

Art's Tattoo Removal

by Mark Lyons

markielyons@yahoo.com

INT. OFFICE

VINCENT DELVECCHIO, mid-40's, guido, sits behind his desk.
ART, early 50's, sits across in the boring, white-walled room.

DELVECCHIO
... He's the most expensive artist
around. Works right here out of the
city.

ART
I've heard of him.

Delvecchio wears gold around his fingers. He intertwines them
to rest his chin on. A rich, bling-filled prayer.

DELVECCHIO
You ever deliver any of his work before?

ART
A couple of his miniatures. I love
delivering Guptas. Good money with
minimal damage.

DELVECCHIO
Well, the piece I want is one of his
larger ones.

Delvecchio takes a photograph out of a lone folder and lays it
out on the table.

The back of a shirtless YOUNG MAN neck down. Leonardo's 'The
Vitruvian Man' is tattooed over the shoulder blades and down
his back. An almost exact replica of the famous drawing.

Art smiles.

ART
That's my favorite piece of artwork
ever.

DELVECCHIO
The Vitruvian Man?

ART
(nods)
Scheme de Proporzione. The Canon of
Proportions.

Delvecchio points to different locations in the picture of the man's back.

DELVECCHIO
It's the exact same dimensions that da Vinci had drawn it. Precisely to keep the balance of the human body accurate, like in the original work. Gupta admitted so himself to us when we talked to him.

Delvecchio puts the picture back in the folder and slides it across the desk to Art. Resumes his rich-prayer pose.

DELVECCHIO
My friend across the waters was amazed when he saw it in the artist's portfolio. I had an associate of mine speak to Gupta about the artwork in question and he said he engraved the piece on the man's back years ago. I want it.

Art motions to the folder.

ART
Gupta give you the guy's name?

DELVECCHIO
Johnson Lamana. And he's not from too far away from here.

Art nods, interested.

ART
How much?

DELVECCHIO
Three-hundred fifty-thousand.

ART
That's more than Nexdorf paid.

DELVECCHIO
Nexdorf might not ever see hers framed.
I want to see this one laminated in a
week.

Art continues to stare at the closed folder in front of him.

ART (V.O.)
I was smiling inside. I finally
found that score I was looking for...

FADE TO BLACK.

ART (V.O.)
They call me Artie. Or Art.

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Art wears a ratty gray t-shirt, brushes his teeth in the mirror.

ART (V.O. throughout)
It's short for Arthur Lionel.

He's medium height. Ugly and aging with long, stringy, thin
blonde hair. His small potbelly hangs over the sink.

ART
I remove tattoos. But I don't have a
shop; and you won't find me in the
phone book. Not even under residential.

He has a tattoo high on his left arm of a face, very similar
to his own.

ART
If you do any business with me, you
have to be referred. You can only
get a hold of me through the grapevine.

He spits a sickening amount of foamy toothpaste out his mouth
and into the sink. A lot of it dribbles down his pockmarked
chin.

ART

And a lot of that vine consists of some very evil, rotten, and lowly grapes.

INT. TATTOO PARLOR - DAY

A MAN's bicep gets the name 'Patricia' tattooed on it inside of a gothic heart.

ART

If you're one of those people who fondle other people for a couple weeks, fall in love and get that person's name on your calf or bicep;

INT. TATTOO PARLOR - DAY

A woman gets a tribal on the small of her back.

ART

Or if you get that Mark of the Whore stamp just above your ass crack and want it removed: Don't come to me. I don't do that business.

INT. BATHROOM

Art leans over the sink, takes one of the contacts out of the lens solution and swiftly dabs it into his eye.

ART

I remove the tattoo, canvas and all, and hand-deliver it to my client soaked in mineral oil so it doesn't lose any of the necessary features of the skin color.

He leans close into the mirror and plucks miscellaneous hairs out his nose and ears. Then pulls the ones that give him a unibrow.

ART

I used to execute people for money. Now I just cut little snippets out of their skin and the clinging capillaries and corpuscles underneath. If you ask me, I'm taking a step in the right direction.

INT. BEDROOM

He pulls a baggy pair of jeans over his crusty boxers. The room itself is actually neat and tidy.

ART

You'd think that there wouldn't be a lot of money involved in something like this. And for the most part, you'd be right. There's really not a lot of people interested in slicing off a piece of a person just to have an original copy of whatever picture or symbol or cartoon or portrait is inked on their skin.

He makes the bed.

ART

It's too much of a hassle to keep the artwork in an even decent condition. There are a few people out there, though, and they pay big. And I have a monopoly on the whole damn market.

INT. KITCHEN

Drinks coffee at the breakfast table. Next to him, he notices a tiny tear in the fabric of his old, button-up shirt.

ART

No one delivers a better, more carefully removed piece of flesh art than me. A couple have tried, but they've all failed miserably. When someone wants it done right, they come to me.

INT. LIVING ROOM

He sews the tear in his shirt with a needle and thread. Careful, quick, and precise.

ART

I should've been a surgeon. That's why they pay me the handsome money.

EXT. HOUSE AND TINY YARD

He leaves the quaint house and walks down to the bus stop at the corner of the street.

