

The Memory Painter

by  
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Based on the short story  
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EXT. WOODS - MORNING

We're tracking at high speed along an unsealed road lined with autumn leaves. We can hear the sound of a horses hooves pounding the road off camera.

A bird, disturbed from it's pecking's, flies suddenly out of frame.

A child's voice cries out in terror as the pounding of hooves climbs to crescendo.

The camera tilts up to partner a rearing horse and a young boy slips from the saddle, his head slamming down on the road as the horse bolts away.

Eight year old DANIEL is dead.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

A pristine female soprano begins Frances Poulenc's "Agnus Dei" from the final movement of his "Messe en sol majeur".

Wispy clouds sweep an ice blue sky and the title "The Memory Painter" fades up, floating for a moment before fading away.

A snowflake falls into frame and we follow it down through the air.

A girl's face rises into shot, filling frame and the snowflake lands on her cheek, the warmth of which melts the snowflake to a tear.

YOUNG LAURA wipes the melted snowflake away with her hand.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. BUSY CITY STREET - NOON

LAURA, now in her fifties, brushing a stray hair from her face as she hurries home from work.

She stops in her path and replaces a pin that has come loose and, when she is sure that everything is in place, continues briskly on her way.

She passes a woman negotiating with a child in a tantrum.

An old style four-in-hand advertising a well known stationary seller clops past.

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CONTINUED:

The driver tips his hat to Laura, who nods her greeting in return, and drives out of frame to reveal, SIMON, a man in a coffee cart on the other side of the street writing 'Laura' on a brown paper bag and placing a Danish in it.

CUT TO:

An elderly homeless woman with laughter in her eyes energetically plays the spoons. Her tattered old hat lies on the ground in front of her. As Laura approaches she opens her purse and takes out some coins placing them in the hat as she passes.

DEIDRE

Peace be with you, Laura.

LAURA

And also with you, Deidre.

Laura continues on her way, but as she puts her purse back in her bag something catches her eye and she drops it, money spilling everywhere.

On the ground, gathering coins, pedestrian feet almost trample her.

When she stands she is embarrassed at having made a spectacle of herself and she rushes onward not realizing she has missed her crossing.

In the back ground we see the man from the coffee cart calling to her and holding her Danish up.

SIMON

Laura! Hey Laura! You forgot your Danish!

But Laura doesn't hear him. She has become transfixed by a painting in the window of an old knickknack shop.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHOP FRONT - NOON

CU of a painting showing a girl aged around ten in a cottage style garden. Wind is blowing her hair across her face so that her features are hidden. She is skipping toward a part of the painting which is obscured by a large green vase. Laura, struck by a feeling of familiarity with the scene, enters the shop to enquire about it.

INT. SHOP - NOON

Arabian music curls through the air mingling with incense smoke to bring a surreal feel to this time forgotten shop.

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CONTINUED:

Adjusting to the light we become aware of an old woman sitting behind the counter. She has the look of a gypsy about her and is painting at an easel. Paying no heed to Lauras' entrance she continues to paint. The shop is filled with other paintings in a similar style. Each piece of work as detailed and lifelike as the next.

Gingerly Laura frees her painting from behind the green vase. When all of it is revealed she draws in a short sharp breath of grief.

LAURA

How much is this painting?

OLD WOMAN

How much can you pay?

EXT. QUIET STREET - EARLY AFTERNOON

Grand, slightly dilapidated, houses along with quaint Deco apartment blocks line the street.

Gulls soar through bright sunshine which scatters diamonds amongst yachts moored at the waters edge and a little park complete with fishpond and bridge creates the centre piece of this picturesque inner-city village.

But Laura, hurrying home, notices none of it for tucked under her arm is the strange little painting from the shop.

INT. LAURA'S FLAT - CONTINUOUS

Laura fumbles with her keys at her front door.

Once inside she places them in a little Wedgewood tray in the middle of a crochet doily that protects a small Queen Anne mahogany hall table.

We follow Laura down the hall, through her living room and into the kitchen with the painting under her arm.

As we travel through the house we see that Laura's flat is quite small but elegantly, though sparsely, furnished. It is immaculate in its order, showroom condition as a matter of fact. But while it looks tailor made to her comforts it does not look lived in. As she enters the kitchen she glances at the bills on the fridge. They are sitting a bit crooked and she straightens them. Propping the painting on the kitchen bench against the wall she gives herself a moment and then begins to unwrap it, taking care not to tear the paper. But when the painting is revealed something has changed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She looks closely at the detail, the little girl seems to be much nearer to the tree and her hair is not covering so much of her face so that now her features can be just made out. Laura is sure the painting was different when she bought it.

