

THE PORTRAIT OF DORIS GREY

Written by

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BLACK SCREEN:

Siren blares underneath a roaring engine, it increases in volume as it nears, we hear it louder and louder.

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Ambulance with a flashing red light atop races along a dimly lit winding road, its siren pierces the stillness of the night.

EXT. EMERGENCY DRIVEWAY - HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Ambulance screeches to a stop and the siren slowly whirs down.

Two PARAMEDICS alight from the vehicle and rush to the rear.

Two male ORDERLIES, in white coats, wheel a gurney with urgency.

Paramedic #1 opens the rear door, levers a latch upwards and a metal tray extends.

Atop is a WOMAN - her age hard to determine - wrapped in a foil blanket from neck to thigh, a breathing mask over her nose and mouth.

Her face is burnt, singed blonde hair, more burns on her lower legs, she is barely alive.

Paramedics with Orderlies maneuver a metal slide onto the gurney, then push it towards the hospital entrance.

EXT. OPENING DOORS - CONTINUOUS

Gurney, Paramedics and Orderlies glide through... INTO...

INT. FOYER - EMERGENCY - CONTINUOUS

There's a flurry of activity in a busy emergency room.

Two MALES in football kit with bloodstained head bandages, sit in chairs.

WOMAN cradles a YOUNG GIRL (2) in pajamas.

ELDERLY MAN with his WIFE sit quietly.

All eyes on the gurney propped near a counter.

A charred hand flops down from under the foil blanket.

Woman shields her child.

The two footballers grimace.

A gasp of shock from the elderly wife.

Paramedic #1 notices the exposed hand.

He carefully slips it back under the foil blanket.

NURSE (20s) rushes from behind the counter, followed by a DOCTOR (30s) in green covers, stethoscope draped around his neck.

He shines a pen torch into the burnt woman's eyes, gently lifts each lid up, he glances to the Paramedics.

DOCTOR

What happened?

PARAMEDIC #1

Car accident. Open top rolled down a cliff. She must have been thrown from the car. She was lying on rocks nearby.

DOCTOR

(to Nurse)

Call Edwards, get her into the O room now.

Nurse nods as the gurney is pushed by Orderlies through two opaque glass sliding doors.

FADE TO BLACK.

BLACK SCREEN:

We hear church bells ring in a rhythmic chime.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

SUPER: 3 WEEKS LATER

Upper body to head is wrapped in bandages, it lays still in bed under a blanket.

Tufts of singed, blonde head hair poke out.

There is a small gap for nostrils and the mouth...

- like an Egyptian Mummy -

Eyes are deep mirrors of pain.

Nurse looks at the clip board, we see a name in bold type...

- JANE DOE -

She slips the clipboard on a rail at the end of the bed, then exits the room.

We hear the sweet melody of a Harp's strings, gently being plucked.

Those eyes flicker, then a smile creases.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. STUDIO - DAY

SUPER: 3 YEARS EARLIER

ARTIST (looks in his 50s) his age hard to define with a youthful shock of wavy brown hair, keen eyes and a sophisticated manor, sits at his easel and paints a portrait of a naked blonde woman.

This is HELENA (30s) his muse, feisty, eye-catching and curvaceous.

Her body is angled, stretched out upon a mid-high-back velour Chaise lounge with legs elegantly crossed and her right arm rests casually on the top wooden ridge.

She seems agitated and fidgets with her left hand.

ARTIST
Please! Helena.

HELENA

What?

ARTIST

I am working on your left hand. You
keep moving it.

HELENA

(annoyed, under her
breath)

You're such a pain.

Artist pretends to ignore as his brush delicately strokes the
canvass.

Helena then shuffles her body on the Chaise.

Artist looks up at her.

ARTIST

I said don't move!

Helena bristles and glares at him.

HELENA

You're a beast.

Artist a mild scoff.

ARTIST

And you are my beauty.

Helena creases a - touché - smile.

Artist then crafts the shape of her delicate fingers, the
ridge and valleys of her knuckles.

ARTIST (CONT'D)

My mother would always say you
could tell the men from the boys by
how they handle the classical craft
of painting the hands.

