

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

WILLIAM GLADSTONE, 59, with a lean face, wearing grey trousers and a white button-down shirt. His sleeves rolled up as he carves away at the face of a young DEAD WOMAN, 19, hangs by her wrists against a rough-faced brick wall.

WILLIAM (V.O.)
Are you sure, doctor?

DOCTOR (V.O.)
I'm afraid so, Mr. Gladstone. The consumption has spread from your kidneys to your lungs. I would suggest that you get your affairs in order.

William continues his work with quick swipes of a surgical blade. He intermingles moments of intense focus.

WILLIAM (V.O.)
This... can't be. What about my work? There's so much art to be seen, to be created. How am I supposed to accept that?

DOCTOR (V.O.)
I'm sorry.

William's strokes violently with the blade, swinging his arms in wide arcs. He pants, slamming the blade down onto a table, keeping his hand atop it as he leans to support himself. He stares at the Woman's body.

WILLIAM
Finished.

Symbols sliced into her body. William steps forward, face-to-face with his victim, looks over his masterpiece. Her lips and adjoining flesh carved into a permanent smile. William returns the grin.

INT. COFFEE HOUSE - NOON

William sits at a table, sips a cup of coffee. ADELINA YOUNG, 35, in a beige tea dress, sits across from him running her finger around the rim of her cup as she stares into her drink.

ADELINA

Are they sure there's nothing that can be done?

WILLIAM

If there is anything, it's nothing that I can afford.

She reaches across the table and clutches his hand.

ADELINA

Then let's do what we may while you still can. Tell me, what shall we do?

WILLIAM

Nothing.

ADELINA

We... we should have a baby.

She smiles at him as his eyes meet hers.

WILLIAM

I do not want to have a child that I cannot be a father to. I told you, I want the chance to be a father. I want a chance to instill my perspective, my passion, and my love into someone. I want to leave a legacy!

He shifts and leans forward in his seat. He rubs his hand across his lips, purses them as he pulls it away.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I can't do that... when I'm not here.

He slinks back into his seat.

ADELINA

Not being here doesn't make you a bad father! I can teach the child the things you've taught me. You're not a terrible man like your father, William.

William slams his fist against the table and stands.

WILLIAM

Don't you speak of my father!

Adelina lowers her eyes and places her hands in her lap.

ADELIANA

I'm sorry.

WILLIAM

The fact that you would say such a thing, lets me know that you couldn't possibly teach a child what is truly important to me. No different from the rest.

William straightens his clothes and checks his watch. He tosses a few bills onto the table.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I bid you a good day, Ms. Young.

He puts on his overcoat as he walks away. Adeliana turns and parts her lips as if she wants to say something and watches him go.

INT. ART STUDIO - AFTERNOON

William tosses his coat onto a rack as he walks in. Students of various ages at easels scattered about the room. Most continue painting as he stops at his desk.

INT. ART STUDIO - WILLIAM'S DESK

Notes and a front-page article about the Cheshire Cat Killer's newest victim that was found.

INT. ART STUDIO

William rolls up his sleeves.

WILLIAM

My apologies everyone. My lunch meeting ran a little long.

The students give him their full attention.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Last week our theme was passion. This week, I want to look deeper into your minds. I want a glimpse into your ability to differentiate passion... from love.

He steps over to the easel on his left and reveals two nude lovers in a passionate sexual embrace.

He pulls back the sheet from the opposite easel which shows the same lovers in a more intimate yet non-sexual embrace.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

One of these is passion. One of these is love. Or are they different at all? Today, I want you to show me love.

William sits at his desk with an introspective look while his students refresh their easels.

INT. ART STUDIO - EVENING

William paces the studio. Each students' work gets a quick once-over and feedback as he passes. He stops at CHARLES AYRE, 24, paint-stained trousers and shirt. His eyes widen as he examines the painting over Charles's shoulder.

CHARLES

I'm sorry, sir. I know that it's a bit grim.

WILLIAM

No problem at all, Charles.

William scans the painting in amazement. A portrait from the waist up of a man lying on his back. His eyes centered perfectly meeting any gaze. Beneath him a pool of blood and a knife protrudes from his chest.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

This piece is wonderful.

CHARLES

Thank you, sir. It's a representation of the ultimate love. To grant someone the gift of release from all of the ills of this world.

WILLIAM

A simple, yet powerful statement.

William looks at Charles, who fine-tunes his work with tentative brush strokes. He looks at Charles, scans and analyzes as he did with the painting. He pats Charles on the shoulder as he walks away.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Well done, Mr. Ayer. Brilliant work.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT - LIEUTENANT'S OFFICE - EVENING

DET. JOSEPH THOMAS, 33, black slacks with a white shirt and black vest, shakes a copy of today's paper at his LIEUTENANT, who stares at him with his arms folded.

JOSEPH

I'm telling you, lieutenant, I know who the Cheshire Cat Killer is. William Gladstone is making a fool of us each day that he walks the streets as free man.

LIEUTENANT

Now, detective, I've told you that until you have evidence, what you're saying is slander.

