

Adventures of a young artist trying to discover his personal style and place in the art world.

**The Phosphor-Dot Gallery**

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# ***THE PHOSPHOR-DOT GALLERY***

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A Novel

***ROBERT EMMETT MUELLER***

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## Chapter 1: NEW ACQUISITIONS

People splayed up the concrete staircase in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art, like fixtures in a human sculpture, colorful exhibition banners flashing off the façade as backdrops. In their open-air lounge, sun-seekers and tired culture vultures enjoyed a brief respite. Pretty youthful men stared at the youthful long-haired blonde stereotypes, who stared back with liberated forthrightness. A two-year old escaped her parents' grasp, her pretty face contorting with delight as she scampered over the sun-hot staircase with bare hands and feet, clapping like a cute fleshy spider, squealing. An orchestra of people cheered her escape. She is rescued by a tall young man with blond hair and bloodshot eyes, and returned to the parents without so much as a thank you. Vendors sold soda and hot dogs and shis-ka-bab at the curb, artisans displaying their wares on the sidewalks, cabs and Fifth Avenue buses periodically belching out their charge, adding to the fray.

A young man stepped out of a cab on 5th avenue, his face breaking into a smile. "Will you look at this crowd?" He gave a slight laugh, his face bright with amazement, and reached for a pretty young woman inside the cab, who asked, "Why'd you bring me here?"

"I want to show you something," the young woman said, stepping out, her face washed with a fixed calm, "something that will really interest you." She let herself be pulled up; then quickly, like a dancer, turned to pay the cabbie; she took his hand and together they gingerly went up the staircase, with careful dance steps around the composed people. "It's a surprise," she explained. "You'll see."

"I haven't been here in a long time," the young man said, looking around as if at the zoo. Some of the people sat or lay back on the steps with their eyes closed to the sun, others talked wildly in little groups of spirit or discontent; most simply stood with folded arms, looking into space as if bored with existence, waiting impatiently for something to happen. "Perhaps I should have," he smiled, admiring some of the pretty women; "I mean, come here more often." He shook his head, crossly. "No. I hate museums. Nowadays. They make me feel guilty. For not working more. For not working harder!"

"I guess I can understand that," she said, negotiating the multitude and weaving toward the museum entrance. But until that moment she had never thought how artists like him might feel about museums where so-called great art resides. Pointing to the line at the pay booth she said, "I'll pay. It's on the gallery." When she reached the booth she shelled out bills, obtaining two crimp Met buttons. "Come on," she began, fastening the button on his collar, "and follow me."

"It's worse here," the young man began, "than in a Mall."

"It's Sunday. I should have thought." She frowned, feeding on memories. "But I had no choice. Only discovered it yesterday." She went ahead, talking over her shoulder, her voice loud: "I just had to show you this. Something special. It'll be a surprise. Upstairs."

"A surprise? Here in the Met?" he asked ironically. Yet he was filled with expectation as he bounded after her, taking two stairs at time. "A surprise in this Museum? That will be the day."

"Your museum, indeed!" she turned at the top of the stairs, lit up with delight. "Well, the curator does do things behind your back, you know," she said facetiously, her voice cheerful. "Follow me. To the left."

"Whoa!" he said, stopping, "I know where you're going." He felt he should be

annoyed with her; he wanted to do many things rather than be in this crowded museum -- to walk in the woods, to make love in Central Park; he wanted to be away from everyone and alone with her forever. "They put new acquisitions there, in the Johnson Gallery. Have they bought something of mine?" he asked her anxiously. "Did another of my prints get into the Met?"

"Well, no such luck," she frowned, worried that she had build false hopes. "If dad sold them something, I've told you. But this is important," she again pulled his hand, the momentum of his body making her feel like a canary with a goose in tow, "as you'll see. It's through the Johnson Gallery. Come on." She saw the look on his face when he said 'another' and realized her mistake; young artists took these things seriously; every museum purchase, especially by this museum, was a milestone. "Gracious no, they didn't buy anything of yours. Sorry to say." She shook her head, but plucked up her spirits and smiled as she spoke. "It has to do with that van Gogh. Dad's van Gogh."

