

GALATEA UNDONE

by Paul Watson

The model looked at the townhouse. Fancy for an artist, but then, this one was supposed to be innovative. The fee was impressive, but the exclusivity clause had given her pause. It was a long time to be stuck with just one client. In the end, the money won out over her concerns, it was a lot of money, after all.

She knocked and was let in by the artist's representative, a sharp-faced woman in a dark business suit and the pursed lips of someone used to dealing with intrusions and difficulties.

Perfunctory greetings followed, and she was ushered into the foyer while the representative checked on the artist. In the model's experience this check could be anything from mood, sobriety, state of dress or state of consciousness. More often multiple checks.

Apparently, the artist was suitably vertical and coherent as the representative swiftly returned to collect her. She was asked, again, if she'd read and understood the contract and agreed to the terms. She confirmed she had, repeating it when nudity was mentioned. Nudity was almost always mentioned. Sometimes the model wondered if artists were just frustrated and couldn't figure out how to watch pornography. Still, a job's a job.

The artist's studio was typical of the type in her experience. Haphazardly organised; cloths covering almost everything, themselves covered in a dazzling array of stains; pathways cleared in the detritus and ephemera by use rather than conscious design; and dingy light. At least the central pedestal was clean. That was a point in his favour. The artist was, also, fairly typical, covered in dust and grime because he forgot about washing, somewhat wild-haired and haphazardly shaved, with bags under the eyes and a certain manic intensity to his gaze. His hands showed signs of work and the draping of the cloth indicated a preference for sculpture.

He was drawn out of whatever artistic inspiration he was experiencing by the representative's quiet cough and turned that unsettlingly wild gaze towards them. He approached, extending a hand, then seemed to notice its state and pulled it back with something of an apology before forgetting that incident and starting to explain his vision. The representative left the room at that point. The artist didn't appear to notice burbling along about Pygmalion, drawing similarities to the tales of the creation of Eve. Apparently he was a talker and wanted her to understand the nature of the work she'd be modelling for. The model could deal with talkers. She tuned him out, concentrating on getting herself ready, paying just enough attention to detect any remarks about pose or positioning. Instead, after the mythological explanation appeared complete, the artist looked expectantly at her. She put on her smile and gave vaguely encouraging platitudes that usually satisfied the distracted type. They seemed to work this time, too. However, his attention changed direction, to a small bottle of some vaguely terracotta coloured liquid. She must have looked puzzled as he explained it was a body lotion to help her hold her pose for longer. A little insulted at that, she was at least pleased he didn't insist on applying it personally, letting her coat herself in the cold liquid, only touching her in those hard to reach areas in the middle of her back. The insistence she covered her face was something she'd more associate with a body painter, but, it was an awful lot of money and she was soon covered head to toe. The artist went to a video camera she hadn't seen before, and at least the theatrics made more sense if this was performance art. That reassured her somewhat, as it made the weirdness more ordinary. She'd done strange things for the camera before. This was more towards the normal end of them, in fact.

Satisfied with the shot, the artist started giving her instructions to pose. She wasn't surprised her posture needed to be classical. Anything invoking myth was always going to go in that direction and she was soon happily posed. She didn't see the artist's work materials but wasn't too concerned. He was filming her. If anything, that might mean less need for her to be present in future.

The artist finally had her posed to his liking, moving behind her with the camera. She felt a pinch in her left buttock, feeling a numbing warmth flowing through her body. She decided against giving him a piece of her mind, partly because it wasn't worth the hassle, but mostly because her mind was rather sleepy at the moment and moving just seemed like something that wasn't worth bothering

with. The warmth inside her started to cool, her muscles tingling as the strains of holding her pose started to fade. Her skin was feeling odd, stiff, a little scratchy but she couldn't find the need to move enough to scratch at the itch. The artist approached with a small metal rod, but she wasn't paying him much attention, trying to decipher the various strange sensations from her body. She paid more attention when the rod tapped her arm with a dull clunk of metal on hollow fired clay. But moving still proved too challenging, the gentle raps coming again from her back, her leg, her head, her breasts, all equally stiff and unyielding. The artist seemed pleased, which was something, but she'd like to have asked him exactly what was going on. Instead, she remained quiet and still as he moved the camera around her, taking a few more light taps with the rod to get soundings, before setting it back into its tripod to record her.

The rod tapped her again. There was a tickle, sparks flashing. She would have blinked if her eyes were working properly. She felt less stiff, more...gooey? Warmer, certainly, but still kind of unfocused and not worth the effort. She felt the artist take hold of her arm, feeling him move it, leaving imprints of his fingers in her pliable skin. That felt...odd, like she knew it shouldn't feel like that but unable to explain to herself why. The warmth continued, her fingers bending back, pressing into her arm, mixing together until she can barely tell which part is her arm and which her fingers. That feeling spread as the artist kneaded and squeezed her arm, mixing it all together until it was more a lump of terracotta clay than an arm. Her other arm followed suit, the two lumps pulled off her body and mashed together, confusing her already fuzzy mind further. And then, she felt the hands on her head, and the artist just squeezed, and all thought fled in a jumble of confusion as her head crumpled into twisted clay, eyes and ears vanishing leaving her in silence and darkness, only able to feel. Which just got more and more confusing as the artist rendered her body down into a single heap of clay on the pedestal. He turns off the camera, reviewing the shots.

A few weeks later, the artist's latest piece opens in the gallery, a piece called Galatea Undone, or the Reverse Pygmalion, combining a video of a beautiful nude becoming a statue and finally reverting to the clay some myths claim all human life emerged from and a misshapen pile of the same clay with signs encouraging interaction. The clay enjoys the interaction, feeling hands kneading and sculpting it, feeling like it's fulfilling a purpose. When it's not being reshaped, the clay wonders when it will be restored, or if it will even remember what it is to be a person, or even if it wants to be restored when being clay makes far more sense. Fortunately, the model's exclusivity contract still has several years to run, so it can ponder these things without worry.