Artist's eyes do not leave the canvas.

We transition through those eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ROOM - DAY

SUPER: **GERMANY 1943**

We emerge through the eyes of a YOUNG BOY, early teens.

He sits in a chair at a table with his sketch pad and pencils and looks at an image in a magazine of a beautiful woman (famous actress, Alida Valli).

Focusing on her hands, he's concentrates. Skims his pencil, the shape not quite right. He stops.

MOTHER (40s) a sturdy woman with a no-nonsense way about her, places a bowl of broth on the table.

Her son looks up to seek approval. She looks at his drawing.

MOTHER

(German in subtitles)

This is no good! What have I said
to you?

Chastened, he drops his head.

Mother picks up the sketch pad, she holds it in front of her and studies the drawing, traces the lines with her eyes.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

(German in subtitles)

My boy. You want to be an artist?
You must know how to draw the
hands.

She gives the sketch pad back to him, he takes it.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

(German in subtitles)

You may never become an artist, so
best eat your broth, at least maybe
you'll be strong to lay bricks.

He looks at the hands he's drawn on the page.

Then he closely studies his own hands.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Artist stares at his hands.

HELENA

I thought you were painting my hands? Don't make mine look like a labourers!

Helena giggles. Artist glances up.

ARTIST

What do you mean?

HELENA

Oh, sensitive are we? Don't you remember?

Artist looks curious.

She creases a grin, Helena loves to tease him.

HELENA (CONT'D)

Oh come on now? If you hadn't practiced so hard you might have ended up laying bricks!

(Artist takes in a breath mildly annoyed)

You told me how your mother would always go on about men, boys and hands?

ARTIST

Yes, hands...

HELENA

(overlapping)

I mean I don't get it.

(she looks at her hands)

They're just hands right?

ARTIST

Some hands are more inspiring than others.

HELENA

Really?

ARTIST

Yes. Like yours. They possess a kinetic poetry.

HELENA

Kinetic poetry. Well, is that just another term for a hand job?

She laughs mocking Artist. Then she moves her partially clenched fist up and down in a provocative sexual act.

He glares at her.

ARTIST

Smart arse! You may be exquisite,
quite dazzling, but you have the
mouth of a drunken sailor.

HELENA

(indignant)

How dare you compare me to a
drunken sailor!

(laughing)

I'm much worse!

Artist dismisses her with a wave of his hand.

HELENA (CONT'D)

By the way, I need to talk to you
about something too. A great
opportunity for you.

ARTIST

Look! We have work to do, so if you
can just keep those hands still and
stop carrying on like a spoilt two
year old! What opportunity?

HELENA

What? Two year old? How dare you!
That's it. I'm not putting up with
this.

Helena is riled.

HELENA (CONT'D)

(she glares at him)

Stuff you.

She abruptly rises from her seat.

ARTIST

Please! Helena! Enough of this
petulance.

Helena gathers her clothes and coat.

ARTIST (CONT'D)

Where are you going? Come back and
sit down I haven't finished!

She ignores as she storms out of the study.

ARTIST (CONT'D)

Helena!

Artist sighs, then shakes his head in exasperation.

ARTIST (CONT'D)
 (to himself)
 Damn you girl.

FADE TO BLACK.

BLACK SCREEN:

SUPER: **3 YEARS LATER**

FADE IN:

EXT. HARBOUR - DAY

Water glistens like diamonds on a glass emerald sheet, a rising sun bathes it in a shimmering glow.

Trains and Cars make their way across the expanse of Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Ferries carve their way through water.

Fishermen dangle rods standing upon a rock embankment.

INT. ART GALLERY - DAY

HANDYMAN (40s) in coveralls, holds a clipboard.

Framed artworks of partially naked, beautiful women, affixed on walls, mounted on tripods, all strategically positioned.

YOUNG WOMAN (20s) saunters in, looking a little weary, Handyman smiles, she squeezes a polite smile back.

HANDYMAN
 You're in early. Where's the boss?

YOUNG WOMAN
 St Mary's.

HANDYMAN
 Big night?

