

BLANK CANVASES

by

Peter Sreckovic

petersreckovic@gmail.com

INT. OSCAR'S APARTMENT -- DAY -- PAST

Out of the darkness a pair of paint-stained hands sets an EASEL upright

...squeezes tubes of paint onto a PALETTE

...fills a cup with water

...places canvas on easel, and finally selects a BRUSH.

OSCAR NORTON (18) squares up to the canvas. His hair dark and face gaunt, covered in paint stains.

He dots the top right corner of the canvas with black. His signature.

The room darkens as if a shadow is cast over it.

He starts slowly, and then falls into a kind of rage - slashing and pounding and stabbing with his brush.

His face is contorted as all of his pain and emotional baggage tumbles forward.

He finishes. Standing back. And signs the bottom with his name: Oscar Norton.

INT. BURGENTHROP GALLERY -- DAY -- PRESENT

A plaque beneath an unseen painting: OSCAR NORTON.
Another: OSCAR NORTON. Another and another.

The hall is expansive, impressive, packed with people.

OLD OSCAR (63) - silver haired, scans the sea of faces intently, looking for someone familiar.

Oscar's AGENT approaches and whispers in his ear, hands him a note.

Oscar has a look. Staring for a long time. A deer in the headlights.

The gallery CURATOR speaks atop a small stage.

CURATOR
Hello, hello everyone.

The noise dies down.

CURATOR (CONT'D)

Oh behalf of the Bergenthorp estate
I would like to thank you all for
coming tonight.
And without further adieu, I'd like
to call on the man himself to say a
few words. Ladies and gentlemen Mr.
Oscar Norton.

Enthusiastic applause. Oscar shakes off his stunned
expression and climbs the stage.

He looks out at the expectant faces. Then down at his
speech... Now shaken... unsure, but he gets on with it.

Reading, awkwardly:

OLD OSCAR

Love. What is love?
Just about everyone will give you
their story. Chemistry. Love at
first sight. Soul mates.

In the crowd, a couple shares a smile and a kiss.

OLD OSCAR (CONT'D)

Bullshit. Every bit of it.
The myth of love is indulgent,
overfeed, and getting fat on your
living-room couch. Love is
complacent self-deception. It's
blind. Ignorant.
And it's a choice. One that we make
every day. We chose to be mediocre
so that we can be happy. Ignorant
so that we can love.

He pauses, loosening his collar, out of breath.

OLD OSCAR (CONT'D)

At...

He pushes on. Breathing heavily. Sweating.

OLD OSCAR (CONT'D)

At some point, most of us sacrifice
the chance to be truly great at
something. And why? For what? For
Love...?

He grimaces. Clutches his chest.

OLD OSCAR (CONT'D)
I'd... rather die here as I
stand...

He collapses. The crumpled note still curled in his fist.
Most of the crowd are in shock, unsure how to react.
One MAN nods his head, inspired, rising into wild applause.

MAN
Brilliant!

The room joins in, awkwardly at first.
Oscar's eyes flicker, staring out at the crowd; seemingly
dying before a blossoming standing ovation.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER: **BLANK CANVASES**

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE -- DAY

Old Oscar stares off into space, distracted.
Bookshelves stocked with old dusty volumes. Degrees fill the
space: Bachelors in Science. M.D., PhD.
Various portraits line the walls.

DR. PERDIT (O.S.)
Go on.

DR. PERDIT (66) - a woman, grey haired, with an intelligent
face - sits across the desk from Oscar.

DR. PERDIT (CONT'D)
What then?

OLD OSCAR
I've been told the applause
eventually ended and someone came
to check on me. If it had been a
heart attack I would've died to
rapturous applause.

DR. PERDIT
Any idea what caused the onset of
panic?

Oscar remains silent.

DR. PERDIT (CONT'D)
Or I suspect that's why you're here
today.

OLD OSCAR
A bit of an assumption, no?

DR. PERDIT
A fair one, yes?

OLD OSCAR
Yes. And no.

Beat.

OLD OSCAR (CONT'D)
I could've died yesterday
surrounded by people who adore me,
but who to me they're just
strangers...

I'm a failure.

DR. PERDIT
Many would call you wildly
successful.

OLD OSCAR
Only because they can't see my
wildly abundant deficiencies.

DR. PERDIT
And those are?

Beat.

OLD OSCAR
Love, for one.

DR. PERDIT
From what I've heard love hasn't
been much of a priority for you.

