

THE ARTIST

written by
Juston Moore

INT. DEN - NIGHT

A baby wails in the greasy arms of an UNKEMPT MAN.

He ashes a cigarette and sets the tray next to the charred spoon, metal pipes, lighters and bottles of New Amsterdam Vodka. Incents burn alongside a lit-wick taper, only one, in a menorah.

A jittery BOHEMIAN WOMAN comes in from the cold world and kicks snow off her tatty Doc Martins.

WOMAN

Look what I found on the Subway.
Put Judah in his crib!

She holds out a small baggie of white powder, assumably cocaine or heroin.

GUY

Woo-hoo, make it snow!

The guy bars the baby in a tattered wooden crib. The woman melts the powder on the charred spoon. She beams as it bubbles and exhausts fumes.

ANGLE ON: The thin, paler-than-pale baby in the crib.

WOMAN

Happy hanukkah to us.

GUY

Eight days? Shit'll be gone tonight
Jilly-Jill.

INT. DEN - LATER

Baby cries continue.

Both of them, drowse and strung out on the yellowed dropcloth. The woman leans on the man, her bony ankles lounge on the coffee table.

She mellows, nestles in and yawns.

Her feet position to tip the candlestick and engulf the liquor and coffee table and entire room in smoke and fire.

INT. ELEGANT LIVING ROOM - DAY

Five years later.

Solemn and twinkling, a pine tree pours gifts. Five-year-old JUDAH enters. Excitement flushes the youngster as he encounters CHRISTMAS MORNING. Silver haired GRETA trails him.

Judah jumps with glee.

JUDAH

Santa came!

Greta cheers, sinks into the cushiony couch and watches Judah tear into the presents.

INT. LIVING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Chatting on the phone, Greta rifles through a stack of mail.

GRETA

He's been in his room all day, I just got him down. He didn't even have dinner with me!

MAN

What's his favorite?

GRETA

The paint set. He wont let me see, he's been at it constantly.

MAN

You didn't take a peak?

GRETA

I don't know if I bring myself to...

MAN

Don't worry yourself, anything weird's an expression of the kiddo's feelings.

GRETA

I'm not sure I wanna know what goes through that kids head.

MAN

He'll have some stuff from childhood, but he'll be alright.

GRETA

Sometimes I feel guilty. I feel like he knows some how...

MAN

That's impossible. And you can never tell him!

GRETA

I know!

ANGLE ON: an envelope from Dr. Dexler addressed to Greta.

MAN

His life is better here. Who knows what those people put him through. We made a miracle happen that night.

GRETA

I know, it's in my head.

She opens the letter and firms her brow at the bold print :
YOUR RESULTS ARE IN.

WE PAN through the ultra-thin walls AND FIND Judah,
ear-to-the-wall, eavesdropping.

He hears murmurs, slumps in-front of the easel and selects a
watercolor pencil.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Ten years later.

We see Greta, drawn, pallid and bald, in the hospital bed. A
nurse spoon feeds her.

Judah knocks and enters, a heart-healthy, shaggy teenager.
He's carries a wicker basket of baked goods and smiles from
the doorway.

GRETA

Oh my boy. Come come!

Judah huddles down to hug her, then hold out the muffin
basket.

A tear streams Greta's cheek.

GRETA

You brought me muffins!

JUDAH

Mrs. Lynch made them. Are you
crying?

GRETA

My nueropathy. The chemo aggravates
it.

He gives her the basket, pulls up a chair and takes Greta's
hand.

GRETA

Keep em.

She gives back the basket.

JUDAH

I can take it from here.

He takes the pudding cup and plastic spoon. The nurse
leaves.

GRETA

I'm okay.

JUDAH

You sure?

Greta nods.

GRETA

There's something we need to talk about.

Judah sighs.

JUDAH

What now?

Judah unwraps a muffin and eats it.

GRETA

The cancer's escalated.

Judah puts down the muffin.

GRETA

Stage three.

He stands and tightens his grip on Greta's hand. .

JUDAH

We're gonna fight it harder Mama,
we're gonna fight it and win. And
I'm gonna be there every step!

GRETA

It's gonna be okay...

JUDAH

That's what I'm telling you Mom.

GRETA

Cause I'm not fighting it.

Judah pulls away.

JUDAH

What?

GRETA

We can't afford it anymore.

JUDAH

So you throw in the towel? Just
like that?

GRETA

Stage three Jude. The survival rate
is only 3% with the chemo. It isn't
worth it.

JUDAH

Isn't that better than zero?

Judah fidgets with the muffin wrapper and crumbs fall.

GRETA

I'm gonna be okay. And so are you.

JUDAH

I'm not ready to lose you!

GRETA

I've fought this battle for how long?

Judah drops his face in his hands and wallows.

GRETA

All I ever wanted was to see you grow up and become a man who'll do great things.