YOUNG WOMAN
 You could say that.

Handyman nods, then points to three wooden crates.

HANDYMAN

You're young, you'll survive. Want me to unpack those?

YOUNG WOMAN

If you would. I'm going to grab a coffee, need a kick-start. Can I get you anything?

HANDYMAN

Winning lottery ticket be nice.

He grins, she slumbers off.

EXT. FORECOURT - ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL - DAY

Artist stands with his sketch-pad and pastels.

BUSINESSMAN (40s) sharp suit and briefcase, strolls past, stops, he watches Artist sketching Neo-Gothic architecture.

Procession of ready-for-work dressed MEN and WOMEN slows as they all stop to look.

Businessman turns to a WOMAN (30s) who is observing Artist.

BUSINESSMAN

(to Woman)

The last thing I expected to see in front of St. Mary's?

WOMAN

Yes. Quite.

Artist overhears, sports a subtle smirk as he focuses on his work.

A MOMENT LATER...

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN...

- her age hard to define, almost timeless -

...in a slinky, mid-length, black cocktail dress, a large white-brimmed hat, white gloved hands, clutching a small black purse...

- out of place for an early morning stroll -

...casually strides past.

Artist is struck by her svelte shape, silky smooth steps on high heels.

He eyes her sculptured calves and alluring figure, hourglass perfection within the fabric; he double-takes.

She turns her head, their eyes lock.

The image of her beautiful face, her piercing dark eyes and blood-red lips, burns into his mind.

Then she is gone! Vanished before his eyes.

He turns to the Woman observing him, his fraught expression causes her to back away then she scurries off.

He looks at the Businessman, seeking, he shrugs then walks on.

Artist drops his sketch pad and steps toward the side of the Cathedral.

His eyes search, she sees nothing.

Then he sees her as a black CAR pulls up, she opens the rear passenger door, quickly gets in, then the car hurriedly drives off.

He looks around as people go on their way, he's further unnerved.

INT. GALLERY - DAY

Handyman affixes a framed artwork of Helena...

- reclining on a Chaise lounge -

Young Woman sits behind a desk and sips her coffee while she reads a newspaper.

She notices something and frowns.

Handyman turns to face her, he sees her concerned look.

HANDYMAN

What?

YOUNG WOMAN

He's not going to like it.

HANDYMAN

Not like what? You happy with blondie?

YOUNG WOMAN

This review. A slippery form of graphic design backed with a high-powered marketing strategy. The veil homme terrible of the art world. Oh my. He'll go berserk.

(looking up at the painting on the wall)

Yes, blondie's fine.

She throws the newspaper on the desk.

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

I can't believe they write such things? All the time. Always the same rubbish.

HANDYMAN

Today's news, t'morrow's fish 'n chips wrappers. Water off a duck's back.

(looking at painting of blonde woman)

She was a nice girl, Helena.

(to Young Woman)

Where'd she go?

Young Woman shrugs 'don't know'.

YOUNG WOMAN

It's been a few years.

She picks up the newspaper and drops it in waste paper basket under her desk, then sips her coffee.

INT. BAR - DAY

Artist sits in a booth with ENRICO (50s) he's an Italian lothario in an open-necked shirt, navy trousers, several gold chains and well tanned.

Music plays softly in the plush bar, it's well appointed decked out in wood grain and leather.

They sip red wine from bulbous glasses.

ARTIST

I could not believe my eyes! Such a woman, such elegance, she was an angel.

ENRICO

You sure you weren't dreaming my friend?

ARTIST

No! I saw her. It was so...
 (looks off then back to Enrico)
 Like I had never seen before.
 Extraordinary!

ENRICO

Really?

ARTIST

Then she was gone. It was quite surreal.

Enrico sips his wine he raises an non-believing brow.

ENRICO

So, when are you off?

ARTIST

You don't believe me do you? Next week.

ENRICO

Well, it is a bit far fetched don't you think? I mean seeing a beautiful woman is one thing, then she just disappears? Come on?

ARTIST

Not a romantic notion in you.

ENRICO

Depends on what you call romance?

