

THE GOLDEN CALF

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The funny thing about the mathematics of beauty... they're just so precise. It's just so precise. What we find to be... beautiful is rooted into easily decipherable variables. You can predict what one will find beautiful easily; in its beholder's symmetry, proportion, context. So predictable, so soluble... it's so easy to see where this... where this concept, really, comes from. Beauty. But beauty's effect on the human soul... it distorts. It warps. It takes what is clear and muddies it. That's what draws me into art, really. Beauty. It can turn a king into a tyrant. David and Bathsheba, for example. You see? Biblical. Even Abraham. Abraham had concubines. Sarah was sure faithful, but beautiful? Nah. Where did we get this... fixation on beauty? Father Abraham.

You see, I'm not a... (*near whisper*) I'm not a perv. I'm not like the other guys here. I mean, I know everyone says that, but... but I'm not, uh, I wasn't attracted to her because... because she was young. It was different than all of that.

Phidias... uh, excuse me for being a bit pedantic, here. There was an ancient sculptor named Phidias and he crafted great statues of the Gods Athena and Zeus. The part that no one knows is that he's best known for being a great mathematician. Because with sculpting... it's not so much about carving human likeness. It's not about portraying humans accurately. Art is about portraying humans beautifully; depicting the top of the evolutionary heap. And Phidias discovered this number, this ratio... uh, point-six-one-eight-naught-three... er, nine-nine, I think; anyways, this number that, uh, sort of delineated... aesthetic perfection. Sort of like a recipe for beauty.

And so this number was named after him; Phi. And it's just like the number Pi in that it's an irrational number. It pops up almost everywhere in nature, in every aspect of human life, and yet mathematicians still aren't able to pinpoint where it ends. Sort of a warning to us; it's saying "Be careful!"

And every artist since... well, every good artist since has factored it into their work. The Mona Lisa's face is a Golden Rectangle, meaning that the width of her forehead is .61 times the length from the top of her head to her chin. If you described her to someone... if you described her facial features to some guy on the street, they'd be unimpressed. But you get that guy in a museum... I saw the Mona Lisa myself. Took a trip to Paris in college. Pushed half a billion Japanese tourists out of the way so I could just stare at her all day. It was remarkable. Her face is simply perfection. Perfectly crafted and perfectly rendered. Can't look away from it, but if you study it... once you know the proportions, you know why.

When I saw Mona for the first time she was walking outside of my window. The girl, I mean. I had just happened to glance outside; it was around noon, and I had been painting in my

room. Not the painting. It was raining outside; very overcast, and she was wearing a... very bright yellow peacoat and carrying an umbrella at a roughly seventy-five degree angle over her shoulder. Very... iconic. Very beautiful. And I was immediately struck; this was before I knew her, before any of the... before all of it happened. I sensed it immediately; this... there was a sense of divinity. Something in her face was unearthly.

I'm a painter. I've seen many faces, but there was an... ungodly perfection to her face. Very valuable to me. All I did that day was snap a photograph of her. Just one. I only painted what I'd seen; made sure I was precise... made sure I maintained a mathematical precision down to the last detail.

I used to be a sculptor. And I was always very inspired... very much led by Galileo, and the Canon of Polyclitus in believing that it's not mine to create. It's mine to interpret, and as accurately as possible. The... uh, Polyclitus, um. Polyclitus was one of the first sculptors to make a hypothesis on how to more accurately depict the human form within mathematical confines. Very influential to the art of sculpting.

My training came in, mainly, as a mathematician. Started out as a math major in college; my dad was a mathematician, too. It was what I was comfortable. But I got too comfortable. It got boring, you know, and I guess I wanted to be a rockstar or something... So I found a healthy balance with it all and decided to become an artist. I figured I could just slip in with the pop art scene, you know, having grown up in the Andy Warhol era. Thought I could just, you know, "find my sensitive side" and get laid. It became a lot more than that, though. Art is my main focus now. My passion, if you will. It was a whim at first, though. Really. Art was.

