THE OLD MAN’S PAINTING

By

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FADE IN:

INT: BEDROOM - NIGHT

A ghostly apparition stands over SIMON (76) as he sleeps. SPANKY, Simon's little terrier, appears at the bedroom doorway and barks at the ghost. Simon awakes momentarily as Spanky sniffs around the spot where the ghost had vanished. Simon returns to his dreams.

DREAM SEQUENCE

EXT: Simon walks along a beach with his wife, ANITA (40). She is a raven haired beauty. She laughs at something he says.

    ANITA
    I love you, Simon.

    SIMON
    Likewise, Anita.

Suddenly there is silence. Simon turns around to see Anita's fading figure walking into the waves.

    ANITA
    I'll see you soon, darling.

    SIMON
    But where are you going?

END OF DREAM SEQUENCE

INT: BEDROOM - DAY

Early morning light streams through Simon's curtains.

Simon sits on the side of his bed, groaning. He holds his head and grimaces.
SIMON (V.O.)
I felt like I was almost ready for death. With each passing day I seemed to enjoy life less and less.

It wasn’t so much that my life was such total drudgery, but just that every little thing was such a blasted chore. The simplest tasks were a challenge for my old body which too often was wracked with pain.

Often I welcomed the thought of death's kind release. And yet it would be very strange to leave my body behind after having lived in it for 76 years.

Simon struggles to his feet and slowly, painfully gets dressed, bracing himself against the window sill.

SIMON (CONT'D)
That eerie thought strikes me at odd times throughout the day. My body is not too unlike an old car that I would someday have to abandon. As they say, our bodies are the vehicles for our spirits. Unfortunately, we cannot trade them in for newer models.

Simon slowly drags himself across the floor and shuffles into the kitchen.

INT: KITCHEN - DAY

Spanky sniffs her empty bowl. Simon looks out the window to see the fog lifting and the sun starting to shine.

SIMON
Mornin' Spanky. Don't you wish we could just hibernate like bears for the winter?

Spanky looks up at him expectantly and then stretches.
SIMON
Well, I suppose you’re ready
for your breakfast.

EXT: OUTSIDE OF HOUSE – DAY
Fog is clinging to the trees at the forest’s edge.

SIMON (V.O.)
I'm still trying to recover from
my horrific car accident 20 years
ago. Often my body is crippled
with pain from the lingering after
effects. I'm indeed surprised
I have lived to 76. I was sure
this old bod would've kicked the
bucket years ago.

INT: SIMON'S STUDIO – DAY
Simon paints in his studio. He's doing another portrait of
his wife, Anita. She wears a one piece bathing suit that
was popular during World War II. Simon looks dreamily at
Anita's face in the reference photo taped by the painting.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT: ELM TREE-LINED SUBURBAN STREET – DAY
SUPER: 1945
A young, "twenty something" Simon wears his Navy "dress
whites" with his Ensign insignia on his shoulder boards as
he walks up the long path of an expansive lawn. He climbs
the steps to the porch of a large home.

He rings the door bell and a young, beautiful Anita, with
flowing dark hair and crystal, blue eyes, flings open the
door and jumps into Simon's arms. They kiss passionately.

ANITA
Darling, are you home for good?
SIMON
Yes, honey. The war is finally over.

INT: UPSTAIRS BEDROOM OF ANITA'S HOUSE - DAY

Simon lies in bed and watches Anita walk around the room wearing his Navy jacket and hat.

A song by the Benny Goodman orchestra fills the air.

SIMON
Let's get married, sugar!

Anita lies down beside him with his Navy hat covering her eyes. She kisses him.

ANITA
Let's do!

She unbuttons her shirt and lies on top of Simon.

END FLASHBACK

INT: SIMON'S STUDIO - DAY

Simon paints the background behind Anita. Spanky is curled up resting on the floor.

SIMON
Those were the days, eh, Spanky? Glad I survived. Yes, indeed, I'm glad I survived! It's ironic that I came out of the war with hardly a scratch, only to be almost killed by a drunk driver in a car crash.

