

EXTRACT: ALISA MARGOLIS

And she had imagined or remembered? Was it an actual memory?

It was clear to her, in her mind at least, where this fear came from. She could remember the walk through the gallery, hurrying through certain periods to get straight to the 16th or 17th century. Going from this dark grey, boring, rainy day into the museum and its aroma of arum lilies, up the staircase, still grey, and into this endless space with all this red and gold. The room was filled with paintings of Jesus, dead or still or still alive man, the same, nailed to a series of crosses. Jesus, relentless nailed down, eternally tortured. The crowns of thorns, the tiny spikey paint punctures, digging deep into unhealthy skin, sometimes not even piercing, merely forming ominous little indentations. A balloon about to pop. She remembered it as obscene, intensely brutal. She had nothing in place to protect herself from it. It was out of her experience. Fat, flat-headed nails were banged into hands and into feet and into her body, there in the gallery; she would feel her own hands being nailed into wood, a body suspended in pain. The blood she watched flow was at once its own character and grand finale: red violent, relentless and versatile; oozing into languorous lines, streaming in its spindly shivering rivulets to articulate the sad, pale and sweaty face, drooling down the body, spraying in these tiny fountains out from between the ribs, dripping indulgently from limp fingers, the gore around wounds congealed, inflamed; wounds exhausted by bleeding.

And she became a painter?