OLD OSCAR
Yes. Until everything changed.

DR. PERDIT
Has this something to do with your
"friends"?

She waits.

OLD OSCAR

This is where I monologue about how
my childhood ruined me... right?

DR. PERDIT

If you'd like.

OLD OSCAR

What a diplomatic answer. Sadly my
childhood was anything but...

EXT. NORTON FAMILY HOME -- DAY -- PAST

Mid-sized. Modern. A pleasant home in a pleasant
neighbourhood. Your standard American-dream package.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)

I grew up in the suburbs of a place
void of inspiration. A place so dry
and dull that it sapped anything
but wide-eyed smiles.

On the mailbox: Essex, Connecticut.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)

My parents were both accountants...

Outside the upper window of the house we hear a carnal
commotion.

MR. & MRS. NORTON

(rhythmically)

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes!

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)

...with the kind of steady
employment and steady marriage that
tells you they got more pleasure
out of their tax returns than their
sex lives.

INT. BEDROOM -- DAY

Envelopes lie on the floor.

MR. NORTON & MRS. NORTON jump up and down on the bed holding
their tax returns aloft.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)

...And were both completely fine
with it.

INT. DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

OSCAR (18), his parents, and sister, EMILY (15) sit at the dinner table.

Mr. Norton pours red wine for his wife, she stops him early.

MRS NORTON
Oooo, ooo not too much Jerry.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)
They were rational, emotionally stable, never yelled or were overly harsh...

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

Mr. & Mrs. Norton garden in the backyard.

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM -- SAME

Oscar watches from his window.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)
(speeding up)
They were good with money,
didn't gamble,
didn't do drugs,
hardly drank,
had a nest egg and investments and
established 401ks, and had the
foresight to put money aside for
their children's education.

Oscar's parents embrace each other.

OLD OSCAR
And most of all they were deeply
and passionately in love.

Oscar closes the curtains abruptly.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)
...And it was SO FUCKING BORING.

I vowed to be different however I
could.

On the walls are posters of his idols: Beethoven, Nietzsche, Van Gogh. One tortured soul after the next.

His desk is covered with sketches, paintings leaning in the corner.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)
Art had always piqued my interest.

INT. BASEMENT -- LATER

By the light of a single bulb, Oscar digs through stacks of old, dusty boxes.

He drags a tarp off of another pile. Underneath it are various painting supplies.

Oscar pulls out a large blank canvas. Examining it.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)
My mom inspired me and pushed me to explore it as a hobby.

On the back is written: **"LOVE BEFORE ART."**

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM -- DAY

Oscar sets the blank canvas on his easel, staring at it.

EXT. BERGENTHORP GALLERY -- DAY

Oscar stops outside a grand-looking gallery as his parents continue through the gilded gates.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)
But what truly gripped me... was immortality.

The masthead reads: The Bergenthorp.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)
The Bergenthorp.

...Accompanied by a dramatic *buuuuummm* of orchestra music.

INT. BERGENTHORP GALLERY -- CONTINUOUS

Oscar steps into the main hall, overwhelmed by the vast, prestigious space.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)
Make it inside those walls, and you've truly made it.

Oscar looks on in awe at painting after painting.

EXT. NORTON FAMILY HOME -- DAY

The family car pulls into the driveway.

The others get out. Oscar sits still, stunned: a young artist finding his purpose in life.

OSCAR

Mom?

His mom pauses, halfway out of the car.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Why aren't you a painter?

MRS. NORTON

I still paint sometimes.

OSCAR

But why aren't you in a gallery?

MRS. NORTON

Well. Being an artist is hard work. And things came up. I met your father, had you and your sister. I fell in love with something other than art.

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM -- DAY

Oscar shuts his door.

He stands before the blank canvas and picks up a paint brush.

EXT. LOCAL GALLERY -- DAY

Oscar walks out of a small gallery, visibly upset, canvas under his arm.

INT. OSCAR'S ROOM -- DAY

Oscar sits on his bed, upset.

Across the room, Oscar's latest work features an abstract family portrait of him and his family.

Annoyed, he turns the canvas around. The writing on the back mocks him. "LOVE BEFORE ART."

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Oscar stares at his parents from the hall, who sit on the couch together, curled up cosily together watching TV.

He grits his teeth.

INT. DR. PERDIT'S OFFICE -- DAY -- PRESENT

Back in the office, back to the present.

Oscar is on his feet, pacing.