Spanky looks bored.

BEGIN MONTAGE

We see Simon's various paintings of the WWII era, all of his wife. The styles range from a colorful Fauvist palette to the golds and siennas of the 17th century Dutch Golden Age masters like Rembrandt and Vermeer.
One painting is more of a bold colorful late 19th and early 20th century style of the Post Impressionists.

END MONTAGE

SIMON
Yes, Spanky, she was quite the beauty back then. I miss her so much.

Spanky dances a little jig on the floor. Simon stares down at her.

SIMON
Oh, alright, you'll get a doggie snack since you're being so cute.

As Simon gazes into the eyes of Anita the sun breaks out of the morning fog.

SIMON
Let's go outside.

INT: KITCHEN - DAY

Simon and Spanky walk through the kitchen towards the door. Simon tosses her a snack.

SIMON
No, I didn't forget.

EXT: OUTSIDE OF SIMON'S HOUSE - DAY

His house is dappled in sunlight. We see the expanse of acreage, with no other house in sight. They walk around his property which borders a local state forest.

Spanky zig-zags in and out of the forest’s edge. She sniffs round in excitement and doesn't notice a rabbit about 20 feet from her.

Suddenly she spots the rabbit and runs towards it. The rabbit seems bored while it waits until the last moment to duck into the underbrush.
SIMON
You're getting a little too slow
in your old age Spanky. I know,
I know, so am I.

Simon walks slowly around the house and examines his victory
garden which is still in it’s winter dormancy.

SIMON (CONT'D)
I guess we'll have to replant some
vegetables this spring. Hopefully
we'll have a bountiful garden come
summer time.

He inspects the new paint job he had done on the house the
previous summer.

SIMON
Hey! The paint job we did last
summer is holding up quite nicely.

Simon gazes at his house sadly.

SIMON (CONT'D)
You know we haven't had a guest
come visit us in a long time, eh,
Spanky? Why is that?

Spanky ignores him as she sniffs around the spot where the
rabbit had just vanished into the forest.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Hmmm.... when was the last time
we had company over?

Simon stares down at his shadow trying to remember and then
shakes his head and continues walking around the house.

INT: SIMON'S STUDIO - DAY

Simon is back in his studio painting, with Spanky curled on
the floor.
SIMON
You know, Spanky, when I'm painting her sometimes it's like traveling back in time to my younger days, when I still had a vibrant and strong body with no pain at all.

Spanky stretches and yawns in boredom.

SIMON (CONT'D)
She's like my own personal Greek Goddess.

INT: KITCHEN - EVENING.
Simon finishes his dinner and dumps the scraps off his plate into Spanky's dog bowl.

SIMON
Looks like it's going to be a beautiful night outside, Spanky!

EXT: FRONT PORCH - NIGHT.
Simon sits on the front porch drinking a beer while watching the full moon rise.

SIMON
It's going to be a chilly one tonight, alrighty.

Spanky climbs the stairs back up to the porch after sniffing around in the moonlight. Simon watches the night sky for a long moment. He drinks his beer and looks sadly out at the night sky.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Oh, well, that wasn't such a bad day, was it, Spanky? I guess it's time to hit the hay.

INT: SIMON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT.
In the middle of the night Simon wakes up and makes his usual trip to the bathroom.
INT: HALLWAY - NIGHT

As he returns to bed he thinks he sees something in the moonlight streaming down through the skylight in the hallway. He stands still trying to focus his eyes. It seems to be a shimmering form.

Yes, it is a woman standing and looking back at him. Simon blinks and shakes his head. He walks down the hallway to get a closer look, but the woman disappears into his studio.

INT: STUDIO - NIGHT

By the time he reaches the doorway he sees nothing in the room, merely his desk and his easel holding his latest painting.

INT: BEDROOM - NIGHT

He walks back to his bedroom and lies in his bed.

SIMON
What the fuck was that? Am I hallucinating or am I still dreaming?

