

The Judge's Wife Part 3

by Daniel Harris

I met my dealer for lunch on Thursday and arrived late at my studio. Margaux and her daughter were sitting on my porch swing.

—Sorry, I'm late. Lunch with my dealer ran long.

—It's okay, Jack. We arrived not two minutes before you pulled up.

I unlocked the studio and turned on the lights.

—This is my daughter Liz, said Margaux. She wants to see how you work and then she'll take my car and go to the beach.

Liz was not quite a perfect copy of Margaux but was tall and lean like her mother. Her hair was dark, and she had a stronger chin. But she had her mother's prominent high cheekbones and winning smile with four dimples. She was a little bustier, but that may have been an illusion since she wore a bathing suit under her cover-up.

—Welcome to my studio, Liz. It's a perfect beach day. Which beach do you prefer?

—Siesta Beach. It will probably be crowded, but it's the best of the three. Also, there're more people my age at Siesta.

—Well, Margaux, shall we begin?

—The clock is ticking.

—I'd like to start with the right profile.

—What's that sound I hear? asked Liz.

—That's my cat Stretch. He's sleeping on the daybed upstairs. He snores. I'm surprised he didn't come down and check you out. He's pretty sociable.

Just then Stretch, hearing me say his name, came bounding down the stairs talking up a storm.

—What a cool cat, said Liz. Is he friendly?

—Look at him. He's asking you to pick him up and praise him.

Liz picked up the cat, which began to mark her neck with his cheeks and whiskers.

—That tickles, Mr. Stretch, said Liz. What a lover he is.

—Spoiled rotten, I said

I tried to ignore Liz, but she kept walking around the studio.

—Liz, let me turn the lights on in the gallery. You can look at some of my recent work.

—I'd love that, Mr. Mahler.

—You can call me Jack.

Liz put the cat down and followed me into the gallery. Stretch trotted alongside us inches from my sandals.

Most of the work here is from the last two years, I said. Larger sculptures are in the garden in the back. Use that door to access the garden, it's unlocked.

—Mom said you were prolific, but this is ridiculous.

—There are lots more in the attic. Enjoy. I have to get back to work.

Liz gave a tentative push on the back door and entered the sculpture garden.

—Now where were we? I said, sitting down opposite Margaux.

—If Liz is a problem, I can ask her to go, said Margaux.

—Tradition is that when working with a live model, even a dressed model, it's better to be alone. If there's a chaperon, they should sit quietly in the corner.

—Liz will probably leave for the beach soon.

I made five quick drawings of the right side of Margaux's head. She had remarkably large eyes. They lent her face a charming innocence.

—Let me do a quarter-profile of your face. I'll do it on a separate piece of paper; you can show it to the judge.

—That's thoughtful of you.

—You asked for that last time, remember?

—Do you remember last time? she said, with a wink.

—Haven't washed my hand since.

—You jest, of course. I can see you clipped your nails.

Liz walked into the studio.

—That's a very, very impressive collection of work, Mr. Mahler, said Liz.

—Thank you.

—I'm going to leave for the beach, mom. But before I go, will Mr. Mahler take a picture of the two of us in front of that big sculpture in the garden?

She gave me her iPhone. I took a few shots of them. They were almost twins.

—I'll do one better for you. I'll make a quick pen and ink sketch of the two of you.

—That sounds like a lot of work.

—No, it will be a quick sketch. Two minutes tops.

—You'll draw both of us in two minutes?

—Two people, two minutes.

I drew the two women standing in front of my spectacular Starburst Cleradendrum tree. I signed and dated it.

—Who will be the keeper of the drawing?

—Give it to Liz.

—Thanks, mom, she said, walking out the door.

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—Before we continue, I need to make a morphology chart of your body.

—How will you do that?

—With calipers and a tape measure. If you're uncomfortable with that, bring Liz next time and she can take the measurements, I'll write them down.

—I don't mind, as long as you respect me.

—See this form I've made. It has a rough outline of your body with places for measurements. Your face and hands are called out in greater detail. If you ran barefoot, I would also have a detail for your feet.

I pulled up a chair for her to sit on.

—First your head measurements. I do the circumference with a cloth tape. The rest I'll do with calipers.

—Wouldn't it go faster if I write down the numbers?

—Great idea.

We worked well as a team.

—I wish my parents had corrected my jaw line when I was younger, she said, after I measured her mandible.

—Is that possible?

—Yes, my oral surgeon keeps telling me he can fix my weakish chin, she said.

—Well, why didn't you do it?

—You don't like my face.

—I think you have a beautiful face.

—Well, the judge refused to allow me to get my jaw fixed.

—I've got to go with the judge. Your big eyes and prominent cheeks bones make you special.

—You're sweet.

I started measuring her arms and shoulders.

—Why is your left shoulder more developed than your right? Did you have some trauma or illness to your right shoulder?

—No, I was a left-handed fast-pitch softball pitcher in high school and college. I pitched for several women's softball teams when we first moved down here.

—I remember trying to hit one of my high school buddy's sister's pitching. She pitched for some professional woman's team. The ball comes at you faster than major league baseball pitchers and from much closer. With your long arms, I'll bet you could overwhelm most batters.

—I had a wicked curve and slider, too.

—Could you move to this stool? I need to take your leg lengths and torso measurements.

—Why don't you measure me standing?

—It's easier to find the correct point on your hips if you're sitting.

We continued to take measurements.

—Two more, but you may want to wait until someone else can hold the tape.

—What are they?

—I need to measure from you top of your sternum to your pudendum, and I need to measure your breasts. Which do you want to do first?

—Let's get the breasts out of the way, she said, removing her top. How do you propose you make the measurements?

I blushed. Even though she was in her mid-fifties, her apple-sized breasts had not begun their inexorable slide down her chest. As the French say, the breasts should be angry at each other. Her nipples were aimed 30° away from each other. She was more comfortable standing there half-naked than I was looking at her with a wood caliper in my hand.

—Don't be so timid. Give me your hand.

She took my hand and cupped her larger breast. It was warm and firm.

—It doesn't bite. Now you measure it.

—Now do the other one, she said, giving me her best mother says voice.

—I think I should kiss them, I said.

—I thought I would have to ask you, she said, pulling my head down to her chest.

I began kissing her working my way down to her nipples, which were now fully aroused. She had her eyes closed enjoying my touches and kisses.

—That's enough, we have one more measurement, she said, pushing my head away from her body.

Without a by or leave, she pulled off her shorts. She wore no underwear.

—Measure me, she ordered.

I held the tape at the top of her sternum and stretched it down to her mons. I held the tape away from her pubic area.

—You can touch me there. You'll need an accurate measurement.

I pulled the tape down to the lowest point of her abdomen. She was hot. She loosened my belt, my cargo shorts fell to the ground. She pushed my boxers down to my knees.

—There's a bed upstairs, I said.

Everything clicked.

Afterward, I lay on my side caressing her cheek.

—Thank you, Margaux. That was wonderful.

—Yes, I enjoyed it. I hope I didn't make too much noise.
—Don't worry about it. There's no one to hear you except me.
—You're petty virile.
—What's that supposed to mean: More virile than the judge? Not bad for a guy my age?

She laughed.

—The judge hasn't had sex with me in twenty years. You're only the third man I've ever had sex with in my life. I needed that.

—I'm embarrassed to tell you how long it has been for me, but long enough that I had forgotten what a good woman can do for a man.

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When we resumed the drawing session, I had her sit on a chair facing me.

I was sitting an arm's reach from her.

—Please tilt your head back just a touch, I said. She moved her head. That's better.

I started a formal portrait of her face. I got into my zone. Once she put her hand on my knee and gave me that beautiful smile.

—Thank you, but don't move, please.

I returned to my work. After another twenty minutes, the drawing was 95% finished. I wanted to add some gouache background.

—Time, I said. That's it for today.

—Can I see what you've done?

—Sure.

Margaux stood, walked behind me to look over my shoulder.

Her face fairly leapt off the page. It was my best portrait drawing. The drawing was so three-dimensional it looked like a bronze of her head was lying on the page.

—It's beautiful. You are amazing.

There were tears in her eyes.

—Don't you like it? I asked.

—These are tears of joy. It's so realistic. If you sculpt me like this drawing, it will be fabulous.

