

SELF-PORTRAIT

by
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Art Ed Soph.

The strong smells of oil and turpentine hang in the air. A bare lightbulb casts bright, white light over the corner of the room. Sounds of soft guitar music from the stereo and the occasional sloshing and tinkling of a brush being hastily cleaned fill the space and solitude.

On this gray, almost-winter day, a young girl works steadily, leaning close to her canvas, brush in hand. Her oversized shirt and faded jeans are covered with snatches of color from many afternoons spent just like this one. Half-used tubes of paint and an assortment of brushes lie on the table beside her. Her hands moving quickly from canvas to palette, she stops to squeeze a bit of paint from one of the tubes, mixing it on the board until it's just the right shade.

Her brush touches the canvas in light, short strokes. The paint glides across the surface, meeting and uniting with other colors. She smudges a small spot with the tip of her finger, then scratches her nose, leaving an oily smudge on its end. Unaware of the smudge, she steps back, focusing critical eyes on the work. Her gaze never leaves the canvas. Remounting her stool, she continues the transformation from bare white surface to landscape.

She is absorbed, her mind as much a part of the painting as the paint itself. In this room, with its stained easel and oily brushes, she finds deep concentration.

She loves the smooth greasiness of the paint, the way it mixes, the smell of it. The ache between her shoulder blades is a good ache. The reddening of her eyes from the paint fumes is of little importance. She feels an eagerness to see a finished product, to feel satisfaction, to sign her name inconspicuously in the corner of the canvas.

The lights go off one by one in the surrounding rooms of the house, but the unshaded bulb in her own corner burns late into the night.