INT: INSIDE SUN PORCH - AFTERNOON

Simon and Spanky sit in the sun porch. There is just enough sun breaking through the clouds to provide solar warmth in the enclosed room. He reads from an old Saturday Evening Post magazine while Spanky naps.

SIMON
Did you see anything strange last night in the house, Spanky?

Simon looks over to watch his dog snoozing.

SIMON (CONT'D)
No, I guess you didn't.
INT: SIMON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT.

Later that night Simon awakes to his dog barking. Spanky stands at his bedroom doorway barking at something down the hallway.

INT: HALLWAY - NIGHT

Simon gets up and sees the same ghostly figure. This time, though, when he walks towards the apparition the woman lingers for awhile.

The woman smiles at him before she disappears into his study.

INT: STUDIO - NIGHT

Simon follows after her, but once again, after he enters the studio there is no sign of her. He looks at the painting and notices that his wife is moving slightly in her 1940’s style clothing. And then she is still and the painting appears normal.

SIMON
Now I know I'm hallucinating!

Simon looks down at his dog who is sniffing around the room.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Are you hallucinating too, old girl?

INT: KITCHEN - DAY.

The morning finds Simon in the kitchen turning the page of a wall calendar.

SIMON
Well, well! Guess what Spanky? It's March 1st! It definitely feels like springtime is in the air.

He gets up and looks through the window at the outside thermometer.
SIMON (CONT'D)
Hey, it's already 50 degrees outside. I'll bet it will hit the high 60's today.

EXT: OUTSIDE OF SIMON'S HOUSE - DAY.

Simon pulls some weeds from his "victory" garden. Spanky barks briefly as Anita appears in a nearby meadow by the forest's edge.

She is adorned in 1880's style clothing, complete with bustle, corset and parasol. Her long, dark hair is piled on top of her head in the style that was in vogue during that era.

She could've stepped right out of a painting by Monet or Seurat. She strolls toward Simon, stops in front of him and smiles, with the parasol shading her face from the bright sun.

ANITA
Hello, Simon!

Simon looks stunned and almost falls to the ground.

SIMON
Anita! Where did you come from?

ANITA
We need to talk. But not today. Just enjoy the sun today.

Anita turns around and strolls back to the forest and disappears.

SIMON
Anita, wait!

Simon walks to the edge of the meadow where Anita had disappeared.

He sits down on a nearby bench, shaking his head.

Spanky cocks her head and runs off momentarily into the forest, but immediately re-emerges.
INT: SIMON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT.

Simon wakes up for his typical bio break. He looks down the hallway, but sees no sign of Anita.

EXT: OUTSIDE OF SIMON'S HOUSE - DAY.

Simon and Spanky sit by the garden. He watches a pair of hawks circling above the trees.

    SIMON
    Wow, Spanky. It must be close to 75 degrees today!

    ANITA
    Hello, Simon!

Simon looks to his side and sees Anita lying on a chaise lounge, wearing a one-piece bathing suit that was popular in the 1940s.

She drinks from a soft drink bottle she had pulled from an old fashioned ice chest sitting by her side.

    SIMON
    Anita, honey! Is it really you?

Simon leans over to kiss her.

    ANITA
    Yes, it's me darling.

    SIMON
    This is wonderful! So incredible. Where did you come from?

    ANITA
    I guess you could call it the Great Beyond.

Simon hugs Anita who pats his back.

    SIMON
    It's been so long. I thought I'd never see you again.

Anita sips from her bottle and leans back.
ANITA
After I left you, a year before your car accident, I told myself I never wanted to see you again. Not the way you treated me during our last year of marriage.

SIMON
I'm sorry, Anita. I was drinking too much back then.

ANITA
Yes, you were.

SIMON
I'm sorry. Can you ever forgive me?

ANITA
I don't know. You made life very difficult for me, Simon. It was hard for me to finally drum up the courage to leave you.

SIMON
But you're back now.

ANITA
Well, sort of.

SIMON
What do you mean, sort of? What are you doing here, then?

ANITA
I'll tell you soon enough. But for now I need to clear the air.