Greta forces her cracked lips to form a weak smile.

GRETA

Do don't deserve to suffer with me.

JUDAH

So you're just giving up?

GRETA

I did what I had to do.

Her frail wobbly hand clings to Judah's.

GRETA

You're going to be an amazing man. I want you to study abroad. I want you to see your artwork where it belongs. On the walls of museums in France and Italy.

JUDAH

That's just a stupid dream! You're my mother, don't you wanna see that too?

His voice cracks. Greta's lips quiver.

GRETA

I want it. But you need it. You deserve it. And love. And children. You deserve that life.

JUDAH

I'm not going anywhere. I'm not letting them discharge you, I won't leave this chair.

GRETA

You can't stop this from happening Judah. I'm outta here Friday.

Judah rolls the muffin into a ball and tosses it in the trash.

GRETA

Judah...

JUDAH

You're crazy!

He tosses the basket in the trash and leaves abruptly.

GRETA

Judah!

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Judah soaks a paintbrush in murky water and strokes the bristles in a pan of Ivory watercolor.

A swift knock at the door then a lady peaks her head in. MRS. LYNCH (45), enters with a covered plate of food.

MRS. LYNCH

Knock knock. I made Pork Loins,
mashed potatoes, and green beans.
And I'm workin on some fresh apple
pies right now.

JUDAH

Thanks.

She places the plate on the nightstand and looks over Judah's shoulder.

MRS. LYNCH

My goodness Judah, you really are
talented.

Judah rolls his eyes, implicit.

MRS. LYNCH

That's beautiful.

JUDAH

Thanks...

MRS. LYNCH

What'd Mama think'a her muffin
basket?

JUDAH

(get out!)
Loved it.

MRS. LYNCH

Fantastic.

She lingers for a beat. When she leaves we see the painting. This kid is gifted...

Delicate stroke work. Detailed. Angular. Simple, subtle contrast. A winsome woman, laughing. Familiar. Tasteful. Distinguishable to the BOHEMIAN WOMAN.

INT. HOSPITAL BED - DAY

Greta's out of bed, but wired to a heart monitor, hacking up phlegm. She watches nature outside her window and eyeballs a caterpillar on the windowsill.

Judah enters, an 11 x 14 inch canvas firm to his chest. Daub variants from past years jut out from his backpack.

JUDAH

Sorry.

GRETA

You handled it better than I thought you would.

They hug and sit on the bed.

JUDAH

How you feelin'?

GRETA

How're you?

He glances to the painting.

JUDAH

I wanted to show you something.

GRETA

What's my little artist conjured up today?

JUDAH

You're gonna think this is weird, but I've been painting this since I was a little kid.

Greta furrows her brow.

JUDAH

There's been tons of others, but this one spoke to me. She's finally perfect.

He reveals the masterpiece. Greta's face blanks, then she simpers and nods.

GRETA

You're very talented.

Greta takes a pensive pause as he displays the bevy of artwork.

JUDAH

It's kinda strange it's been the same for so long but--

GRETA

There's something I need to admit to you...

JUDAH

Not again Mom...

Greta's heart rate sprouts from a steady 80 to 85 and climbs.

JUDAH

Why is that beeping?

Beat.

GRETA

I've kept somethings about your childhood from you.

JUDAH

I don't know if I can handle anything else...

GRETA

You know how I used to be a volunteer at the fire department?

The heart monitor intensifies.

JUDAH

Mom!

Greta veers to the monitor. Then the painting. Then Judah.

JUDAH

What's going on? (then) Hey can we get a doctor in here?

GRETA

I'm not you're real mom Judah.

Her breathes sharpen. Judah staggers back.

JUDAH

What did you just say?

GRETA

You were in a f--

Greta gasps for air. Judah falters back. Now at a STEADY BEEP Greta's eyes roll back and seal shut.

JUDAH

(louder)

What!

He falls to his knees and CRIES. The high pitched tone
BLARES...

CUT TO:

INT. JOINT HOSPITAL ROOM - PRESENT DAY

The ringing continues.

A privacy curtain parts the room.

The bohemian woman is tucked into the bed.

A slew of doctors and nurses enter and go behind the
curtain. We hear them try to revive a patient.

NURSE (O.C.)

Nonresponsive.

DOCTOR (O.C.)

Call it!

The heart monitor stops. They wheel out a lifeless patient.
Then the bohemian woman awakens. In passing, a nurse
notices.

NURSE

Doctor! Jill Stovina's awake from
her coma!

The nurse approaches the bed and checks Jill's clipboard.

JILL

Where's Judah! Where's my baby?

The nurse disparages her.

NURSE

Oh Miss... Your baby didn't make
it. You've been in a coma for the
last five years.

Anguish washes over Jill's face, and we hear the horrendous,
acrid shrieks of a bereaved mother.

THE END.