CUT TO:

CU of painting in it's original state in the shop.

BACK TO:

Laura making a cup of tea. She is a little shaky in her hands and spills some sugar on the floor. Taking a little dust buster out of a cupboard she vacuums up the sugar and feels the floor for stray grains. She looks at the painting again, feeling disturbed by it.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Laura places the painting deep in her wardrobe and, lying down on her bed, allows the falling afternoon to pull her into a deep sleep.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

We're looking at the roofscape through Lauras' bedroom window as a high speed time laps from dusk to morning takes place. Laura wakes with a start.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Laura grabs her keys from the Wedgewood tray, upsetting it in the process, and rushes out the door.

INT. RECEPTION DESK - MORNING

Laura steps out of the lift and into the reception area of a small law firm. She is greeted by ASHANI, a stout Indian woman of Laura's age, who is carrying two cups of coffee. Dressed in her garnet colored sari Ashanis' comfortable nature contrasts with Laura'S characteristic fastidiousness. She hands Laura one of the coffees and continues on to her desk near by.

ASHANI

Wild night?

LAURA

Huge. Out all night at the disco  
flirting with boys and guzzling  
back the sherries.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASHANI

Ah dear Laura. No ones been to a disco since the seventies; they're called clubs now. And these days they go what is called 'candy flipping' or some such thing: Sherry's not on the menu, not unless there's a red light outside her door.

LAURA

Sounds like you're the one who's been having all the wild nights.

ASHANI

Yes. Wild with worry over two post pubescent sons.

The switch rings. Laura hastily arranges her headset and answers.

LAURA

Good morning, Western Chambers. How can I help you?

EXT. BUSY CITY STREET - NOON

Laura is at the coffee cart paying Simon for her customary Danish. Across the street Deidre can be seen playing the spoons and in the distance the back of the four-in-hand rattles out of sight. The coffee cart is busy with city lunch hour and Laura moves on her way. Looking back across the street she searches, with her eyes, for the old knickknack shop but it is nowhere to be seen. The row of shops all appearing to be the usual city fare.

EXT. QUIET STREET - CONTINUOUS

Laura passes an old cinema on the other side of the street. She stops to look at it as she's sure she's never seen it before. It is deserted and bare but for a torn poster of the 1940s version of Little Women pasted to the wall. Laura is struck by the presence of this poster and allows it to sweep her into a memory.

FADE TO:

EXT. TREE BRANCH - FORTY FIVE YEARS AGO TO PRESENT

ECU of the cover, same as the poster, of a well-loved book version of the film held by a child's hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

During the fade we hear the SFX of a horses hooves galloping madly, then neighing and a child screaming.

CUT TO:

Young Laura starting in alarm at the noise and dropping the book from the branch she is expertly perched upon. The camera tracks high speed into her eyes, wide with fright. The brilliant violet of her eyes dims and the skin around them slackens. As the camera pulls back slowly a tear forms and makes it's way down the cheek of middle age Laura. But the winter cold stops it in it's tracks, freezing it into an icicle. The camera pulls out and we're back at the old cinema. Laura quickly collects herself and walks out of shot.

INT. BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Laura sits on the end of her bed staring at the cupboard where she has placed the painting. She pulls the painting out of her cupboard and looks at it. To her shock she sees that the little girl, who is now perched on a branch in the tree, is herself at the age of ten. She is holding a book. At the base of the tree a small brown arm has appeared around the trunk.

EXT. BUSY CITY STREET - AFTERNOON

Laura rushes along the city street against the stream of rush hour commuters. She is looking for the shop where she bought the painting. She is quite edgy and not really sure if her investigation is going to bear fruit but given the strangeness of the painting she feels she has to do something. At the place where she is sure the shop was there is only the usual fare of city establishments. She stops someone.

LAURA

Excuse me, have you seen a shop here, a small sort of, um, knickknack shop from the fifties?

He shakes his head and she tries someone else.

LAURA (cont'd)

Hi, I'm looking for...

MAN

(brushing her off)  
Sorry.

She enters a nearby news agency.

INT. NEWS AGENCY - CONTINUOUS

There is quite a cue. She makes her way to the front and asks at the counter.

LAURA	CUSTOMER
Hi, can you help me? I'm looking for a shop...	Hey lady, wait your turn.

