

# The Painting

Director's Cut

by  
**Neil Sandell**

**Synopsis:** A man falls in love with a mysterious woman in an oil painting. He and his wife discovered it at a flea market near his home in the south of France. Now it sits in his living room. He entices neighbours, a local author, and a friend of friend into the apartment to see it. As he contemplates his obsession with the woman in the painting, he reflects on his past. They say we look at a painting to look at ourselves. So, what does he see?

“The Painting – Director’s Cut” debuted at the Lucia Festival in Florence, Italy on December 2019

Length: 9:30

**Credits:**

Author: Neil Sandell

Story editors: Mira Burt-Wintonick, Cristal Duhaime, & Sarah Geis

Sound Design: Neil Sandell & Mira Burt-Wintonick

Remix: Neil Sandell

**Music: (Creative Commons license)**

Daniel Birch	“Weightlessness”
Jahzzar	“Montmartre”
Scott Buckley	“Hymn”

## The Painting

*MUSIC*

*[laughter]*

**Clara:** *She has blue eyes.*

**Eva:** *She has a nice necklace. Looks like pearls. When I look at her it's like she would like to say something.*

**Carmen:** *She might be a woman in her early 50s.*

**Clara:** *For me she's a very nice woman who's 41 years old. And she's holding a cigarette.*

**Eva:** *She's smoking a cigarette.*

**Donna:** *Her face has such a lovely sense of ... I don't know -*

**Carmen:** *She's looking straight at me.*

**Donna:** *- vulnerability -*

**Carmen:** *And she's about to tell me some of her woes.*

**Neil:** This woman with the pearl necklace, smoking a cigarette, looking straight at you. She's sitting at a table leaning gently forward.

My wife Donna and I rescued her from a pile of junk in a corner of a flea market here in France.

This was a few months ago now. And ever since, I've just wanted to introduce her to people.

**Clara:** *There is something soft about her expression.*

Neighbours, a local author, a friend of a friend...

**Eva:** *And she looks really, really alive.*

Anyone I can entice into our apartment for a peek.

**Donna [Neil's wife]:** *I'm not a particularly jealous wife but you're obsessed.*

**Neil:** *The other day you said something to me as I was looking at the painting. You said, "I'm glad she's not real."*

**Donna:** *(laugh) Well, you have fallen in love with her, and I'm glad she's not real for that reason.*

**Neil:** *[laughs]*

**Donna:** *[mocking] Who me, obsessed?  
[laughs]*

Donna and I had been coming to France on holiday, from Canada, since we were dating. Sometimes for months at a time. Every night we'd lie in bed and go over the small joys of the day. Donna's crush on the butcher who always used to throw in a little extra on the sly. The new ritual of buying food at an outdoor market. Life in France was sweet. And that little taste of what our life could become kindled our dream.

After saving up for years, we finally packed up our life and made the move.

And suddenly there we were... on a highway just outside of Nice, our two elderly pugs snoring in the back of our loaded down van. We lumbered to the top of one more hill, and then we saw it. The Mediterranean.

***Eva:*** *She looks very beautiful. A little bit translucent.*

It felt like we had slipped the bonds of gravity.

***Eva:*** *Even more mysterious.*

So that's how we got to Nice.

***Clara:*** *Ah ha!*

Pretty simple, right?

***Clara:*** *Very impressive.*

Neat and tidy.

Well, that's the version I tell people anyway. You learn to leave out the messy stuff.

That there was something missing back home. Something that, in the third act of your life, you're still struggling to find.

You leave this part out because you don't want to think about it: why saying goodbye was so easy.

***Carmen:*** *There's a bit of sadness, a little sadness in her eyes.*

Then one day something comes along that knocks you off your balance.

A woman. Wearing pearls. Leaning forward. Locking eyes with you.

***Carmen:*** *Even though she has slight smile on her lips, she's not happy.*

When sun pours in your living room window, bathing her in a soft glow, you study her eyes and you know she has secrets. A past that's not so neat and tidy.

***Donna:*** *She looks to me like a woman who's lived.... who has perhaps been through a few things.*

And what are those few things? They're a mystery. Open to whatever you project on her.

**Carmen:** *I think her husband is having an affair. Seriously! She's not sure whether to ignore him ...or divorce him.*

**Eva:** *It's very intriguing because it looks like she's begging for something.*

**Donna:** *She's looking at someone I think she cares about. I imagine it's someone she loves. Who may or may not love her. There's a slight wistfulness I think in the expression.*

They say we look at a painting to look at ourselves.

So, what do I see?

Someone who left home for something better, but also someone who left because there really wasn't much to leave behind.

No elderly parents to take care of.

No children. We'd never wanted any.

Oh, I had lots of people I was friendly with in Toronto. But close friends?

Fewer and fewer it seemed. I mean the kind of friends who ask how you're doing and actually care to hear the answer.

At least I had my work, a solid career as a journalist. I got to follow my curiosity and meet a ton of interesting people.

But this thing happened when I got older. My company parked me in a corner... out of sight, out of mind. Invisible.

***Donna:*** *You know, I look at her face. Is it sorrow? Is it resignation? Is it acceptance?*

***Carmen:*** *There's a bit of sadness. A little sadness in her eyes.*

But now in France, a woman's eyes follow me around my living room. My very own Mona Lisa. She leans forward and I find myself leaning towards her too, and towards others.

When I invite people over for the first time, we look at the painting. And when they pay attention to her, I get to bask in her glow.

***Carmen:*** *Earlier where we were sitting, the light was really hitting your eyes. And as you were asking questions, you lit up and the brightness in your eyes said it all. Who you are. The curious, inquisitive. You're the journalist. That came across.*

That's Carmen, a photographer who moved here from New York. Shortly after I introduce her to the painting, she asks if she could shoot *my* portrait sometime.

In the meantime, I still wonder about this woman in the painting...who she was.



She might have been the artist's wife or lover or friend. But I like to think that she commissioned the portrait for herself. That she hung it in her living room. And as she grew old, she would look at it, the sunlight bathing it in a soft glow.

***Clara:*** *She looks like a very gentle woman, don't you think?*

In my story, the painting hangs in her living room until the day she dies.

***Donna:*** *She's very much with us in this room.*

Like me, she has no children to pass it on to.

So, it goes to an estate sale, and then a flea market.

Invisible.

Waiting for the moment that someone sees her again.

MUSIC