

# Painting by Numbers

My wife is a very social person. I think her favorite hobby is organizing a pleasant party, or should I say *soirée*, as she prefers to call them. There is always a preamble to her events. First, she must clean the house, with me in tow, to do the heavy work. Second, there is the preparation of the food and drink.

The top of her agenda is, of course, the guest list. Throughout her preparations, she will use the pretext of talking to me, but what she is actually doing is talking to herself.

“I think it would be nice to invite so and so.” Or “It’s a pity Mrs. Jones can’t come because her in-laws are visiting for the weekend.

My buddies sometimes come to these *soirées*, but we are always on our best behavior, if not a little inebriated. My buddies always drive here, but after an evening chatting politely together with wine in hand, it is always their wives that drive home.

The parties that my buddies and I prefer are the ones where we can slouch around with our feet up, watching a good game. Of course, copious amounts of beer and other intoxicating spirits are also our companion. Whoever is the host on such occasions will send out for pizza to be delivered.

I don’t believe that our language can be considered polite during our parties, especially if one of our teams is losing. I haven’t improved my vocabulary during these parties, but I have learned some very creative ways to connect words into highly offensive phrases.

Yes, both my wife and I are equally social people, but we have radically different tastes. You could say that I am a party animal.

For instance, when my wife gathers for a girl’s party, they enjoy light finger foods, such as cake and biscuits. They also drink specialty teas from nice cups and saucers. I love a good cup of tea, but in a hot mug with a generous dose of whiskey. Commonly known as a ‘*Toddy*’, this is my version of polite drinks. On the other hand, I think whiskey is better spent as a shot to chase my beer with.

There is inspiration that I get from my Wife’s *soirées*. Recently she held a painting by numbers gathering for her girlfriends. You know, those printed sheets with coded areas that need to be filled with the matching coded paint color. Once they have finished with the teas and cakes, they gather around a table to engage in conversation and painting. The beauty of this is, little or no skill is required. You simply

follow the numbers with the correct colored paint and your artwork appears.

I thought this would be a great idea to introduce my buddies and me to some culture. At first, they were not amenable to such culture, everyone made excuses not to come. They took some persuasion, as long as alcohol is involved, they can easily be convinced to do anything.

The picture had to be chosen carefully. There is no way these guys would paint any classical art like Constable's Haywain. I had to find something that would stimulate their interest.

Sport-related pictures were not exactly culture in my opinion. Classical images would be the other extreme, of too much culture. Pretty pictures of the countryside would be considered boring by my buddies. I could imagine them adding graffiti where it doesn't belong. In the end, I think I got the perfect picture for them.

Since I was the host, I had to send out for the pizza delivery. I also knocked up some chili, so we could enjoy some chili dogs. Our version of finger food. Of course, I also provided copious amounts of craft beer.

Bob is the tall, dark, strong man in our group. He can often be loud, and his love of tequila slammers exemplifies this. He revels in the whop bang of slammers on a bar top. So, it is no surprise that he brought a bottle of tequila.

Gary has an affinity towards anything Mediterranean. We expected him to bring an Italian wine. Instead, he brought a bottle of Rye, exclaiming that the origin of Rye was Eastern Mediterranean, probably Turkish.

Alan is the intellectual one. He always brings something suitable to the occasion. For this event, he brought a box of red wine. "It is what an artisan would consume." He told us.

As well as beer, I also provided limes, salt and ice.

After some chili dogs, a few drinks and a couple slammers to get us in the mood, I cleared things away to make room for our art. As I passed out the brushes and put the little miniature pots of paint within reach, their expressions changed to silent incredulity.

I then unrolled the picture and laid it out before them. "What do you think?" I asked.

"I thought you were kidding!" was all Bob could say.

"Do you really expect us to play this game?" Gary asked. "Like Bob said, we all thought you were kidding. We thought you had something crazy planned for us."

"That's the whole point. It is crazy," I replied, "no thinking is

involved, and we have something to show for it at the end.”

Alan returned from the kitchen with a large glass of wine in hand. After examining the sheet for a moment, he said, “It’s a nude.”

“Its erotic art.” I countered.

“OK,” Bob added, “My wife is going to be so impressed with me.” Here I am painting porn at Bernie’s!”

“Actually, now you put it that way. Which one of us gets the picture when we’ve finished?” Gary asked.

Alan suggested, “Maybe we can have an art appreciation party and invite our wives.”

“If I’m playing this game, I need another slammer.” Bob said as he marched off to the kitchen.

“I think we all agree on that!” I said following him close behind.

Soon after, we were all painting, filling in the coded spots mechanically, occasionally making requests like, “Who has number 3 red?” in between, we were knocking back drinks quicker than during any sports meetings we had.

As the picture took shape, we wondered what her name was.

“We should call her something nice.” Alan suggested.

After a moment of silence, Bob shook his head. “I think we should call her something else.”

We made good progress with the painting, Gary telling us stories funny about his travels, Bob painting rude slogans on spare pieces of paper. Alan trying to be serious despite being under the influence.

After more drinks, more jokes, and more paint, Gary asked me, “Hey, what are you painting?”

I didn’t look up, but continued to fill in the numbers.

“Hey, I wanted to paint that bit.” He said.

“Well, you can’t because I’m painting this bit. You can paint her hair.” I suggested.

“Yeah, but I really wanted to paint that bit.”

“Well, you can’t, because you’re way over there on the other side of the table.”

Alan suggested, “You can both swap places.”

Now I looked up and looked around. Everyone was looking at me and looking at what I was painting. Everyone seemed to have envy in their eyes.

Bob looked at me squarely. “You do seem to be hogging that bit.”

I placed my brush down and stood up. “I am not hogging this bit, I am just painting what’s close to me.”

“Oh, we can all see you’re close to that bit.” Gary said.

“Is that why you sat there?” Bob asked.

“I don’t know what you guys are trying to insinuate. All I’m doing is painting!”

“All you’re doing is hogging that bit!” Gary accused.

“Is that what you think I’m doing?”

“Calm down!” Bob demanded.

“I was calm until you lot started accusing me of being a hog. I tell you what, we’ll do what Alan suggested, we’ll all change places. So let’s all move along one place just like children! Is that what we are now? Children?”

Alan gulped down his glass of wine.

Gary swallowed his rye, nearly choking on an ice cube.

“Now boys, I think we all need another slammer!” Bob shouted.

“I’ll give you a slammer if you don’t move on one position!”

We started pushing and shoving each other, vying for position at the table. Chairs were being pushed out of the way. Some of us were still holding paintbrushes, which caused smears on our clothes and faces. We stopped short of black eyes and bloody noses, but it wasn’t a pretty sight. The miniature pots of paint were getting knocked over, paint spilling on the picture and all over the kitchen table.

After a long period of turmoil and struggle, there was a horrific noise that frightened us all.

“What are you boys doing!”

My wife stood at the kitchen entrance, her fists on her hips, and a look of fury and condemnation in her eyes.

“Look at this mess! I can’t leave you boys alone for one minute! And as for you!” She leveled an accusing finger directly at me. “You had better have a good explanation!”

The picture suffered irreparable damage and ended up in the trash.

I thought myself lucky to be allowed to sleep on the couch for the rest of the week.

My buddies never came to our house again. They weren’t banned, but it was an unspoken rule.

When their wives attended my wife’s soirées, they regarded me with disdain. I certainly wasn’t allowed to visit their homes.

My buddies and I did meet again some considerable time after. But we never spoke of this incident.