

THE STATUE * by Amy Franks

"FRANKIE" was an artist. She wore a smock of softest baby-blue, and her long, brown hair tumbled artistically about her shoulders. Her silvery wine flasks and dreamy landscapes haunted the walls of the studio, and those who were not artists came to admire and to praise them. Even the little studio, so sunny and peaceful, could tell that she was different, "We know you," smiled the tempera jars and water cans and the saucy little spiders penciled on the sink. "You are one of us. You are an artist." The girl heard what the little room told her and knew that it was true.

Today it was late afternoon when she entered the studio, and sleepy sunlight made patches on the tables and floors. A playful breeze flipped the pages of a magazine and caused the little glass mobile to tinkle merrily in the window. Dawn was waiting for her in the corner where the water cans gleamed. Behind her, in its roped off cave, loomed the statue. The statue had been Mr. Juliano's idea. Dear, tiny, Mr. Juliano with his child-face and round button-eyes—she could still hear him running on in an eager whisper at the Production Staff meeting. "We'll have lions in the orchestra pit and Roman soldiers selling tickets—and oh, there must be a statue," he had finished breathlessly. So there had been nightly trips to a lumber yard and raids upon the treasures of a sculptor in Tandem Square; a mysterious pile of burlap sacks and wooden beams suddenly appeared in one back corner of the studio; now, incredibly, she stood before this monstrous framework of wood and wire and burlap. She had come to finish the statue, and the statue was already a legend in the school.

Now she and Dawn took up their tools and set to work, pounding and pinching and pressing dead wire into living limbs; filling in the wire with plaster. The frame took on form; grew more and more human. "Frankie's" hands moved swiftly, conscious of their power, hypnotizing the pliers. The slightest touch of her long, nimble fingers seemed to turn the wire of its own accord into its proper place. Those who were not artists gathered around to watch. "See how her fingers move," they whispered among themselves. "She is truly an artist." The girl heard their words; she felt the ability in her fingertips and knew the words were true. She looked at the statue and thought how it would stand—majestic, aloof—in the center of the stage, of the murmur that would run through the audience when the curtains parted, and of the quick checking of the

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programs. She thought how her name in bold, black letters would link her in all minds, on all lips, with the wonderful plaster statue.

"Is this any better?" Dawn was still struggling with one plaster arm—with the difficult crook where the arm bent upward. Now she looked up hopefully. On her way to the stage, "Frankie" turned to look back at the statue.

"Your arm's still lopsided at the elbow," she stated briefly. She heard the authority in her voice and saw with satisfaction that the others had heard it too. "Yes," whispered the eyes of the students to one another, "she is truly an artist." But Dawn's fingers reached out to touch, ever so gently, the crooked arm, and her eyes were wistful as she picked up once more the pliers she had laid aside.

"Frankie" did not return until late to the art room. The students had gone; the room was empty, but from mountains of smattered burlap the statue towered, unreal in the supernatural light. It seemed to grow in the dark—to be gathering itself together, drawing itself up from the shadows of the room. At first she saw only its power, but as her eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, she noticed cracks, lumps, places that were lopsided or unproportionate, and the statue seemed suddenly comical, pathetic. Dawn was standing beside it—her head lay against one great plaster arm while she gazed—oh so proudly—into the battered, Neanderthal face. She suddenly turned and tears were streaming down her cheeks, but her face was radiant, beatific. "Oh, Frankie," she whispered, "I did it. Can you see? I've made the elbow right!"

The girl stood dumbfounded. She wanted to laugh, but somehow she felt more like crying. Here was this ridiculous statue—her tool to impress, her key to glory—and beside it this strange girl, crying her heart out for one muscle made right. Then she knew that the studio had lied; that the eyes of the students had lied—their words had been meant for another, not herself.

"Here, Gauguin," she smiled. "You finish the statue. I'm busy." And handing Dawn my pliers, I turned and walked away from the art room.

The tide washes his
Seashells and he cries. How you
Would have this day.

EDWARD RIEDINGER