"Van Gogh?" he looked at her question questioningly, sensing mystery in her pretty dark eyes. "Your father had a van Gogh?"

"Yes. You mean to say you never saw it?" she gently admonished him. "It was hanging right before your eyes in his office," she said petulantly, "but now it's here. Back in the European Paintings and Sculpture Galleries. Come along now," she said with a stubborn determination.

"It's so damn crowded," he said as he dodged people, "I can't stand it!"

"Crowded?" she smiled, looking around as if seeing people for the first time. "Oh, yes -- they do let other people into your museum!" she laughed in her pleasant, guarded way. "Well, I'll meet you back at the van Goghs -- if you can find them!" She unleashed her hand and dashed ahead through a sudden gap as fast as she could, like a little girl playing tag.

John Flower was being driven mad by Susan Swain. Quite against his better judgment he had fallen madly in love with her -- but there was no good reason why he should love her; she had all the qualities that touched his heart; she was vivacious, eager, amusing; she was intelligent and enterprising; she had a very pretty face and a trim little body and enjoyed great sex. So he followed her back to the van Goghs, slowly, his destination clear, since every room in the museum, and all of their paintings, was suspended in his consciousness as if hung on an invisible map. As he walked, casually looking at paintings and checking his unconscious store, he wondered how to catch this pretty young woman, permanently. No, pretty was not strong enough: ravishing, an almost universal beauty, and so totally sexually desirable! But she was a gazelle, quicksilver, a shooting star in the night, difficult to capture, frequently dragging him off on one of her tangent expeditions. Like today, when she suddenly insisted they go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and he shamelessly, sheepishly, unquestioningly went along with her.

Susan Swain pushed her way through the overcrowded museum, rudely, as if alone and not being followed by a young man who adored her. She twisted to locate John Flower, plodding after her, his pretty smile towering above the crowd. He was impressive, football hero handsome, and, more importantly to her, a real artist, a very good, intense and serious artist. Art and artists were her life, her heritage, being brought up in the gallery atmosphere; and so it was important that her lovers be artists, men with more than the usual interest, men devoted to their art, creative men with a vision of art

and something important to say. John Flower was such a man, with the potential for becoming a truly great American artist -- with her help, of course. Although he was ten or so years her senior, he was a child in her adept hands. She was ready, thought she would not admit it to herself, to totally surrendering her profound, unique self to this pretty man. She relished the thought of his lips, his laugh, his arms crushing her in a thrilling embrace.

John Flower caught up with Susan in the Annenberg Galleries and fished her out of the crowd. He asked: "What's this...about...?" He tried to speak forthrightly, but his voice turned shy like a schoolboy's, fumbling and hesitating. He had this habit, which he detested, of acting foolish and sometimes even silly, when he should be strong, forceful. When would he grow up? "What's the surprise?"

"You'll see." Then she found herself telling him what seemed at the moment to be valuable information. "I wrote my thesis on van Gogh." But was it valuable information for him? she questioned herself; why am I trying so hard to impress this young man? Was John Flower so different than the rest? Yes, he was a neat fish on her line, and she had better play her dangerous game carefully; men were easy to catch, hard to get rid of - especially for her, who seemed to infect all young men with her beauty, like a disease. "I hadn't seen the van Gogh for years." She hesitated, her eyes clutching an echo of an old memory. "And when dad brought me here last week to show it off, it was a shock. The second I saw it again, I gasped! There was something fishy about it."

"Fishy? Did you tell your father?"

"Heavens no! He'd have a stroke."

"How could the Met get a fishy van Gogh?"

"Fakes aren't so easy to detect these days."

"But a van Gogh!" he frowned, his voice firm; "I'm sure they checked its provenance from here to gazooch!"