—There's something else to show you, I said, rising from my chair and walking over to a metal cabinet. I removed a clay hand.

—This is what's called a *maquette*, or model.

—I know what a *maquette* is. I did attend good schools, you know.

—It's your left hand, the one with arthritis in the pinky, about the same size it will be on a two-foot statue of you.

Margaux looked: half in wonder and half in horror. It looked so real, yet the idea of a severed infant-sized hand, her hand, was terrifying. Reflexively she grasped her left hand with her right. It was still there.

—Well? I asked, handing her the hand.

—It's so, so...I don't know ... lifelike, but scary. Like seeing your own head shrunk by some South Pacific Islander. But I love all the detail, she said, turning it over in her hand. Think of it, my left hand is holding my left hand. My *sinistra* hand, my sinister hand.

—That's pretty existential, I said.

—I suppose, she said. Like a Zen koan.

—One hand clapping, I replied, taking the *maquette* from her and returning it to the cabinet. This is my chamber of body parts. There will be a complete you in here before I start the final statue.

—So do I drive you home? I asked.

—What time is it?

—Just after four-thirty.

—Liz said she would be here before five. I'll call her and see where she is.

Margaux retrieved her iPhone from her purse and asked Siri to call "Liz mobile."

—Hi, sweetheart. Where are you? asked Margaux.

She looked at Jack. The crepuscular sunlight through the trees outside gave him a mystical silhouette.

—At the drawbridge, she said for Jack's benefit. The bridge is up ... It's starting to come down. Okay, so you'll be here in ten minutes, Liz? More like fifteen. See you soon.

—Fifteen minutes, I said, I know the beach traffic time from the bridge.

—Is there anything else you'd like to show me? Margaux asked.

I didn't reply. I sat in my study-the-work-in-progress chair, an old Adirondack chair, looking at the abstract marble piece on the carving bench. I knew what I would like to do, but I doubted I had a five-minute quickie left in me. Margaux had pretty well emptied the tank.

Margaux walked up behind me. She put her hand on my shoulder. I put my hand over hers.

—That was so kind of you to give Liz the drawing of the two of us.

—My pleasure, a little memento of her visit.

I could feel her hair on my cheek. Her hair smelled like newly mown grass. I was becoming aroused. I could feel her lips on my neck. She put my hand on her mound. She was ready. I stood, turned and pulled her mouth to my lips. She pushed her mouth against mine. Our tongues danced in her mouth. Her right hand stroked my erection over my cargo shorts. My right hand kneaded her swamp. Each of our mouths fought for possession. The frottage produced the desired result. I ejaculated under my clothes. Margaux came in a leg-quivering moan. I could hear Liz in the driveway.

—Tell Liz I'm in the bathroom, said Margaux, running into the gallery bathroom

I did a quick clean up in the studio sink. I intentionally spilled some turpentine in the sink to cover up the funk of our embrace. I donned my dust overalls.

Liz knocked on the studio door.

—Come in, Liz.

—Where's mom?

—She's in the bathroom.

—Did you have a good time at the beach?

—It was fun. A guy I knew from high school was there flying kites. I forgot how much fun it is to fly kites. He has the ones with two strings that can do all manner of stunts.

—I use to make and fly kites. I still do sometimes in the winter when the wind is favorable.

—Ah, there you are, said Margaux, walking into the studio.

—Liz tells me, she was kite flying at the beach, I said.

—That's fun. Your father and I use to fly kites on Nantucket.

I was amazed at how composed Margaux looked, a little bloomy, but probably not enough to give away her recent trysts.

—Well, shall we go, Liz? Thank you for everything, Jack. We're flying down to St. Thomas for a long Memorial Day vacation. I'll see you a week from next Wednesday?

—A week from Wednesday it is. It was nice meeting you, Liz. Bye.

—Bye, Mr. Mahler. Thank you for the drawing.

—You're welcome.

I watched them back out of the driveway.

—Christ, that was close, I said to Stretch, who was looking up at me. I hope Margaux doesn't get in any trouble. Hell, I hope she comes back. The judge could come after me big time. The judge was a powerful man: politically, legally and physically.

To be continued.

