

Married life

'1, 2, 3, how many more are we expecting?' she asked her husband as he passed her with a bottle of his finest red.

'Just one more dear. I will collect you when Hendrick arrives and we can all go into dinner – after they have seen our portrait'.

'Is that why you wouldn't let me change out of this dress, and why you are still wearing your big hat?'

'Yes dear. I wanted them to see how well the artist captured our finery. These four men are my most important clients and I need to impress them with my good taste'.

Shortly afterwards all four men were shown into the main reception room, where Giovanna was waiting, and her husband, with a little flourish, unveiled the painting. They expressed their pleasure and joked that they must have been paying him too much, but they complimented their host and hostess on their fashion choice. Hendrick enquired as to when the baby was due much to Giovanna's exasperation, as she was yet to conceive. She let her husband explain that his wife had gathered up the material of her green dress as she walked into the room and the artist had asked her to pose like that so that he could show the fine wool lining.

Thankfully the smell of roast goose drew the men into the dining room, and soon she heard deep voices rumbling as they clinked their glasses. Giovanna could finally escape to her room to remove her statement dress and have her meal in private. She finished her dinner with one of the costly oranges that her husband had insisted were in the portrait.

When their guests had left Giovanna took the opportunity to ask 'why did our portrait show us in the bedroom, our inner sanctum?'

'I wanted to show that we were a stylish couple. That our room is well lit by the stylish bronze chandelier, and that we even have a fine mirror in this secluded room. Your little dog seems to approve. No one will think us as the poorer relative when they see this portrait!'

Giovanna sighed and retreated to her boudoir. Why was it that men were such show-offs, she wondered. At least he had chosen her when she came of marriageable age before her distant country cousin had a chance to formally express his interest. All her prayers had been answered when this wealthy merchant unexpectedly asked for her hand, and now she had a quality of life she had never imagined.

[Little did the couple know that their portrait would become one of the most famous and intriguing paintings in the world and can now be found on public display in the National Gallery of London. (The Arnolfini Portrait by Jan van Eyck, 1423)]