"Perhaps," she said softly.

"You should tell your father -- "

"Never!" she said, firmly. "You don't understand!" In the tight crowd with ears on all side she blushed slightly, her voice too loud, embarrassingly loud; so she continued, whispering: "Besides, he'd not believe me. Dad doesn't trust me about art. Even with a Fine Art's degree from Mount Holyoke, can you imagine!" She made a little frown of discontent, taking John Flower's arm intimately. "After I graduated and came back to the city he gave me the books -- he trusts me there! Gave me the gallery management. And a good thing he did. They were a mess. Well, I have great plans for the gallery, you'll see," she began, as if ready to reveal an agenda. "First, I put it on the Internet. With Molly's help, of course. But it was my idea," she smiled, her face radiating ambition. "My father knows absolutely nothing about business. I really don't know how he survived all these years. I think he's getting too old to run the Granite." Her exasperation was clearly written on her face. "But if the van Gogh is a fake, it will ruin everything. So much depends on it now. We need the money," she said, gasping; and added, "to keep you guys in business."

"What do you mean," the John Flower began, his voice expressing dismay, "'keep us in business?'"

"Let's move in on the van Goghs," she said, registering but not answering his question. She pressed against him, using his weight to move them toward the pictures,

the crowd an omnipresent restricting force. "Well, as I said," she relaxed because they were frozen in one spot, "our gallery is in trouble. The economy, you know. Rent quadrupled. All our costs are up. After I went over the books I had to tell dad that we were facing bankruptcy." She read the incredulity written on his face. "Really! I tried to make my father face facts. I showed him the bottom line. I thought he didn't take it in. He just nodded his head. Said he'd take care of everything. I really thought he was going senile! And I didn't know what he was going to do until yesterday when he brought me up here. I had forgotten about the van Gogh. He told me Aunt Lizzy bought it. For the gallery's good. And then she gave it to the Met. She's done it before, he said. Can you imagine that? Well," she smiled, "you have to know my aunt to understand why I am surprised -- and know her history with dad, with the gallery. Goes back all the way to London. But nevertheless the infusion of money will keep us going," she said, pausing for effect, "for a good while, at least."

"Keep the gallery going?" He stood there, his intimations of what the young woman was driving at sent his stomach hurtling down in despair. "Are things as bad as all of that?"

"Yes, they are." She took his hand again and tried to pull him along faster than the line allowed, but they remained stuck in their tracks. "This is maddening!" she said anxiously; but she shrugged her shoulders and continued, serious as a professor lecturing. "The art scene is in such a mess today." Her eyes turned lighter and she altered the tone of her voice to frivolity. "Gracious, who'd buy some of the things you guys do? You never think, do you, working away like beavers in your studios, who will buy your art? Where it will...well, fit! Or it will fit. Not everyone has living rooms the size of museum galleries. Why do you paint so damn large? Gracious, don't you have trouble storing your own work? O.K.," she said, the line beginning to creep along, "we can move now."

Susan Swain realized that she had better not be too critical of the young man's art, his most sensitive area. She had John Flower at her feet; having a lover in her power was an enjoyable excitement, and she better not blow it now. She remembered how at school she used to brag to Molly Berger, her roommate, that she could make a fool of any man, and humble him into submission. John Flower was humbled, that was for sure; but she thought him a more delicate being, who reacted in unsuspected ways to her machinations; he reacted in unpredictable, and therefore in more interesting ways than most of her young suitors. With John behind her she spoke as they inched along: "I thought I understood art history," she continued philosophically, "but today's stuff is impossible." The two of them were locked between a group of giggling young girls and a very old man, who's face clearly indicated he was following their conversation. "I guess," Susan began softer, almost in John Flower's ear, "being raised, practically since a baby, in the atmosphere of the Granite Gallery, the way it used to be, with traditional art always in my eye, has prejudiced me. Can you imagine someone putting a pile of junk like Lev Nemeroff's stuff in a living room? Or installing a wall video display in your home den to show Molly's video art?" She continued, her voice growing louder, gasping and speaking as they pushed ahead; and she punctuated her talk by waving her delicate hands in the air like a musical conductor, once hitting one of the giggling girls in front of them. "Cuse," she apologized and gave a tiny smile, quickly continuing: "Oh, don't get me wrong. I dig most of the modern stuff. I like Nemeroff's garbage sculpture -- but don't tell him I call it that!" she confided, her face open to memory. "And all the rest. All those glomerations

