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Moment of Truth

by Pauline Walden

Sometimes she thought Alec was right - you believed in things because you needed to.

After a whirlwind romance and marriage to a younger man, she had certainly needed to believe the reassurances of friends - a diminishing number, as most of her friends did not meet with her new husband's approval. In his oft expressed opinion, she deserved better company, although he omitted to specify precise requirements.

As she gazed over the olive grove from her sun-drenched terrace she thought of Alec, so far away, just a passing thought, then considered some of those reassurances. The first, and all too frequent, 'Alec absolutely adores you! He can't bear to let you out of his sight!'

She had chosen to believe this all too obvious fact to be commensurate with the depth of his devotion - together with his concern for her driving alone on country roads. Then there was the close runner-up, 'Alec is so protective - I wish my husband would employ a gardener (interior designer, housekeeper etc.) to ease my burden!'

But she loved gardening, planning her home and caring for it, only accepting Alec's modifications as proof of his desire to 'protect her fragile health', as he put it - quite erroneously as she was of a deceptively robust constitution. 'After all', he'd said indulgently - and repeatedly, 'at your age, my dear..'

And then, the piece de resistance, 'Alec *so* admires your artwork - he really believes in you!'

Oh, yes indeed, she well remembered a dinner guest admiring her paintings, and Alec's fond smile as he placed an arm around her shoulders. 'She's really quite a nice little painter', he'd said in what could easily have been - and undoubtedly was - interpreted as a deprecating manner.

'A pity she no longer exhibits', the admiring guest had remarked pointedly, directing his observation to Alec.

That had been the moment of truth, scales falling from eyes and all such expressions of sudden realisation. And that realisation was of an overwhelming need to believe - but this time to believe in herself, her own mislaid identity, without any reassurances from well meaning friends, and certainly without Alec's subtle manipulation.

She had felt the anger rise from the pit of her stomach. She had exhibited only once since meeting Alec. Her excuse being that marriage to Alec had given her total fulfilment and all she wanted to do was care for him with no distractions.

Now, as she gazed over the olive grove, *her* olive grove, from the terrace of *her* villa high above the only city in the world where she wanted to be, she thought, not of Alec but of her coming exhibition and the charming winegrower who had made it possible. A movement below in the olive grove drew her attention to the sunburnt figure of a young man stripped to the waist. She turned away, smiling. *All very nice for the occasional diversion*, she thought, *but one did have priorities*.