

When Our Blood Was Young
by
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"WHEN OUR BLOOD WAS YOUNG"

FADE IN:

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

A dingy old basement, with yellowed light filtering through an old sheet draped over the only window.

The window is long and narrow and at ceiling height.

The window is open a crack, and a light breeze makes it flutter just a little. Outside, the SOUNDS of the occasional PEDESTRIAN hurrying by, or a CAR passing on the quiet street outside.

ARTHUR (51), a gaunt, unshaven man, sits wrapped in an old paint-stained blanket, holding a roll-up cigarette. He looks as if he has prematurely aged - his face seems taut but pale, his hair prematurely grey.

He stares at a huge 'Abstract' - a work in greens, blues and yellows propped against one wall.

It's the only art in the room.

A table with collapsible legs, like those used by decorators, stands a few feet from the abstract. It is covered in piles of paint pots, paint tubes, brushes and other artist's paraphernalia.

Behind Arthur's chair is a camp bed, some bundles of clothing in an open suitcase, and an old cooking stove with a battered kettle and saucepan on it.

Arthur gets up --coughs --and grabs a paint knife from the table.

He loads it with paint and steps up to the Abstract.

He starts applying the paint into one corner.

A 'hip' couple, ROGER (29) and HELENA (27) peer through the door into the basement flat.

ROGER

Can we come in?

Without waiting for an answer, they step inside -- and react to the Abstract.

HELENA

Oh my goodness!

They OOH and AAH as they walk round the room, taking in the work from different angles.

Arthur ignores them - he concentrates on his work.

Roger pulls the yellowed sheet back for a moment -- to see the Abstract more clearly.

Arthur stops, irritated by the change of light.

He throws Roger a fierce look. Roger releases the curtain.

ROGER

We could sell this! We could definitely sell this! Did you hear me, Mr...?

Roger can't remember Arthur's name.

HELENA

Do we have room in our gallery?

ROGER

There's no need, Helena! Remember Mr. Collingwood? Of Collingwood and Collingwood?

Helena looks at him - and nods.

ROGER

He's desperate for something like this for his office atrium. And he loves primary colours.

HELENA

Yes, such beautiful greens, and blues, and yellows -- and now -- is that aquamarine, Mr...?

Arthur continues to apply the paint.

ROGER

It's cyan, darling. I'm sure it's cyan.

HELENA

But no reds! Mr. Collingwood likes his reds!

Roger and Helena exchange looks of alarm.

ROGER

(to Arthur)

Why -- no reds? I mean -- don't get me wrong -- it's just marvellous, but -- no reds?

Arthur puts the paint knife back on the table and returns to his chair to re-light his roll-up cigarette.

Helena walks part-way towards him, nervous but curious. She looks down at the table, and GIGGLES.

HELENA
Darling, the answer's quite simple. He's run out of reds!

Roger and Helena laugh.

Arthur struggles with his lighter. No flame.

Roger thinks for a second, then takes out his wallet and flicks out a banknote onto the table.

ROGER
Listen, um, old chap -- looks like you could do with some cash. So, here's enough to get you some red.

ARTHUR
It's finished.

ROGER
What is?

Arthur nods towards the Abstract.

HELENA
Oh -- it can't be!

Roger waves her silent -- his eyes on Arthur.

ROGER
Listen, Mr -- um -- we could sell this for you, for a considerable sum. To one of our richest patrons.

Arthur looks at him blankly.

ROGER
Lot's of money for you.

Helena raises her eyebrows at him.

ROGER
Minus our commission of course...

HELENA
-And our costs...

ROGER
-And minus those, obviously.

Arthur turns his eyes to his cigarette lighter. He frowns at it. It's as if he has already forgotten that they are there.

ROGER

If you could just add a -- a splash, or even a -- a smidgeon of red, well that would be -- um -
- um...

HELENA

-Jolly wonderful!

Arthur pulls his blanket around his shoulders, and leans back in the chair, his eyes closed.

ROGER

Well, you know, think about it. As Mr. Collingwood might say, 'NO RED, NO BREAD'. Ha-ha!

He edges back to the door.

ROGER

Well, see you tomorrow, Mr...

HELENA

Ciao!

They leave.

Arthur opens his eyes.

He listens to their footsteps as they climb the stairs -- out of sight -- to street level. They are still chattering to each other like budgerigars.

ARTHUR

Idiots!