of things we do in the gallery, the happenings, events, theatrics, either mundane or dazzling. You know," she confided, "a really good presentation, in the atmosphere of a sumptuous gallery like the Granite, makes anything seem like art; anything we mount, if we mount it splendidly, becomes magnificent." She thought for a second. "Well, I like most of it -- don't get me wrong. Lots of it -- yours, of course! And especially Molly's stuff; she was a school chum; I got her into the gallery myself. Dad was suspicious of video art, but it was a good move. Molly suggested the CD-ROM. She's turning the Granite into a 'Museum Without Walls' on the Internet. A true realization of Malraux's dream, but on phosphor-dot screens." Susan smiled, again brushing her hands in space, as if spreading the gallery art before their eyes; but this time carefully, to avoid hitting anyone, especially the old man who was now frowning like an ogre. "But I guess I'm too old fashioned. I don't like art that floats around in electrons! Where's true art? Where's the sense of real art today?" She knew she was trying to sell sanity to a dealer in madness; but she thought John Flower had a reasonable grasp of his own impossible vision, and could get past his aesthetic fantasies. "So to get a fortune for a van Gogh is a windfall. What's dad's is ipso facto the gallery's. We'll avoid bankruptcy. However important it has been to get our gallery on the Web, it is just glorified publicity, electronic publicity. You can't sell cyber pictures. Printouts don't wash. People always want the real thing." She stood on tiptoes, trying to judge the distance to their objective. "So the van Gogh sale was a shot in the arm for the gallery endowment. Important for you all." She gave him a loving look; she noticed one of the giggling girls give her a look of envy - - yes, she was lucky to have John Flower on her arm. She smiled and went on: "I had completely forgotten about the van Gogh. So many years hanging on the wall right behind dad's desk it simply vanished in my mind." She reflected for an instant, her mind traversing time. "Come to think of it, probably that's what influenced me. My thesis on the van Gogh, I mean. I saw 'Lust for Life' when I was eight. Kirk Douglas, wasn't it? And in high school, I read that two-volume collection of his letters. Vincent's life always fascinated me. During my overseas year I chased to the ends of the world to see each and every van Gogh there ever was." She found herself pushing against girl in front of her, and it briefly embarrassed her. But another revelation surfaced and lightened her thoughts. "If I remember right, dad once had three van Goghs. Can you imagine that? Three! But I don't know what he did with them. Imagine what they would be worth on today's market!"

"Again I ask," John Flower began, having listened to her diatribe with condescending annoyance, "what do you mean that this sale will keep us in business?"

"The Granite Gallery is rather unique, you know. It was dad's vision since he was a young man. To have a group of really good artists. But I'm not so sure how much longer we can keep that up."

"Keep up what?" he asked, rather upset because it might effect his future. "Not able to keep up, what?"

"Oh, you know, keep giving you all a show each month. Giving you your small incomes, hospitalizations, regardless of how many pictures you sell." She gave him a concerned look; and, not wanting to discourage him, added: "Well, we can keep it up now, for a while, the gallery won't go bust right away. Don't worry. Especially with the money from the van Gogh -- that is if we don't have to take it back!" She gave a very dark frown. "Grant money is at zero these days, you know. And a network of buyers is

not enough. Dad has had a few angels through the years. Aunt Lizzy was the most important one. Mrs. Elizabeth Meltzer Mangold," she cocked her head. "You know her?"

