

## **Woo Woo by Ella Baxter**

Sabine had traumatised only a few people in her life and one of them was her husband. She stood in their back garden and waited for Constantine to remove the camera from the tripod. It was Monday night. It was about to storm. The sun had set hours ago, and dinnertime had come and gone without mention.

'A reminder that we're aiming for stark and otherworldly,' said Sabine. Despite her tone, she was not too dictatorial.

'The sky is actually purple,' said Constantine. He held his hand out, palm up, and looked at the cloud overhead.

Sabine unbuttoned her vinyl coat, smoothed her hair back behind her ears, and crouched at the base of their fruiting lemon tree, ready to be immortalised. These photos would be used to publicise her upcoming solo art exhibition. She loved seeing herself named as the photographer for any promotional material. Differentiating herself, no matter how subtly, from the other artists represented by the Goethe Gallery soothed her no end.

Sabine had briefed Constantine on the importance of capturing the glossiness of her hair and her lively sanpaku eyes. Two aesthetics she was unwilling to compromise on. She'd demonstrated how she would dip her head at a severe angle so that a distinct white gap showed between her iris and the lower lid of her eye. Their garden needed to look untamed and jungle-like in the background. The sky must be a deep navy. No stars! And—

'Get some of the lemons in,' said Sabine. It was imperative that the waxy lemons were lurid against all that green.

'Please,' said Constantine.

'Please,' said Sabine.

The foliage above and behind Sabine was lit by an industrial floodlight which sat at Constantine's feet and pointed directly at her head. There was no time to disperse the insects or style the lemons. There was no time at all. Her bushy, bleached eyebrows and tall, plump body were in the process of becoming art.

Sabine shifted through a series of poses, tossing her hair, angling her arms, opening her mouth, and tilting her head back, while Constantine moved around the garden capturing her.

'I'm getting sexual art alien. I'm getting a revolution in a body. I'm getting pure genius,' said Constantine.

'What else?' said Sabine.

Constantine was shorter and more nuggety than her, with strong legs like a touring camel. He was quick and elegant, moving seamlessly through various squats and stretches as he photographed her. Sabine loved his salted, wiry hair, his defined cheekbones, and his soft paunch. She found her husband's body to be so irresistibly dense.

'You need to make sure I'm mysterious and powerful and surprised, but the portrait also needs to have the emotional impact of *Rip My Heart Out You Fucking Cunt* by Tracey Emin.'

She motioned for Constantine to stop and went over to him, scrolling through her Instagram feed, angling the phone screen towards him as she rolled through reels of pictures.

'Am I framing it wrong? Should I reattach the camera to the tripod?' Constantine held her four-thousand-dollar camera in three fingers of one hand, the strap twisting in the breeze.

'Pure, uncompromising rigour is needed to make transcendent, supernatural art,' said Sabine.

'Hear! Hear!' said Constantine.

She returned to the tree, flapped her coat out behind her, and let the light blanch her white skin to ghost.

Constantine held down the shutter button and let more photos accumulate.

'I am impregnating every image with my unruly, creative juju. Are you getting my full body in?' said Sabine.

'You're stunning,' said Constantine. He zoomed in.

'The shoes?' said Sabine.

'Devastating,' said Constantine. He pointed the camera at her shoes and took a photograph, just of them.

'The eyes?' said Sabine.

'Perfect, in an unexpected way,' said Constantine.

Sabine's upcoming exhibition, titled *Fuck You, Help Me*, in simple terms, was fifteen photographic portraits of her swinging naked from things outside at night and one short film; in more complex terms, it was something about discomfort and vulnerability and archetypes. *Something*, Sabine was sure, *about juxtaposition*. In each photograph she was covered from head to toe in sheer costumes. These wearable puppets, several feet long and made from panels of stretch silk, featured silicone faces that Sabine could position over her own. Think of the collection as: blinding flashes of light across a defiant, nude cis-female body. Think: a backdrop of forbidden, murky urban nightscapes.

'Sabine, you need to breathe,' said Constantine.

Their usual ritual on Monday nights was for Sabine to burn two salmon fillets, and for Constantine to insist they were delicious. He would swoop in and happily eat his up, even though the blackened fish tasted truly carcinogenic. The other six nights of the week he worked as a chef at one of the busiest restaurants in the city. He returned home late, filthy and exhausted, and smelling of sautéed chicken hearts and ninety-dollar steak.

Constantine put down the camera and extended his hand, and when she took it, he drew her close. He danced her across the grass and then dipped his glorious, emotional, hardworking wife headfirst towards the worm farm until she was cradled in the crook of his arm. She rested there, silent, seeming to enjoy it. After a moment he eased her back to standing.

Constantine's phone rang from his pocket. He held his hand over it, kissed Sabine briefly on the cheek, then entered the house, speaking softly into the phone receiver.

Inside, he slunk past the window, opened the fridge door and burrowed through the crisper. He snapped leaves off a head of lettuce then leaned against the counter and crunched through them. He

hung up the call, pulled a strip of beef jerky from a pantry jar and ate it in two bites. Shook out a handful of smoked almonds, and tossed them into his mouth. He kept going, running a tablespoon through a block of unsalted butter and dipping it in the salt dish before putting it into his mouth. He took a sip of whisky from the bottle, and then another.

Sabine knew that none of her demands, from the impractical to the perfectionist, were new to Constantine. The last time he had assisted her was on the seven-minute short film to be featured in her exhibition. *Worship Me* began with her taking off her pants and sitting in a dish of animal blood, and ended with her squat-hopping, bare-arsed, along a line of puckered prosthetic lips made from acrylic resin. Sabine had roped Constantine into sourcing the blood through his restaurant's suppliers. For twelve hours, he'd stored that bin bag of blood in the work fridge, and at the end of his shift he'd carried it home, on the bus. And when Sabine, over the following two weeks, kept unknotting the bag and emptying it slowly to rehearse with, he became so upset due to her defiance of all health and safety regulations that he'd threatened to pour it down the drain himself. *'Why not practise with water?'* he kept asking. *'The chef in me can't stand to see all of this waste!'*

The temperature dropped and hail began to fall in streamers of white. The balls of ice scattered across the garden and bounced off the metal drains like coins. Sabine gathered the equipment under one arm and hurried inside.