Embarrassed by the attention she has drawn she goes back out to the street.

INT. NIGHTMARE - NIGHT

Laura is cleaning an already immaculate kitchen. She is quite intent on her work.

CUT TO:

Laura rearranging the books on her shelf.

CUT TO:

Laura dusting her apartment.

CUT TO:

She notices a leak running down from the ceiling. She tries to stop it with a rag but the leak appears somewhere else. She tries to stop that one too when she notices water pushing it's way in through a window frame and then from a crack in the wall and now coming under a set of drawers. She rushes from room to room trying to stop the leaks which are coming through with much more force. She has sponges and buckets and mops but it is all to no avail. The leakages are getting worse and she's now in a panic. The water level on the floor is rising and she's frantically trying to mop it up.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Laura, in her night dress, stoops over her vanity and splashes cold water onto her face. She looks at herself in the mirror and lightly touches the loosening skin at her throat as if to wonder where the years have gone. Then she makes a decision.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

She goes to the cupboard which holds the painting. She takes it out, taking care not to look at it just yet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA  
(to herself)  
Oh for heavens sake, Laura, pull  
yourself together.

She turns the painting around and grief flashes across her face. The painting has changed again and now, from behind the tree, a small boy has emerged and he is dancing around the bottom of the tree singing up to one of it's branches. There sits LAURA reading her book (Little Women) seeming to ignore the little boy. As the camera tracks into the painting it comes to life.

EXT. GARDEN - FORTY FIVE YEARS AGO

Daniel stands at the base of a tree looking up at the branch where Young Laura is expertly perched.

DANIEL  
Come on Laura, come riding with  
me.

YOUNG LAURA  
I said I'm busy. Anyway you're  
too small to *really* ride. I  
always beat you and you always  
whine about it.

DANIEL  
I am not too small.

YOUNG LAURA  
Tiny tot. Tiny tot. Tiny tot.

FADE TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT / PRESENT

Laura, in her night dress is on the edge of her bed and stares out her window at a bright moon spraying silver light across the roof tops of her neighborhood. We repeat the SFX of a horse galloping and then neighing and then a boy screaming over and over again and into the next cut.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Laura kneeling before a simple crucifix. The only adornment on a plain wall.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM/BEDROOM - MORNING

The sun coming up on Laura still kneeling in front of the crucifix. The SFX of the accident have gone. She rises to her feet and walks slowly into the bedroom. She picks up the painting and places it against the wall. She straightens the bed, takes some clothes out of the cupboard, laying them out, and prepares herself for a shower. She has lost the smooth rigidity of her usual movements and is now weighed down with age, with grief, with guilt.

EXT. CEMETERY - MORNING

It is a biting, gusty day. Ice blue skies are here and there blanketed by clouds. Laura stands at the gates of a huge cemetery that sprawls out over windswept headlands and is broken abruptly by sharp, sheer cliffs. Slowly the thousands of tombstones begin to fade away so that only a few remain and we are left with the original cemetery of forty five years ago.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETARY - FORTY FIVE YEARS AGO TO PRESENT

ECU of black skirts snapping in the wind as mourners move away from the grave and Laura, past a winter tree, gnarled and bare but for a leaf fluttering madly under a sharp wind.

ECU of Laura wiping the melted snowflake from her face and looking up into the sky as snow begins to fall in earnest. The camera tilts higher toward the sun until eventually the vision is blown out by the intense light of the sun and a figure begins to take shape in the light. Coming into focus we see that the figure is the head of an angel in marble with huge wings holding a boy up to her face and, in sculpted tenderness, kissing the marble child on the mouth. The winter sun is now behind the angel's head creating a brilliant halo of light.

CUT TO:

PRESENT DAY

Middle age Laura staring up at the sculpted tombstone angel with tears streaming down her grief cracked face. She reaches out her hand to touch the cold stone shroud of the marble boy. Color comes to him then life and he turns to Laura who takes him into her arms and clasps him to her. Fifty years of suppressed grief finally finds air.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Laura, now an old woman, is sitting in her recliner by a window with a light rug over her knees. Her apartment, though still elegantly done, now has a lived in look. The window is open and a spring breeze wafts in and slightly lifts wisps of white hair from around Lauras' face. She is just finishing the book of Little Women she started all those years ago and as she finishes the final page and closes the book she lets her final breath leave her body and dies. The camera pulls back to reveal the painting showing the two children in each others arms. Slowly they fade from the picture.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END