"I met her last week," he said, the implications of Susan Swain's remarks only slowly reaching the anxiety centers of his brain. "Some babe. She's your aunt?"

"Well, not actually my aunt. More like a surrogate mother."

"And she supports the gallery?"

"I wouldn't exactly call her a babe," she gave him a wry look. "No. She doesn't support the gallery. Not really. But she has always helped out. She knows all the prominent art collectors. Both in here and in London. You know," Susan began, another recollection turning her eyes active with excitement, "dad used to have a lot of important pictures. I grew up with Picassos and Gauguin's and van Gogh's. Real ones. On the walls of our apartment. I never thought about it before." She paused and tried to visualize some of the paintings. "I wonder where dad got them all. And what happened to them." She reflected again. "I have a vague recollection that Aunt Lizzy had something to do with getting them. She once took me to Paris when I was little. I seem to recall that she bought paintings for the gallery back then."

Again they were forced to stop, the accumulation of people in the Annenberg galleries creating gridlock. "Gracious," Susan said, "I feel like I'm at a parade. I don't believe this crowd! Fine art is becoming a real spectator sport in America! A shrewd gallery manager should be able to really clean up in America. I bet you I can really turn the Granite Gallery into something very profitable; into something important and special."

"The Granite Gallery's special already," John Flower had to admit, his voice reduced to thralldom at this stunning young woman's verbiage. "It was a lucky break for me to get in." He added, his eyes squinted with concern, "But I'm worried about what you said. That the gallery could go bankrupt."

"I didn't say that. I said it was on the verge. When I came down from school. I saw this when I first went over the books and did a little statistics, a little projection," she insisted. She realized from the look of discouragement on her young friend's pretty face that she had better change the subject, not wanting to upset him. "How did dad pick you, locate you?"

"Some people I met a year ago. Before I went to Europe. They told me about the Granite." He felt a surge of excitement when he recalled his prospects. But he momentarily lost his train of thought, squeezed against her by the crowd; her very proximity was enough to confuse him, her perfume and sweetness overpowering. He wondered if he was being silly, letting this slip of a kid wrap him around her finger. Too young, but not too beautiful. "Do you know the Adlers?" he continued when he regained his train of thought. "I think they have bought other things from the gallery."

"Adlers? Howard and Janette Adler? Sure," she smiled, placing her hand gently in his, "they are important collectors." She looked into his blue eyes, projecting a confused mixture of love and admiration. "It may have been their recommendation that got you in. But don't think dad let that influence him. I mean in accepting you. He is very careful about that. It was you. And your art." She smiled an exquisite smile at him. "He thinks you have great promise."

"He does? I'm glad," he smiled back, catching the sympathetic rays shooting from her pretty eyes. "I didn't know the Adlers were art collectors."



"And so do I," she heard herself saying, "think you have great promise, I mean. Know you have!" She touched his cheek affectionately. "The Adlers? Oh, yes. They are serious collectors. Howard Adler has bought a lot of pictures, expensive pictures, over the years. And," she added, "I'm sure they will buy yours too."

Susan's touch sent shivers throughout John Flower's body. She had such a sweet, fresh smell about her; and her finger was soft as a kiss. He steadied himself, trying to play it cool. He had a desire then and there to protest his love for her; but he hesitated, realizing it would be unwise, counterproductive; he was amazed at his self control. "I would have never believe," he began, trying to play it cool, "that there could be a gallery like the Granite." Instead of verbalizing his love, he tried to beam it directly into her heart through intense eyes. "A gallery that supports you; lets you work freely; and gives you a show every year."

"It's true," she acknowledged, "that the Granite Gallery's special. Dad's dream realized. But things have to change. I tried to convince dad that with so many artists out there who would do practically anything to get into a gallery as important as the Granite, we ought to exploit it more. A lot of artists would for a show on 57th street. We should not depend on angels, on endowments, no more than sales. I took a great art business course at school, and I want to apply some standard marketing techniques to the gallery. Just in case the van Gogh doesn't work out."

"I can't wait for my first show," John Flower said, ignoring her remarks because he did not want to follow their implications. "What a break! You don't how I survived. The shitty jobs I had to do." He pressed her hand tightly, another means of love communication. "Art material is so damn expensive. Did about everything -- except teach!" he added with a laugh. "I never wanted to teach, though I do occasionally help out with Sam -- my old instructor who has private students. I always felt teaching, especially at some college, would ruin my art. Make me too self conscious about my art. Too intellectual." He thought for a moment, and decided to be frank. "But truthfully, I more or less live off my family. My Uncle Henry has a pizzeria in Brooklyn and he supplies me with lots of pizzas. And occasionally my brothers, both successful businessmen, send me a little money from time to time. I've had a lot of part time jobs, but I don't know what I'd do if I had to go back to that shit..."

"I don't agree with you," she began, trying to catch his thoughts before they fell too deeply into concern, "that becoming intellectually aware of your art by teaching is all bad." She became aware that people were eavesdropping on their rather lengthy conversation. Without thinking she began to disagree; then, after thinking, she added: "But you have a point. There is one artist in our gallery who was ruined by teaching. Nelson Allen, one of our first artists who has been with us from the start; he was with dad in London, even. His pictures used to be quite good; quite free and fresh; but his work has tightened up and become totally academic. Dad said he once had great technique. That he could paint almost anything. But now his paintings look like copies from photographs." She looked graciously at her young man and asked: "What about your prints? Haven't you sold a lot of them?"

"No. Only a few. From time to time. But not enough. I thought getting a print in the Met would be important. But it didn't make a damn bit of difference!" he sighed.

"I had forgotten you had a print here. Where is it hung?"

"That's the problem. It's not hung, it's in the library, in the print collection," he gave a

sigh of resignation, "hidden away somewhere in a file. To tell you the truth I thought they'd put it on display. I wanted to stand before it, proudly, and listen to people's comments, maybe even tell the people who liked it that I was the artist," he said, trying to look important. "What a disappointment when I found out that it is snuggled away in the print room, viewed only on request!"

"Well, we must request it one day," she said.

"Do you think that the van Gogh's really a fake?" He tried to obliterate this past disappointment as they had pressed through the crowd to where the van Goghs were hung. Before spotting the pictures he imagined a van Gogh sunflower, its limpid yellows and fiery reds and clear blues shimmering in his mind like an icon. "Would it bankrupt the gallery if it was? A fake, I mean?"

"I'm not so worried about bankruptcy as what it would do to dad's reputation!"

"Did this woman, your aunt, what's-her-name? Mangold? Do you think she bought the other important pictures your father had? And then gave them to museums?"

"Maybe. I don't know. Or perhaps some of her collector friends did. I'll check it out on the computer, if I can, because I think it happened before we went computer." She wanted to assuage John Flower's concern about the gallery and she let her enthusiasm grow. "You don't have to worry about the gallery going broke. With us on the World Wide Web things are bound to change." She was thinking rather boastfully that with her at the helm things will be different and most certainly improve. "Yes. You came into the gallery at a perfect time. I will make the gallery economically secure. Just you wait and see. I'll get a lot of good collectors going -- world wide."

"Well, let's take a look at this copy of a Van Gogh. Which one is it? I gotta see this," John Flower said, pushing ahead.

"Not a copy, but possibly a fake. There's a difference. A good forger doesn't outright copy a painting, but rather does something different, using similar elements. Van Meegeren, for example, juggled Christ around in his fake Emmaus Supper, and added typical figures like Vermeer used," she continued. "But I hope I'm wrong about the van Gogh. It would really destroy dad. And everything..."

The last room in the Annenberg Gallery had four van Gogh's lined up on the back wall, but when they arrived they were obscured by a row of peering people. "Which one is it?" John repeated, his height allowing him to scan over the heads of the people. "It's too damn crowded."

"I know. That's always the trouble on Sundays. I should have brought you during the week. It's the left-most one. Next to L'Arlesienne."

"How do you know," he began when they stood one line of people away from the picture, "it's a fake?"

"Not so loud," she cautioned, as the heads of the shuffling crowd turned at them with glaring frowns that showed disbelief. "I'll tell you later," she whispered. "Just take a very close look at it. It's just a feeling. I have seen practically every Van Gogh in existence. All those in the States. In the Van Gogh Gallery in Holland. Those in the Louvre. In St. Petersburg. And I've seen all the rest in good reproductions," she added.

They passed the three familiar van Gogh's, and the new one, last in the line, had an almost magical attraction for them, like a magnificent color magnet. As long as the pressure of the line allowed, people soaked up the radiance of the picture, a tracery of sienna and green olive trees set on a orange field and framed by a blazing yellow sky that

swirled around an incandescent sun ball, and left with their eyes and minds dazzled. Soon they were standing immediately before the new van Gogh. "It is indeed very lovely," John observed with reverence.

"Look at the brush strokes," she suggested, bending her head over the picture. A guard standing in the room began to move toward them; but the crowd impeded his progress. "Look at their width, in particular. I don't think Vincent ever had brushes that size. And the dynamism is lacking. It doesn't quite sing. Not Vincent's incisive graphic gesture. It's not his personal 'hand writing'." The guard reached them, cautioning with a glance to keep their distance. "And look at the colors," Susan continued, ignoring the man. "He used intense yellows and oranges, but not exactly those, I think," she equivocated. "I know all about Vincent's technique. These olive trees are from the Saint-Remy period. I went there and saw his equipment. All the supplies he left in the insane asylum at Saint-Remy where he committed suicide. Those citrons are a little too white; the cadmiums a little too dark. And -- "

"We better get on," John suggested, aware that the guard was getting restless, feeling the pressure of the crowd; but he knew that this determined young woman would stay there all day unless asked to move on. He shrugged and said, "Do you think it's like any of the pictures your aunt bought in Paris?"

"I'm not sure. I never wondered about the provenance of any of dad's old pictures."

"Can't you ask your father?"

"He'd smell a rat."

"He's gotta be told, really. I mean, that it's a copy."

"No. First I must make sure it's a fake -- not a copy. I'll have to do a little research. And then I'll have to do a little detective work. Maybe put it out on the Net. See if I can figure out where it came from. Who did it. First I'll talk to Aunt Lizzy. Perhaps she'd have a clue."

"I think you better tell your father. He'd never forgive you."

"No," she began, and caught his arm and looked him straight in the eye, "and you better not let on to dad! I know you! Now promise me you'll not say a word until -- "

"I can't promise you anything," John Flower said, a certain righteous indignation in his voice. Although Susan Swain was straightforward as far as he knew, he began to suspect something less open in her now, and he was disappointed. "Something like this can't be kept quiet."

"Why John Flower! I'd never forgive you! Please," she pleaded and playfully hit him on the arm, "don't say a word for now. Give me some time -- promise me!"

"You mean to say that if it were a fake, and if the money had to be returned, you'd cover it up?"

"I didn't say that!" she frowned, annoyed; she continued, whispering, her sweet lips nearly touching his ear, enticingly: "But look at the picture: isn't it beautiful? If a fake is so expert even the experts can't tell the difference, is or is it not as satisfactory a work of art as if it were unequivocally genuine?" she said, triumphantly. "And you mean to say that if the Granite collapsed and you were all thrown out and be forced back to that old odd-jobs life again, you'd tell?" she argued. After a pause to let this sink in, she added: "Anyway, who'd ever know if it was a fake. Who'd ever care?"

## **Chapter 2: THE SWAIN SALON OF ART**

Adventures of a young artist trying to discover his personal style and place in the art world.

**The Phosphor-Dot Gallery**

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