

## **“RED DOT” by Alexander Lee-Rekers (StageMilk, 2024)**

*A graduate exhibition at an art school gallery: trendy people, cheap wine, middling exhibits. JEMIMA scans the art hanging on the walls, before stopping at a particular piece—which more than fails to impress. She bends down to inspect the label (description.) RAJ enters.*

**RAJ:** No...

**JEMIMA:** Yep.

**RAJ:** Somebody bought it?

**JEMIMA:** So says the little red dot.

**RAJ:** He'll be insufferable.

**JEMIMA:** Yay.

**RAJ:** How much did he sell it for?

**JEMIMA:** No idea. I'd have to check the register.

**RAJ:** Maybe it's better not to know. Not to draw attention... *(Yelling, off.)* Millie! Come see this!

*MILLIE enters.*

**MILLIE:** Guys, I think the wine is running low, the servers are starting to ignore me-

**RAJ:** He sold it.

**MILLIE:** Fuck off.

**JEMIMA:** We don't know how much.

**MILLIE:** Please don't even tell me. He's going to be such a *prick* about this.

**RAJ:** You know this is what we have to deal with. This is what Craig was talking about in our final class. Fickle public, bitchy dealers and hacks like Ben Guillam.

**JEMIMA:** Maybe his parents bought it. Or some rich uncle we don't know about.

**RAJ:** Ben's whole thing is that he came from nothing. I've never see anybody cultivate a style out of poverty like he has.

**MILLIE:** It's like it's *almost* sexy, but not quite? Like if things were different, and he never opened his mouth.

**JEMIMA:** Or thought he could paint.

*Further down the gallery wall, BEN appears. RAJ spots him and stiffens.*

**RAJ:** Heads up.

**JEMIMA:** *(Looking straight ahead.)* Where?

**RAJ:** About six paintings down, near Tyrone's nudes.

**MILLIE:** We shouldn't be bunched up like this. We need to scatter.

**RAJ:** Too late-

**JEMIMA:** Brave faces-

**RAJ:** Shit-

*BEN joins the others, who immediately fake-smile-and-nod to him. It takes him a second to notice that his painting has sold. His expression is a little pride, a little pain—highly personal.*

**BEN:** How about that.

**RAJ:** Well done, Ben.

**BEN:** Thanks, Raj. Congratulations to us all. Our first exhibition.

**JEMIMA:** It's just a grad show.

**MILLIE:** And your first sale! Ben, you must be so happy.

**BEN:** I'm kinda still processing.

**MILLIE:** Very cool.

**JEMIMA:** So what did it sell for?

**BEN:** I listed it for two thousand. I wonder who bought it? Craig said some dealers like to purchase anonymously, so artists can't jack up prices when they know they're in demand.

**RAJ:** Did Craig say you were "in demand"?

**BEN:** No, that's just what he taught us.

**JEMIMA:** Well, I hope you spend the money on something fun.

**BEN:** Like a guitar?

**RAJ:** Like painting lessons.

**MILLIE:** Raj...

**RAJ:** What? Fuck it. Ben, we don't like you. We never have. Not for three years of art school and not now that we're at the end of it. We think your work is shit and you are a hack who thinks abstract expressionism is still a worthy substitute for a man going to therapy.

*Pause.*

**BEN:** That felt a lot like jealousy talking. I'm sorry if I've ever upset you, Raj. I've always admired your work. And Jemima, the way you manipulate negative space?

**JEMIMA:** I know what my work can do.

**BEN:** *(To MILLIE.)* One of your photos sold. It's the really pretty one. Congratulations.

*BEN exits. The three friends stand in an uneasy silence.*

**RAJ:** I thought that would feel better to say. It sounded good when I was saying it...

**JEMIMA:** No, of course it did, Raj. Ben's the worst.

**RAJ:** Total prick...

**MILLIE:** Have we been wrong about him this whole time? *(A horrified thought.)* Are we like the villains of Ben's story?

**JEMIMA:** *(Unconvinced.)* No...

**RAJ:** Please don't call our lives "Ben's story."

**Written for StageMilk, 2024.**