you insane?
- Leave? Who's leaving?

Our lovers have been so wrapped up in each others company they've failed to spot The Unknown Man wandering close by.

- Anna. Sergei.
- Ah The Unknown Man. We've been hearing, things about you –
- All good I hope?
- It depends on which version you mean.
- And which version is this?
- Well according to the Woman Sleeping in Sheepcote – she's not always asleep you see. Not even she, can sleep for that long.
- Oh do go on.
- She overheard you discussing something with the Portrait of the Composer Arthur Lourié.
- Did she now?
- Oh well yes she did actually -
- And what exactly did our sleeping beauty hear?
- Well funnily enough she heard you saying that you weren't The Unknown Man and that you were actually a self portrait of, now let me think a certain one, Mr Derain?
- Oh she did she?
- and well let me just think this through. Bear with me but wouldn't that make you the one and only Mr Andre Derain?
- Oh and we couldn't have that could we now Anna? Just think The Unknown Man sitting at the same table as the bourgeois poetess Anna Andreyevna Gorenko.
- I wouldn't want the time of day from Andre Derain and but would willingly share a blueberry with the Unknown Man. If he could prove he was actually the Unknown Man.
- You two! Come now... look this is the opening night let us not fall out so soon.
- Indeed Sergei indeed.
- Very good. Come Anna we must find Sophia – rumour has it she has found a black truffle the size of Apollinaire's fist that has made it through transition – and there is some debate as to its country of origin.
- A black truffle? Come now Sergei that is not in the painting!
- Oh it is was – but supposedly painted over – a little joke I think you'll find
- But it will have decayed, putrefied –
- Yes and truffles cannot just be created, however skilful the artist
- Come Sergei, Anna is right!
- Well - we should at least find out

Sergei pulls Anna away. Anna glances back at the Unknown Man quizzically.

- what is it with you two? Don't tell me you've --- before?
- I've had quite enough of Unknown Men, Sergei, believe me.
- And what does that mean?
- Oh just drop it won't you

The Unknown Man walks nonchalantly around our sleeping Jolyon, and stops to look at a painting of a Moscow courtyard and the missing shadow-like figures of the children, the woman and the chickens that have made it through. He is sure he can still hear the child crying from a nearby room.

**Jolyon** cannot hear crying. He's waking - slowly – bulbous eyes blinking. Aware only of a dull ache in his head and that the whole room seems to be flickering a dull grey orangey glow, shadows form cast by frames and shudder slightly and are gone. Maybe it's a film they're showing? Opening night, makes sense. And then he notices him and begins to eye the man in the oversized black jacket with tight trousers and, skinny black tie with growing mistrust. He rights his trilby, alights his chair uneasily and saunters over with exaggerated casualness.

- Independent?

The Unknown Man visibly shudders with surprise.

- Eh?

- You're from the Indie right?

- What, sorry? What painting are you?

- I can assure you I'm no painting my young man. Jolyon Tuflaw – ex- Guardian Arts Critic now very much freelance. You are?

- Oh my god!

- Yes it is me...

- But this can't be happening

- Don't worry I don't bite. I'm rather cuddly really. I think I must have fallen asleep, is Sir Norman still here – I must –

- But where are you from?

- Originally? Oh a little village in Hertfordshire – you won't have heard of it

- Is that in Russia?

- Good grief man – are you mad?

- Kazakhstan then?

- Look I must be going ... jeez I bet he works on a website for some fuckwit

Jolyon marches off.

- Wait!

- Excuse me?

- Look forgive me – you can't be one of us

- Well clearly – I have an MA. Would have been a PHD if it – look who are you? A freelance?

- No forgive me. I am The Unknown Man.

- Oh for

- You know the Derain painting?

- Oh that well yes of course I do.
- I am The Unknown Man
- Oh for – oh...oh of course... you've been hired by the PR agency... Are they showing a film? Come on then is there any red left my head's killing me.

Jolyon links arms with The Unknown Man and walks past three adjoining rooms of subjectless and fruitless paintings.