I also got lucky with art in that I had learned about the mathematics of art from my father. He'd take me to galleries as a kid and point out the mathematics in it all. My father was the one who taught me about the Mona Lisa. And I was always struck how famous these, you know, ancient men had achieved just by... depicting humans. And when I thought about the mathematics to it; that it was mainly mathematics... art became comfortable. So I spent my education as an artist learning the angles in which we, as human beings, are formed. Just as Polyclitus did. And much of this was established in my ability to identify the golden ratio. That's how I was taught.

By that same token, I don't create my inspiration; the muses make me. I've been very reliant on the natural beauty of my models. Despite my training, you know, I'm not really able to... just conjure up an imaginary model. Not necessarily the best way to work in this industry, but it's... it's just like I said; art came easy to me. So that's how I worked. And I don't feel honest... reinterpreting my model's bodies. Pretty much at the beginning of my career I got lucky and met my wife, Angela. Eh, ex-wife. She was... lucky. Her body... wow, her body was just very... angular. Classical. And she was my muse. We made bank, just the two of us. I'd just sculpt what I saw.

But she... I guess you could say that she just got bored with me... went with someone younger, you know, and I... I just couldn't find... I couldn't find a model who could create the same success as my wife's body... had, frankly. I'd get sales, just not as large of sales as I used to. Not large enough to make sculpture worthwhile. I got new models, but my work wasn't selling. I had made sculptures of Angela for... ten years. So when she left, I couldn't keep making images of her, because she could sue me for using her likeness. So rather than keep on working, you know, somewhat aimlessly, I decided to switch back to painting. I had started out as a painter, and it was more... cheap. A lot cheaper. And it was less time-consuming and because I'm less skilled at painting than I am at sculpting, I'm less critical of my work in it. So it's more productive.

But with Mona's portrait I knew, as I started, that she would be my greatest painting. Right there, and nothing to do with my skills. Her proportions and the iconography found within the painting made it timeless. Resonant. I just painted what I saw. Swore she must have been a bodhissattva or something, but I didn't talk to her until roughly... until a few weeks later. I had no idea she lived in my building, but one day I was about to go out and run errands when I ran into her in the hallway. Scared me half to death and I fell down. So she sort of looked at herself and looked if anyone was around and then decided to help me get back onto my feet.

At that point, I decided it was fate for me to talk to her. So I did. I said hi, and asked her if she lived in the building. She was one of those people who open up to you instantly. I was in over my head before I knew it. The next day, she knocked on my door to see if I were home; I could hear her voice coming in through the door. I was just painting, but I had to go hide the painting of her I'd been working on and so I told her to come back later. She came back an hour later; I should have known it was trouble at that point. But I didn't.

And so she came in and I just poured us some tea and it began; instant friendship. Very interesting girl; funny, intelligent, very precocious. As she revealed more and more of herself to me, I became more and more attached to her. I fell, I suppose. She was 17. I was 45. So I was very concerned about how our relationship was developing; wanted to make sure I was staying decent, more like a parental figure to her than anything.

But my resolve slipped... when I finally showed her the painting I had made of her. I had been showing her my artwork in general; things I had been working on, of which she, much like the entire artistic community of New York, was generally unimpressed by. But I had ended up, in the course of the weeks where we were talking regularly, showing her some images, online pictures, of my past work with Angela online and she was really... awed by it. And that really made me very nostalgic. It was very petty, but I wanted to show her that I could still make pieces that well; that it wasn't me that had changed, but my muse. That I wasn't meant to be making uninspired cityscapes; I was meant to be crafting the human form.

And so I showed her the painting I had made of her. And she was very impressed by it. Too impressed. I think... I think that it went to her head; that I had been inspired... like that, by her. And I think that it made her attracted to me, which was very dangerous to our friendship and, as I ultimately learned... excuse me.

A lot of why I let it continue, let her keep coming over, was because of her home life. She had expressed to me that her father's was... not the safest place for her to be, that she was beaten occasionally. She didn't express to me that she had many friends; I didn't know what pulling away from her would do to her psychologically. I thought that my presence in her life was calming; that I was helping her.

And so she began to pursue me. Sexually. And I didn't reject her because I knew that it might make her pull away all together. I'm not about to pretend that I didn't enjoy it as well; she was a very beautiful woman. And she was very tender... it's hard for me to believe, even, that she was only seventeen.