ART

Not great money or anything, but handsome enough to pay for a cozy little house in Poughkeepsie and my gambling habit.

INT. BUS

He rides the bus, making sure he's at least a couple seats away from the nearest person.

ART

Honestly, I'm waiting for the market to explode, though. There's this guy who sold the tattoo right off his back to Zurich gallery owner Jutta Nexdorf for two-hundred and eighteen thousand dollars. True story.

INT. MUSEUM GALLERY

Among different paintings, an INKED MAN stands shirtless. A large tattoo of the Virgin Mary adorns his back. Onlookers and different connoisseurs stare at him in passing.

ART

Three times a year, this guy takes his shirt off at one of Nexdorf's exhibits. When the guy dies, Nexdorf gets to flay him and keep the skin. Just think. Two-hundred and eighteen thousand for a

Virgin Mary tattoo that only cost the guy a couple grand and thirty-five hours time. Since then, I've been waiting for a call to come in from a collector who wants to skin the guy early and hold the canvas ransom from Nexdorf.

INT. BUS

He continues to ride into the city.

ART

Nothing on that yet, though. Actually, that's all I'm waiting for right now is a big score to retire on. A nice six digits to run away to a secluded beach somewhere. A lonely oasis.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Art walks a New York City street, only wearing his dingy gray t-shirt and jeans. Carries his long-sleeved button-up shirt because of the heat.

ART

As for me personally, I've never really been that hung up on tattoos. I mean, I got two of them, but very few other people have ever seen them. The one on my back, a friend of mine inked for me for free not very long after graduation as a thanks for a favor.

The chin of his face tatted on his arm sticks out from under the sleeve of his shirt.

ART

My other tattoo, the one high on my left arm so I can easily hide it with a short sleeve... I'm not so proud of. It's to remind me who I used to be, back when the evil grapes would hire me to kill people.

SLUG OF PICTURES

Pictures of both bloods and crips, white and black. All have different numbers of teardrops tattooed below their eye.

ART

The want-to-be thugs who get teardrops on their cheeks are morons. Unless you've already been tried and convicted, you're just snitching on yourself. You can't have that shit out in society.

EXT. STREETS

Art walks. Turns down different alleys. He lifts his sleeve to scratch his shoulder and reveals his tat.

ART

Me, I got an amateur portrait of my face on my bicep. And, in my likeness, it's not very handsome. The portrait has five tears falling from the eye. The first four tears are filled in and solid. The last tear, the fifth one, is empty. It's the last person I was hired to kill. I didn't. That's why the tear's not filled. If the woman's kid wasn't with her that day, it'd be inked in, and who knows how many more tears would be falling from my tattooed eye.

Art walks down a sidestreet towards 'Delvecchio's Italian Bar and Grille'.

ART

I gave the fifty percent down payment back to its rightful owner, who, coincidentally enough, happens to be Vincent Delvecchio, and apologized to him, saying I couldn't follow through with it this time and I was looking for something else to do.

He walks inside.

INT. KITCHEN

A large filet is blackened with char seasoning and tossed into a sautee pan filled with simmering oil. It crackles and spits.

ART

Flaying cubic inches off people may not be respectful in a lot of people's eyes. But to be honest, I don't feel the same pitiful tug in my gut that I was getting when I was killing. What's funny is that, even though there's not as many jobs, the money's a lot better for this kind of hit. I'm not going to lie... Artwork sells bigtime. Even if it is only tattooed skin soaked in oil and mineral water.

SLUG OF JONATHAN SHAW

He gives people different tats.

ART

So far, I've peeled and delivered two of Jonathan Shaw's customers. Those weren't too much money because the tats weren't any of his celebrity work, like Kate Moss' or Johnny Depp's, but I do whatever I need to get fast food in my stomach.

SLUG OF KAT VON D

She gives people different tats.

ART

Then there was some dyke way out in Reno who had a quite unsettling fondness of Kat Von D. She asked for the work from three of the popular tattooist's customers, and I obliged and delivered each one timely when she had asked. Then, the dyke crossed the line.

Pictures and close-ups of Von D.

ART

Butch, my nickname for her, asked for the skin of Kat Von D's pretty face. Although I loved the challenge of delivering a facial tatoo, the dyke didn't have the scratch to pay for that caliber a hit. Also, KVD was too popular and it would draw too much attention. I want to stay below the radar with this shit. Once it would hit the headlines that Von D's skin around her temple, forehead and cheek had been removed, I wouldn't have a monopoly anymore.

INT. RESTAURANT

Art skillfully cuts his Pittsburgh filet and eats it.

ART

Every two-bit hit man with a paring knife would hit the streets, raping miniscule faded roses and crosses or chinese symbols or 'I heart my mother's. Not only would I lose business, I might get a potential big score ruined by some hack butcher and miss out on one of my six-digit payoffs. I already missed out on one big huge score back in ninety-four.

SLUG OF HENK

Pictures of the tattooist.

ART

A consultant of somekind in Los Feliz offered a half-million reward for one of Henk's tattoo jobs. Henk was actually short for Hendrikus Johannes Everhardus Schiffmacher.