Enrico laughs, Artist feigns a smile, just as three stunning, sexy LADIES enter the bar...

- two Brunettes, a Honey-Blonde (mid to late 20s) -

...all in short, tight-fitting skirts, bulging cleavages, red coated, pouting lips.

ENRICO (CONT'D)

Right on time. This is my kind of romance.

Artist sees the three stunners approaching with a mild sigh as Enrico promptly rises from his seat.

ENRICO (CONT'D)
 (effusive)
 Ah, Bella!

Perfect white teeth with big eyes flutter as Enrico with a broad welcoming smile motions with a guiding hand, they take their seats.

ENRICO (CONT'D)
 Please meet the master of the cult
 of beauty!
 (clicking his fingers)
 Champagne for the ladies!

Artist smiles politely, yet seems indifferent as flute glasses are promptly filled by a WAITER, then handed to all, clinked with wide smiles.

INT. GALLERY - NIGHT

Artist stands in front of the artwork of Helena...

- same painting the Handyman affixed to the wall -

He stares sadly, a sense of hurt prevails within...

- her eyes are full of temptation and desire -

ARTIST
 (to himself, lamenting)
 Bella, where did you go?

He sighs then walks off, flicks off the light switch on his way.

INT. CAR - VATICAN CITY - ROME - DAY

Artist sits in the back seat of a limousine, he's poised, immaculate in his sharp suit, his shoes shined to perfection.

EXT. VATICAN CITY - CONTINUOUS

Limousine glides under a raised boom Gate into a compound where two SWISS GUARD stand at post.

INT. ROOM - VATICAN - DAY

CARDINAL ROCHE (60s) dressed in his claret robes and gold braids addresses Artist.

CARDINAL ROCHE

His holiness is looking forward to
seeing you again.

Artist smiles as a door opens, in strides the POPE (70s) in
his long white braided robes.

He props, extends his hand as Artist bows to gently kiss the
Pope's ring finger he then rights himself.

ARTIST

Holy Father.

Pope smiles warmly.

POPE

Welcome my son, it is good to see
you again.

ARTIST

Holy Father, I am honoured.

POPE

If we can reach the hearts and
minds through depiction in art of
our scriptures, then we will enrich
our souls. It will be you who
honour us my son.

Artist nods with graceful humility.

ARTIST

I am but your humble servant Holy
Father. I have never forgotten
those who would try to destroy our
faith. This is my duty.

Pope gives a gentle nod of acknowledgement.

POPE

The Lord loves us all. Even those
who don't believe. Come my son, we
shall take tea.

Two high-backed crimson velour Chairs with a small table in
front, a silver tray laden with fine china and a silver pot.

His Holiness sits, followed by Artist.

YOUNG PRIEST (20s) pours two cups of tea. Cardinal Roche
quietly observes.

POPE (CONT'D)
 So, do tell me of what masterpiece
 do we look forward to?

ARTIST
 St Peters Holy Father.

Pope smiles with an approving nod, then sips his tea.

EXT. FORECOURT - ST. PETERS CATHEDRAL - DAY

Artist is encircled by a throng of MEDIA.

JOURNALISTS (Male, Female) hold microphones, note-pads and
 small tape recorders.

CAMERAMEN point their lenses as Cardinal Roche begins.

CARDINAL ROCHE
 We are delighted and bursting with
 anticipation. The commission is
 blessed by the Holy Father.

Artist smiles as quick notations are made on pads at the
 mention of the Holy Father's name.

Woman in a mid-length black dress with white gloved hands and
 a white brimmed hat...

- same as the Woman who Artist saw at St. Mary's Cathedral -
 ...glides effortlessly past some 20 metres away.

Artist is stunned.

The sun is high in the sky above, he shields his eyes from
 the glare.

Her shapely figure is unmistakable as it casts a shadow on
 the cobbled stones, a cross-like image extends as though it
 was part of her.

She turns her head slightly, her eyes, dark and mysterious,
 lock with his for a slight moment.

Her lips are blood red and crease to a delicate smile.

Artist is dumbfounded, he just stares in a daze.

ARTIST
 (whispers)
 This is not possible?