

Crossed

by Phillis Ideal

Like a sleepwalker — lost in the abyss of an unresolved painting — I hit the pavement to escape my own turmoil. Working on this painting for three days, nothing was looking back at me and I had really had it. My mind was in a whirl and colors were merging into mud. Dry-eyed through squinting and staring at splotches of paint one after another, the sum of the parts was not making a whole. I couldn't see the forest for the trees. I wasn't seeing straight. Or any other applicable metaphor.

Definitely, between exhibiting the so-called painting or the palette with smeared globs of paint and accidental mixtures, I would go with the random energy of the palette. This canvas needed to be covered over with large swathes of paint. Destroyed. Forgotten.

I started walking down Second Avenue, to a vintage designer clothing sale at my favorite second-hand store. Nothing like shopping, comparing, sorting and combining patterns to create a wonderful outfit. Not so unlike painting, but so much easier. The collage elements of clothing at least know what half of the body they will go on. Another mirror of self, I suppose, but a respite from the studio.

Still lost in my own thoughts, head down, focusing on the pavement, I was jolted by loud voices. I was walking side by side with a group of seven, screaming, thundering men. They were of different ethnic groups and looked to be in their mid to late twenties. But they were acting like drunken teenagers high on crack who just lost a football game, spewing a stream of curses, grinning and swaggering, hurling their crushed soda cans against the concrete and hogging the whole sidewalk. It was very hard to pass them, and my body stiffened as they swapped their contagious, violent feelings.

“I wanna send him a message — one he won't be around to remember.”

"Yeah, that fucking asshole. He's gonna take a very big fall."

"No one's backing me into a fucking corner."

"Shit, this sucks, I eat red meat, I eat pussy, I eat sugar, and I drink and will kick ass till I am ninety."

"I gonna get some retard to kick his ass. See what kind of an action I can stir up at that cesspool."

Their raging energy felt like a unified force that could catapult itself in any direction at a second's notice, like a heat-seeking missile targeting the next warm body. I pictured myself becoming an odorless vapor as I wafted by them. Holding my breath, looking straight ahead when not focused on the ground and my hurrying feet, my heart hammered so hard they must have known or smelled my thoughts. Then one, baldhead and thick neck, spotted a public phone, grabbed the handset, ripped it out of the phone booth and slammed it into the wall. Shards of plastic exploded in the air, and shouts of glee and accomplishment went up from the pack. A job well done! My face must have twinged with horror. Destroying one of the last forgotten public phone booths in New York City was like destroying an endangered species or planting a minefield in the Papago Islands.

The phone-smasher caught a whiff of my disapproval. "What is that slut looking at? Look at her! The cunt is cross eyed", and his back up chorus of riff raff echoed him: "Yeah, a crossed eyed cunt! Cross eyed, cross eyed, cross eyed cunt!"

This was not the first time I had been cursed on the street. *But cross-eyed? Never called cross-eyed!*

As I entered the store, I found my eyes riveted to my reflection in a full-length mirror. I asked myself, *"Is there something wrong with the way I look?" I had been told my eyes were my best feature. How could anyone think that I was cross-eyed?*