He goes over to the open suitcase and searches through it. He finds what he's looking for.

INSERT

An old colour photograph.

It's a picture of Arthur in earlier, happier times. He is strolling along a foreign street with a pretty GIRL (33). She wears a red dress, red shoes and a beautiful smile.

END INSERT

Arthur smiles fondly at the photograph..

He sits down on the chair facing the Abstract, and looks at it. Then at the photo. Then the Abstract.

His eyes flutter - he's sleepy. His eyes close...

LATER

CLUNK CLUNK CLUNK! Footsteps coming down the stair. Only one person this time. COLLINGWOOD (60), well-groomed and in a business suit, appears in the doorway.

COLLINGWOOD

I came to see the painting. My name's Collingwood. Do you mind? Did I disturb you?

Arthur shakes his head. He waves Collingwood towards the painting.

Collingwood steps into the room and takes in the painting. He takes his time - a man who appreciates his art.

Arthur looks up at the window, at the light. The daylight has turned very yellow, almost orange-y. He rubs his eyes.

ARTHUR

What time is it? Please?

COLLINGWOOD

Half past eight.

ARTHUR

Nearly sunset.

COLLINGWOOD

Yes. Hmm. It looks good -- in this light. Isn't that strange?

Arthur looks surprised but pleased at those comments.

ARTHUR

My wife was a painter. When we were poor, she painted with reds, And I used the other colours. We were crazy.

Collingwood nods -- eyes still on the picture.

CLACK CLACK CLACK! The sound of a woman's heels stepping down the stairs.

Collingwood looks at Arthur, worried.

COLLINGWOOD

Are you expecting someone? Perhaps I should go?

Arthur shrugs his shoulders, turns his hands palms-up as if these things are beyond his control.

ABBIE (25), a beautiful girl -- with a face that resembles the girl from the photo, casts her eyes on Arthur and frowns.

ABBIE

Oh Dad! Not that smelly old blanket! I'm going to buy you a new one.

ARTHUR

I'm fond of this one, Abbie. It was your mother's.

Abbie can't help but smile. And then she sees the first red ray of sunset break through into the room.

ABBIE

OMIGOD! It's starting!

She runs to her father's side, and turns to stare at the Abstract, one hand on her father's shoulder.

Collingwood is caught between them and the painting.

COLLINGWOOD

I'm sorry, I -- what do I -- where should I stand?

Abbie smiles at him and indicates Arthur's other shoulder.

Collingwood hesitates. Arthur nods at him - a little smile creasing his lips.

Collingwood steps to Arthur's side. He turns and joins them in viewing the painting.

The light from the window has turned a deeper red, and the sun's rays shine through the fine dust into the room.

There's something about the Abstract. Collingwood squints his eyes a little.

A woman's face appears magically in the painting, outlined in red. Her smile is the smile from the photo.

Tears in Abbie's eyes.

ABBIE

It's Mum. She's so beautiful! I wish I had known her.

Arthur smiles. He seems happy and sad at the same time. He takes her hand from her shoulder and holds it in his. Their fingers intertwine.

COLLINGWOOD

Astonishing!

His eyes flick from the face in the painting to Abbie and back.

COLLINGWOOD

- And you are such a likeness! To your mother, I mean.

ABBIE

I never met her.

Collingwood is trying to frame a question. Arthur nods towards the face in the painting.

ARTHUR

I met her -- abroad. When our blood -- was young. And then, when Abbie was born, there was a war. A short, stupid one. Only Abbie and I managed to...

He doesn't finish. His eyes have never left the painting. But now the face is fading as the sun's rays fail to reach into the room.

ABBIE

So Dad comes to this horrible old place for two weeks each year. To paint. And he knows that the sun will set -- for just a few days -- and shine in this window.

The three stand in the gloom of the unlit room in silence. Then -- when the face has faded completely away...

COLLINGWOOD

Can I -- give anyone a lift?

Arthur nods and stands up. Tired now.

Abbie links arms with him and they exit the room, followed by Collingwood. They step up the stairs and onto the street. The SOUND of car doors opening and shutting. An engine starts.

Through the window, Arthur stares back as if he can see into the basement and towards his painting.

The strong red light from Collingwood's car tail-lights shine through the curtain.

On the painting, the woman's face has reappeared in the red light. This time the face moves.

The face smiles, and blows a kiss towards the window...

The SOUND of the car as it drives off -- and the face fades gently into the darkness.

FADE OUT.