Close-up of a tiny tattoo on a forearm.

ART

The work in question: A K Record's
symbol branded into someone's forearm.
The person's arm:

Picture of Kurt Cobain with his tattoo.

ART

The fresh carcass of a now-legendary
blonde rock star. That was before I
ventured into this kind of business,
though. As far as I know, the reward
was never collected. But also, as far
as I know, the man's forearm was never
checked before he was cremated.

INT. RESTAURANT

Art finishes eating.

ART (V.O.)

One last score to retire. That's all
I've been waiting on.

Delvecchio comes out from the kitchen and shakes hands with Art.
They talk MOS.

ART (V.O.)

I never thought I'd hear from Vincent
Delvecchio again after I gave him his
down payment back. That was years ago.
I was surprised when I heard he was
trying to get in touch with me.

Delvecchio leads Art up a staircase.

INT. OFFICE

Delvecchio sits at his desk. Art sits across.

DELVECCHIO

I hear you're still out of the life.

ART

The cardinal sin aspect, yeah. I still do the venial thing, though.

Delvecchio laughs hard.

ART (V.O.)

Hardcore Italians love Roman Catholic humor.

DELVECCHIO

I heard. That's why you're here. There's never been any bad blood between us and I got excited when I heard your name come up after asking around about this kind of thing.

ART

I was a little curious when I heard you were looking for my services. I never thought you'd be the sort to develop a spot for artwork.

DELVECCHIO

I'm not. But I have an associate, out of the country, who is. And he knows I have a spot for lots of money.

Art nods.

DELVECCHIO

The tattooist whose work it was that I was asked to confiscate is Anil Gupta's. He's the most expensive artist around. Works right here out of the city.

ART

I've heard of him.

They continue to talk MOS.

ART (V.O.)

I really have heard of the tattooist he was talking about, though.

Delvecchio pulls the photograph of 'The Vitruvian Man' tattoo out of the folder and points out different aspects.

ART (V.O.)

Extremely good work. A definite master of his craft. Miniature art; perfect in detail and coloring. Precise life-like portraits.

Delvecchio puts the picture back in the folder and slides it across the desk to Art, then resumes his rich-prayer pose.

Continues to talk MOS.

ART (V.O.)

The man's going to go down in history. Has to.

DELVECHHIO

... I want to see this one laminated within the next week.

Art nods and ponders.

ART

You know I still collect by the same process as when I was doing hits, right? Half now, the other half when I deliver.

Delvecchio says nothing. Just pulls out a drawer from behind his desk and lifts out a brand new Samsonite.

The weight of it echoes through the hollow office as the leather hits the desktop.

ART

I don't think I even want to know what your friend's going to pay you for it.

Delvecchio makes no motion to tell him. Just unlocks and lifts the briefcase open.

DELVECCHIO
One-hundred and seventy-five thousand
dollars, packed nice and neat.

He shoves the case over to Art.

DELVECCHIO
You can count it if you'd like. It
wouldn't hurt my feelings if you did.

ART
It's good.

Art doesn't count, just closes it.

ART (V.O.)
He was right. There never was any
bad blood between us.

He just looks at the briefcase.

ART (V.O.)
Not yet.

ART
I have a week you said?

DELVECCHIO
An extra fifteen thousand for every
day you deliver it earlier.

Art and Delvecchio shake.

ART (V.O.)
I wasn't going to deliver it early,
though.

ART
What was the man's name again? The
one with the tattoo?

Delvecchio stands and walks Art to the door.

DELVECCHIO
Johnson Lamana.

ART (V.O.)
I asked him only to humor myself now.

Delvecchio pats Art on the back, lets him out of the office and follows behind. Closes the door behind him.

ART (V.O.)
I knew I wasn't even going to collect the other hundred-seventy-five thousand next week.

EXT. RESTAURANT

Art walks out back into the streets, briefcase in tow.

ART (V.O.)
I'd already be on the beach,
thousands of miles away from here.

INT. BUS

Art sits in back, as many seats as he can from the nearest person.

ART (V.O.)
I thought about what kind of expression would be on the dego's face when he would eventually speak to Anil.

INT. INKLINE STUDIOS

Delvecchio and an ASSOCIATE speak to ANIL GUPTA. Anil points out a picture in an old book.

ART (V.O.)
And Anil would show him his high school year book and point out Johnson Lamana.

Delvecchio looks at a senior portrait Anil points to.

ART (V.O.)
The friend whom, many years ago not long after their graduation, he had given for free in return of a favor a brilliant, precise tattoo of Johnson's favorite piece of artwork ever.

INT. BUS

Art rests his head against the window.

ART (V.O.)
The Vitruvian Man.

He smiles.

INT. OFFICE

Delvecchio stands and walks Art to the door. Speaks MOS.

Pats him on the back and they walk out of the office as the door closes softly behind them.

ART (V.O.)
I wonder if, after speaking to Anil,
Delvecchio will look down at his left
hand --

CUT TO BLACK.

ART (V.O.)
-- and remember patting me on the back
as he let me out of his office.