OLD OSCAR

How was I supposed to work under those conditions? Average town, average home, average life. I wanted to paint and create and breath life into the world and be recognized for it! To go beyond *ordinary* I needed inspiration. I needed the emotion that brings on art like an infected wound brings gangrene.

DR. PERDIT

Gangrene was your goal?

OLD OSCAR

Growth. Any sort of growth. I was eighteen and my potential was already being sterilized. True artistry requires soul. And never is the soul closer to the surface than when we suffer. Luck of the draw hadn't given me what I needed to create. So I had to find it myself.

INT. NORTON HOME: OSCAR'S ROOM -- DAY -- PAST

Back to the past.

Young Oscar finishes packing a small bag. He looks around the room. Caught. Contemplating. Making up his mind, he grabs easel and bag, and exits.

Left in the room is his childhood - an ordinary room other than the poster of Nietzsche, a quote printed on the bottom:

"To live is to suffer, to survive
is to find some meaning in the
suffering."

INT. NORTON FAMILY HOME: LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Oscar stands in front of his parents on the couch. Mom on her laptop. Dad on his tablet.

OSCAR
I'm leaving.

Neither look up from their devices. Neither see his packed bag. Neither recognize his intentions.

MR. NORTON
Back for dinner?

OSCAR
Nope.

MR. NORTON
O-kay.

MRS. NORTON
Have fun!

Oscar pauses, unsure.

OSCAR
Bye...

Again he waits. Almost asking them to stop him. But then gathers his resolve and belongings.

EXT. NORTON FAMILY HOUSE -- EVENING

At the end of the driveway Oscar stops and looks back at his home.

He pulls out his phone and after a brief bit of hesitation he drops it into the garbage bin next to the curb.

INT. DR. PERDIT'S OFFICE -- DAY -- PRESENT

Back to the present and the therapist's office once more.

DR. PERDIT
Not much of a goodbye. You couldn't
have told them more? Stayed in
touch? Left a note even?
(MORE)

DR. PERDIT (CONT'D)

Surely they would've supported your decision. Even paid for you to go to art school?

Oscar is uncomfortable. Despite on the moment still weighs on him.

OLD OSCAR

If this plan was going to work I couldn't have the option to crawl back. Once I was rock bottom, I needed to stay there.

INT. BANK -- AFTERNOON -- PAST

Oscar walks away from the teller.

He tucks an envelop of cash into his jacket.

EXT. BUS STOP -- EVENING

Awkwardly toting bags and easel, Oscar waits in line for a greyhound bus.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)

The first step was finding a place to aid in my suffering.

The digital sign on the bus reads: New York.

EXT. NEW YORK: BUS STOP -- NIGHT

Oscar exits the bus, looking up at the skyline of New York city.

INT. APARTMENT 1 -- DAY

A suited, WELL-GROOMED LANDLORD presents the stylish 1-bedroom apartment with a flourish.

The space is upscale, clean, and well put together.

Oscar quickly shakes his head. *Far too nice.*

INT. APARTMENT 2 -- DAY

Not upscale or modern, but still clean and tidy.

Oscar shrugs. *Nah.*

INT. OSCAR'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Drab. Dusty. Dilapidated.

Perfect. Oscar grins.

INT. OSCAR'S APARTMENT -- LATER

Oscar looks out the window: a great view of the city, the horizon vivid and clear. Beautiful.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)

I had no income, limited resources,
a shithole apartment, and I was
already filled with heartbreak from
leaving my family.

Oscar slams the heavy shutters closed... shutting out the view.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)

It was perfect.

He sets the canvas featuring him and his family on the easel...

And paints over them with white.

INT. OSCAR'S APARTMENT -- LATER

We return to Oscar mid-paint, a moment already seen out of context, as he furiously pours himself into the canvas.

This darkness deepens as Oscar presses on, losing strength. And then just as soon as it had started, it's over... finishing in a flurry.

OLD OSCAR (V.O.)

Art was all I had. And I vowed that
whatever it took, whatever the
cost, I would make myself great.

The darkness begins to rescind.

Oscar calms... taking a number of deep shaky breaths.

He steps back and looks at his creation.

On the canvas is a darkened figure, veins of blackness creeping out from its core. It is a featureless specter - raw and brilliant and horrifying.

He stares at it blankly... Dr. Frankenstein before his monster. This is THE SHADOW.

The beast's mouth is open. A silent scream.

...

...

WANT TO KEEP READING?

SHOOT ME AN EMAIL:

PETERSRECKOVIC@GMAIL.COM