Simon groans. Anita purses her lips.

ANITA (CONT'D)
You need to hear me out, Simon.

SIMON
Yes, I know, you're right.
ANITA
I always felt that you held it against me that I couldn't have children.

SIMON
No, I don't think so.

ANITA
Yes, I think so. I think you started withholding your love for me when you first found out. That's also when you started drinking heavily.

SIMON (MUTTERING)
I feel like I need a drink now.

ANITA
Go on, Simon. Go on with your old bad habits and see where that gets you.

SIMON
No, you're right. I'll listen to you this time

ANITA
You just shut me out, Simon. You made me feel so alone in our marriage.

SIMON
Well, at least things were good in the bedroom, weren't they.

ANITA
Yes, but a relationship is more than just sex, Simon. Sometimes I just wanted to be held.

SIMON
I'm sorry.

ANITA
Sometimes I felt like I was married to a sex crazed teenage boy.
SIMON
I guess I was a little immature.

ANITA
Case in point. During my father's funeral you didn't hold me like my sister's husband held her. You stood away from me. Too far away.

Simon looks depressed.

ANITA (CONT'D)
That was very symbolic of the way you were in our marriage. Remote and distant.

SIMON
Again, I'm sorry. How can I make it up to you?

ANITA
We're past that now. At least I am, finally.

SIMON
But you came back for me.

ANITA
Well, sort of.

SIMON
What do you mean, sort of? You keep saying that.

ANITA
You'll find out very soon. For now I need to know that you still love me.

SIMON
Of course I still love you honey!

Anita walks in a circle and shades her eyes against the sun. She surveys Simon's house.
ANITA
It's almost time, Simon. Truthfully
I did come for you, afterall.

SIMON
What's it time for?

ANITA
It's time to remember what
you forgot.

SIMON
Huh? What did I forget?

ANITA
Something that happened to you
a long time ago.

Anita drinks again from the bottle and arches her back.

SIMON
Hmmmmm, something that happened
to me a long time ago?

Anita walks around in a circle.

ANITA
Yes, if you can remember ....

Anita points to their immediate surroundings.

ANITA (CONT'D)
Then all this will make a lot
more sense.

SIMON
What do you mean, make sense?
The only thing that doesn’t
make sense to me is you.

ANITA
Oh, really? So I’m the one who
is unreal to you!

SIMON
Well, yes, I would say so. You
seem to be escaping from my
paintings.
ANITA
Tell me Simon, when was the last time you went to town? When was the last time you had any friends come over to visit you?

SIMON
Oh, I don’t know. Seems like quite awhile I suppose.

ANITA
Quite awhile? Quite awhile?!

SIMON
Well, yes. I can't recall exactly how long.

ANITA
How about 20 years, Simon!

SIMON
20 years? No, no way! I’ve been to town since then!

ANITA
Really? Think Simon, when was the last time?

SIMON
I don't know. I don't know, I can't remember.

ANITA
That’s because it’s been 20 years.

SIMON
No! You’re crazy!

ANITA
Okay then. How come you never have to go to the store to buy groceries? How come your refrigerator is always stocked with your favorite food and beer?

Anita stands in front of Simon with a challenging look.
ANITA (CONT'D)
By the way, Simon, your brand of beer hasn't been around for 17 years. They don't make it anymore.

SIMON
That's impossible! I just had a couple last night.

ANITA
You thought you had a couple last night.

Anita kneels down and looks into his face with concern.

ANITA (CONT'D)
The truth is Simon — this is all in your mind. Your nicely kept-up house, your little garden, even your dog. She died a couple of years after you did.

SIMON
What? What are you talking about? You're a crazy lady!

Simon stands up and looks for Spanky.

SIMON
Spanky! Spanky! Come here girl!

Simon scans the yard but finds no sign of Spanky.

ANITA
I'm sorry, Simon. But she's long gone.

Simon slumps back down in his chair.

ANITA
Simon, listen to me! Remember your car accident 20 years ago?