- How old are you?
- 31 but just shy of a hundred really.
- Ha ha of course. Well I should be 56 but I did take 3 years to complete, so. Do you know - I was stood up this evening?
- Stood up?
- Yes. By a nurse!
- Well I'm sorry to hear that.

**Upon** turning right into the central room of the exhibition, The Unknown Man suddenly detaches himself and runs ahead. Leaving Jolyon to make sense of the scene that is now upon him.

Even in the poor light he can't quite remember any private view being quite this colourful. About three metres away a naked man on a red horse is being harassed by five or six orange looking men and women – who dance around displacing oranges and apples. A blue faced matador is elegantly moving between dancers and horse. A group is watching. It is difficult to make out individuals but there's one in an official looking heavy dark blue uniform smoking and one seems to have a fish in his right hand.

The Unknown Man comes back, smiling at Jolyon.

- Look! can't you see?
- Well it seems very affecting – you guys have done a good job. Bloody hell it's 11 o'clock these things
- Finish – yes and now it is our turn. Everyone! Everyone!

Slowly the talk, laughter and general frivolity in the room dies down as everyone turns to look at him.

- Oh look er wow - it's the Unknown Man
- But look!
- Is that a real person?
- Yes! Shit!
- Is he a KGB agent sent to keep tabs on us?
- Spy on us you mean.
- Oh do give it a rest – in that suit!
- No that's an early Chagall

- Is it ever!

Jolyon sees the colourlessness of Matisse's The Dance hanging on the wall. And perhaps a realisation comes to him. If it does, the only sign is his mouth that is hanging wide open.

- This is Jolyon Tuflaw!

- Who?

- What?

- He's a journalist - an art critic! I found him sleeping by the main public entrance. He is one of them! And he is, I think, the first to witness the results of one of our little transitions.

Suddenly everyone is still and silent even the Dancers.

- Oh bloody hell what happens next?

- Far too podgy for a journalist

- I told you - he's a spy!

- He's working for the Government - we'll be getting tax demands next!

- Back-dated for 82 years - jeez does anyone know an accountant?

- Look he may know something about me!

- She speaks again!

A middle aged woman in a blue dress walks up to Jolyon.

- Hello Sir, pleased to meet you.

- er like wise.

- I am Woman in Blue -

- by Cezanne...

- Yes. Do you - well would you know - by any chance, who I a - sorry who it was who modelled for him?

- Oh I'm a bit rusty on but as far as I know the identity of the model in the painting of the Woman in

- Me.

- Of the Woman in Blue. 1900 I think it was

- Yes!

- Remains unknown.

- Oh. Really? Are you sure you don't -

- No that's as far as I know - sorry

A woman is helped forward.

- Hi I am Nude (Black and Gold).

- Clearly, how can I help you? No wait - you're a Matisse. 1909ish. Oh fantastic.

- 1908 Look I don't want to know my name it's just, that why did he not give me eyes?

- Eyes. Oh right of course – ok well during that period western artists were looking toward Africa, seeking influences outside of their -
- Oh I know all about that. But what kind of man would not give me any eyes?
- Look I really, really don't know why he...
- Oh what's the use of you!
- Sir! What is my true worth?
- In what manner do you mean?
- Oh stop evading the question – what is my worth?
- Well it depends what you mean when you say worth... monetarily I would guess. Well a similar Bonnard recently went at auction for -
- No not that. Don't tell me about that – good grief who is this supposed learned man? - -
- He's rubbish!
- Yeah he knows nothing.
- Not only is he not one of us but he is an impostor within his own profession!
- Yes at least we can never be anything but what we are!
- Oh fuck the lot of you! This is like an absurd antiques roadshow.

The hopeful faces have turned sour. And Jolyon soon finds himself surrounded. An orange is thrown at his head, then an apple then a plant pot. Accusing fingers prodding his puddingly frame - fingers form fists and then, a shriek! And another! It's The Unknown Man and the Dancers! They're wading in like riot police.

- Leave him you old bitch. Get off him you old bastard – you smell worse than the fish you sell.

- Come you should leave!
- I think that wise.
- Can you call security? They will all hide if they know security is coming!
- Yes there's a phone by the main entrance!
- He's calling security!
- Hide everyone!

Suddenly the crowd disperses. Jolyon, The Unknown Man and The Dancers make a play for the entrance. The gallery is in darkness and there is complete quiet. Whispers now.

- Call them... now
- what about you lot?
- Oh don't worry about us... we quite fancy a night out!
- What? You want to come with me? Are you mad?
- No – look just for a couple of drinks. It'll be fine, and then we'll come back. It's easy when you know how.
- What? Oh for... Hello?
- Hello security.
- Hello erm well this er Jolyon Tuflaw – The Art Critic from the Guardian. I'm really sorry but I must have fallen asleep during the opening this evening. Too much of the old red I think.

- Ok sir we'll be right up.
- But how are you going to get out?
- Don't worry just keep them talking for a bit. Where shall we meet?
- Oh well there's this private club...members only – but I might be able to...

Maybe Jolyon sniffs an opening here – did he overhear the earlier conversation between Anna, Sergei and The Unknown Man – who might well be a self portrait of Derain? Who knows? Maybe he sees an article he'll sell to the Daily Telegraph - that'll stick it to his ex-editor. Well maybe he thinks that talking to a character in a painting is good enough material for that elusive novel. Imagined or not. Or a short story? In truth, I don't think he's over sure exactly what's going on. Maybe he's been drinking too much since losing his job?

Either way the burly security guard is not over pleased to see him. But with his usual charm he manages to brush aside the whole incident with an anecdote or two.

**A little** under forty minutes later and the rendezvous has clearly been successful.

Jolyon Tuflaw and The Unknown Guest are deep in discussion; our Critic a plump but pert purple bauble, suspended, gently bobbing; our Guest a series of hastily arranged cacti. Curious counterpoints both in the voluptuous thighs of the studded leather seating; only now and again distracted by Jolyon's flirting.

- I can introduce you if you like? How is your Russian? Anna, Anna!
- No I'm, really, not good at these things –
- Jolyon! Jolyon! How is your latest 'From Russia' – ha ha
- Ha ha! Later, you -
- Jolyon! JOLYON! Get the fucking drinks in!

The Dancers are introducing themselves, almost as one; spotlights reveal hints of taut bodies replete in pinks and purples, flattering, the exclusive coterie and buoyed by the champagne and the chat, lapped up straight from the bottle and, linking arms, close-up around another...

- Oh Hi we're The Dancers!
- Ha ha brilliant so you're holding satans' penis too then?
- Ha ha What!?
- But you're in advertising?
- Yeah you could say that.
- Brilliant I knew it! Hi I'm Steve. Director. I did the exploding Jihadi in the VW viral. Small but tough - a bit like me
- Exploding Jihadi's in a VW brilliant Stevie. You're a bright one. Let us guess your brain's Small but tough too?
- Er leave it out i got over a million hits on you tube – what have you done?
- Think of a famous orange drink.

- Oh right you're all in orange, wow! Tango? - I thought that finished.
- Look, Stevie, is there another more down to earth club nearby?
- Yeah loads... I can take you to one -
- The nearest one being...?
- The -
- Oh, but we've only just started now you're finished. Bye Steve!
- Yeah Bye Stevie. Ha ha!
- That's what I love about you guys. No airs and graces. Art unrefined. Fuck it who wants more champagne?

And The Dancers leave, we assume for another club. Leaving Jolyon and The Unknown Guest to - and this is where we must leave. For now.

**Wait**, just before we go, here's a few carefully selected - let's call them headline footnotes - that might tie up the loose end for you.

Kremlin Furious at reports of Art Theft  
 I told you so – says Kremlin  
 Bollocks says Burnham  
 Who is Burnham? Asks Art World  
 Art Critic Caught on CCTV leaving RA with The Unknown Man  
 Ailing Art Critic found in Bed with The Unknown Man

And what affect Jolyon's own transition? From esteemed Arts Critic to freelancer to a five year prison stretch. We can only guess. Well perhaps we'll find out in his memoir. In the meantime this appeared in the incidentals in the Evening Standard just six months later:

Derain Estate Enthused as Prices Soar for First Time Since WW2

**The**  
**End.**