But, uh, also, of course, I had been painting her. And I actually got to measure out her facial proportions, and indeed... she fit the golden ratio. To a "T". Meaning... every one of her facial features when measured against each other equalled out to roughly 1.61. Her face was 1.61 times longer than it was wide, and it went on; the distance from the outside edges of each of her eyes was 1.61 longer than the distance from her hairline to her pupil. It was just everywhere; and this is what art is. My wife was the same way; that I found two muses with such a high level of facial perfection was... miraculous. So Mona meant a lot to me because of that, as well. More than a lot. I mean, her face was worth a fortune. It was my job to take care of it, to preserve it.

And this had gone on for a couple of weeks when one night, at around 8:00, I hear her banging on my door. I didn't know it was her at first, so I'm inching towards the door apprehensively and I look through the peephole and see her; I swear she jumped on me the second the door was unlatched. Very... frazzled, upset. Very upset. And she had been beaten up pretty severely; there was a series of scratch marks on her face, a couple of bruises. I knew it was her father. Before I could even ask what happened, she was trying to drag me into my bedroom... you know. But I needed to treat her wounds first, so I led her to the sink and cleaned up her face; toweled off the blood. I tried to ask her what happened, and she... she wouldn't, uh, she wasn't able to articulate what had happened at first.

So we just... um, we shared intimacies, I guess you could say. And then eventually, afterwards, she told me that it was her father. That she and her father had gotten into a fight and he had... assaulted her. Of course I wasn't going to let her go back home after that. And... um, she expressed... um, she was very upset with her father. And she expressed... murderous intentions towards him. She expressed to me that she wanted me to kill him. Very paranoid that he would hunt her down. Of course I never... I never humored that. I never thought that was a good idea. But, um, I had been planning, for a long time, actually, to move back to Chicago. I

had lived there for a few years with my wife, and I had decided I just needed a change of scene. I sort of wanted to get back to working in sculpture, and I knew I could get some supplies down there. And so I said "Look, I'm moving back to Chicago and I can buy another ticket right now. Come with me."

And, uh, I had been hoping she could come with me, anyways. I figured that... figured if we could work together, that we could make great art. I thought that she was like a second wind for me. And I wasn't thinking I'd take her with me immediately, you know, she's very young, but maybe in two years or so. But at that point, you know, I realized that she needed to get away from her home. So I did. And she was happy about leaving but still... clinging onto ideas with her father. She wanted vengeance. I figured it was just the trauma talking.

And so it was another two days until we'd leave for Chicago, and so she was helping me pack and doing a lot better. Emotionally, that is. But the night before we were supposed to leave, she decided that she wanted to go back to her father's apartment to get the rest of her things. And I knew that was a bad idea from the start, and I begged her to give it up, but she was still very attached to the idea. We got to bed at 12:30 after finishing with packing and our flight left at 10:00 the next day. But I woke up at roughly 3:00 and... and I heard a distant sort of screaming. And I turned over to Mona and ... she was gone.

And I knew that the screams were hers; she must have gone back to her father's and... oh, God. I ran to go get my night robe from the bathroom and as I did... I heard gunshots. And I ran to the door and I saw her father there, and... he... he was beating her with a gun. He was beating her over the back with a gun. I... I didn't know what to do. And... uh. Uh, I had a gun, too, underneath my pillow. And so I ran to go get my gun so that I could fight back... I should have just called 991... I... I dunno, I wasn't thinking logically. But I guess I wanted to shoot back. I wanted to kill him... I... I just... And so I shot at him. And I missed, but he began to run off-back towards the stairs. And he said... he told me I was a coward for taking advantage and that... and that I should have killed her myself. I was just... nauseated. I wanted to vomit, that was just... that was the most repulsive thing I had ever heard a father say to his daughter.

And then I looked back at her, and... and it was bad. She had been shot twice and there was lots of bleeding. I pulled her into my apartment and checked her signs, and... I think she died as I was checking. I had never dreamed that all of... I never thought that my dream would end like that. I think that the... I think the shock killed me. I had... I had heart problems, and I think that the shock... jump-started... something.