SIMON
Of course, how could I forget?
ANITA
Simon, I don’t know any other way to sugar coat it. But you died in that car accident.

SIMON
I died?

ANITA
Yes, you did die from a drunk driver. But that drunk driver was you!

SIMON
Me?

ANITA
Yes. You drove off a cliff one night when you were hammered.

SIMON
But I thought....

ANITA
At least no one else was involved. No one else was hurt or killed.

Simon slumps down in his chair.

ANITA
It will be okay, Simon. Don't worry. You always had a tendency to worry too much. Probably why you drank so much.

Simon looks at her. Something is different, something has changed. Anita is still beautiful, but something is seriously wrong with his house. It is old and dilapidated.

SIMON
What happened to my house? What happened to that brand new paint job I finished last summer? Everything looks so abandoned in my yard.
Simon looks at the meadow with weeds which have taken over the yard.

SIMON
Where's Spanky?

Anita looks concerned.

ANITA
I already told you, Simon. She’s long gone. I took her in after you died in that car crash. She lasted only a couple of more years.

Simon rubs his face.

ANITA (CONT'D)
Didn’t you ever stop to think that she would’ve been about 28 years old now, if you had survived? That’s quite ancient in people years you know.

SIMON (sighing)
Oh well, I suppose you’re right. So this was all in my mind?

ANITA
Yes.

SIMON
But what about the pain and everything. If it was just my imagination why did the pain seem so real? And why would I want to imagine pain in the first place?

ANITA
Because you had convinced yourself that you had survived and your mind logically filled in the gaps. Remember, Simon, you tended to be a little too pessimistic and negative when you were alive. Consequently this subsequent life you imagined was a reflection of you pessimism.
SIMON
Okay, I guess that makes sense, sort of.

ANITA
I know it's all hard to accept. But, hey, Simon, you're not the first ghost to have held themselves back in their world. In fact, it happens all the time.

Simon looks forlornly at his old house.

ANITA (CONT'D)
Don't worry, Simon. We all have gone through life not knowing who we really are. We all get entangled in our Ego-Created false selves. But our true selves live on after we die, while our false selves drop off like old clothes.

SIMON
That sounds nice to me. I think I can accept it all now.

ANITA
Good! Now it’s time for you to move on. Seriously, it’s way past time. Come on, now, let’s go!

Anita takes his hand and leads him to the forest’s edge. Simon briefly sees his reflection in a broken window of his house. He is a much younger 56 years old again.

He also notices that Anita is now wearing a bejeweled Belly Dancing costume. Her eyes are eye lined like Cleopatra’s.

SIMON
Anita, why are you dressed like a Belly Dancer?

ANITA
I guess it just strikes my fancy at this particular moment.

Anita holds Simon's hand.
SIMON
Wait, where are we going? Am I headed to some sort of Heaven or Nirvana?

ANITA
Probably not this time, Simon. But someday soon you’ll get there. For now, though, you have to come back into this world for your next life.

SIMON
You mean I have to start all over again back here on earth?

ANITA
Unless you can become enlightened right now and achieve Total Consciousness.

Anita stares at Simon.

ANITA
I'll wait.

SIMON
Total Consciousness? What's that?

Anita continues to stare at Simon.

ANITA
I guess you're not ready yet. Better luck next life.

Simon looks downcast.

ANITA (CONT'D)
Don’t worry, Simon, you won't be starting completely over again. You did make some progress in this last life. I think you’ll be happier in your new life, back here on Earth or some other planet very much like it.
Anita regards Simon for a moment.

SIMON
Will I see you there? Will we be together?

ANITA
Sometimes. I'll come visit you from time to time.

Simon looks depressed.

ANITA(CONT'D)
Don't worry so much, Simon. Just be natural and be your true self. You'll be fine then.

SIMON
Okay, I'll try.

ANITA
Are you ready?

Simon takes one last, sad look at his house.

SIMON
I guess so.

ANITA
By the way, Simon, I do forgive you.

SIMON
Thank you.

Anita and Simon walk into a bright light shining in the forest.

FADE OUT: