

EXTRACT: TITANIA SEIDL

*You said she had entered the space?*

Yes. And the painting was on the far end. It was a brightly lit space. Or maybe it wasn't so much that the space was brightly lit, rather that the light was reflected by two facing walls, a corridor leading up to the portrait.

*And the usual white walls?*

Not that sort of white. They were painted the colour of snow on a sunny February day in the alps, the colour of *photokeratitis*, of too much ultraviolet. The floor was an organic, dark grey, and she appreciated the tasteful sound of her heels as they clicked on the poured asphalt as she approached the painting. The sound seemed to widen as she walked deeper into the space.

*Tell me about the painting.*

It was a landscape format, a rectangle a little wider than the span of her outreached arms, its height approximately half the width. A format close to that of the image on a TV screen, an old one like the one her parents called 'the tube' in the living room when she was younger. The painting showed the portrait of a woman whose head was leaning towards the right edge, stretching the skin connecting her jaw and the edge of her shoulder. Behind her, a background that seemed like a dark void swallowing up the ambient light. The exposed flesh of the figure's neck and shoulder looked slightly damp, as though tiny droplets of water still lingered there after a spring rain shower; or as though the woman had broken out into cold sweat, never evaporating, pooling on already cool skin, throwing it up into goose bumps. Slowly, stepping closer, she could make out more details – the strands of the woman's hair framing both sides of her face – and it seemed as though even from the distance she could make out individual hairs. She had been sure that the eyes

of the woman were closed, but now she thought she could see her looking out of them through the gaps between her lashes. Maybe she was just about to open her eyes, or about to close them.

*Perhaps she was asleep, in a trance, looking out but seeing nothing at all.*

Her mouth was also open very slightly, and as she was now only a few meters away, it hit her that there was something comical about this portrait. She imagined the large face losing its composure, the full pink lips starting to drool from one corner, the tension leaving her neck, her head lolling, her gaze suddenly cross-eyed. A bit like all those parodies of the Mona Lisa. But instead, as she moved in closely to the painting, as close as she possibly could while still seeing it in its entirety, the beautiful face lost its edges, the details of hair, skin, the eyelashes, the lips, the droplets of liquid and the void of a background became a single surface covered with brushstrokes, of colours that seemed to have nothing to do with the image: lime green, fuchsia, tangerine, partly superimposed with glazes of azure, scarlet and taupe. Irritated, she took a step back and tasted cinnamon on the roof of her mouth from the gum she had spat out hours ago.