He closes the door to his office.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)

Look, you do good work and I trust your judgement. But you know as well as I do, if you go after Gladstone again and it actually makes it to court this time you're basically guaranteeing his freedom.

Joseph throws the newspaper onto the desk and paces around the room, his hands on his waist.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)

You can't let your frustration become desperation. Stay focused and be patient. Your opening will come. Find me that evidence.

He opens the door, Joseph storms out.

INT. ART STUDIO - NIGHT

The last few students pack up and leave the studio. Charles, the last student, takes care to neatly pack his things away. He slings a pack over his shoulder while William watches from his desk.

WILLIAM

Have a good night, Mr. Ayre.

Charles stops at the doorway.

CHARLES

Thank you. You as well, Mr.
Gladstone.

Charles exits. William listens for the sound of him walking through the main doors, grabs his pack and follows.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

William stalks Charles. He hangs close to the shadows and trees. Charles walks and doesn't stop to look back.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Charles finally stops. He looks around and darts down a path next to the house. William follows.

EXT. SHED - NIGHT

William stands silent next to a shed behind the house.

CHARLES (O.S.)

Sorry I kept you waiting. There was quite the interesting lesson in art today.

INT. SHED

Charles places his pack onto a counter top and paces about. A YOUNG MAN bound by rope anchored to the floor in the center of the room stares at him. The rope and his fingertips frayed and blood-covered. Charles stops in front of him, looks at his hands.

CHARLES

Someone's been busy.

EXT. SHED

WILLIAM walks around to a door on the back side of the shed. Charles is heard as he exerts himself inside. William pulls a blade from a hidden pocket in his supply bag and reaches for the door.

INT. SHED

The shed door opens. Charles leaps to his feet and stands over a bloody corpse. His hands and the knife he holds covered in blood. He panicks when William calmly enters the door, both his hands behind him.

WILLIAM

It appears you enjoy doing more than painting these scenes, Mr. Ayer.

He tilts his head, looks over the body lying on the floor. Charles's chest heaves. He clutches the knife, points it at William.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I must say, your work here is much sloppier than the work I see in my class from you.

He moves one hand from behind his back, points at different spots on the body. Charles plants one foot behind him in a defensive response. William pays no attention, continues to critique the body.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

You can clearly see that your cuts were unplanned and arbitrary. They have no force, no meaning behind them. If your painting today represented love, what does this represent?

William stands, looks back toward Charles. Charles holds the knife and shifts his weight back and forth.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Exactly. Which is why you're lucky I've decided to take you on as an apprentice.

CHARLES

Apprentice for what?

He continues to wave the knife.

WILLIAM

Why, an apprentice for this.

William stretches his hand out towards the body on the floor.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

An apprentice in art, of course.
What else would it be?

CHARLES

I can't just let you leave after
seeing this. What happens if I
refuse?

William moves his other hand from behind his back and
clutches his blade tightly in his hand.

WILLIAM

I suppose that would be up to the
one of us who makes it out of here
alive.

William walks towards Charles. He raises his free hand and
rests it atop Charles's hand as it holds the knife.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

You're an artist. Your hand doesn't
shake with a brush in it. It
shouldn't be any different with
this knife. I can show you.

Charles's hand steadies. William turns, walks towards the
door.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Lessons will begin tomorrow. In the
meantime, get rid of this
aberration. It's not art, and not
fit to be displayed.

William exits. Charles's breathing slows as he lowers the
knife. He looks at the body on the floor.

EXT. WILLIAM'S HOME - NIGHT

William approaches his house, a dark figure stands atop his
porch steps. He squints to see past the glare of lantern
along the path.

JOSEPH

Mr. Gladstone. Odd hour for a
stroll, isn't it?

WILLIAM

Ah, Detective Thomas. I almost
don't recognize you when you're not
trying to arrest me.

JOSEPH

A killer belongs behind bars. At least until he's hanged or shot. I make it my business to make sure they find the way there.

William climbs the stairs, stands face to face with Joseph.

WILLIAM

You know, if I was a killer, I would have to admit that I respect you.

JOSEPH

Oh, really?

WILLIAM

Yes, yes. IF I was a killer, it's quite obvious that no one is smart enough to make any connection to the killings taking place. No one, that is, except for you.

He pokes the detective in the chest with his index finger.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I'll have you know, detective, that I am leaving from one of my art classes that ran a bit late. So you can rest assured that no one was harmed tonight, because the scary old man was stuck teaching people to paint.

William grabs his key from his pocket and unlocks the front door.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I'll bid you a good night, detective. I suggest that you find a new suspect for your fun little chase, before you find yourself on the wrong side of a demotion.

He steps into the doorway and looks back.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Or has that already happened and I have you to thank for lighting my lanterns? If that is the case, thank you so very much officer. Keep up the splendid work.

The door SLAMS. Joseph descends the stairs and walks off.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT - WEEKS LATER

William and Charles hide, watching a woman walk through a park alone.

WILLIAM
Tonight, I will take this one.

CHARLES
Are you sure?

WILLIAM
Of course. I've not much time left,
and I have a lot more art for the
world.

William steps to pursue the woman but is grabbed by Charles.

CHARLES
What do you mean, "not much time
left?"

William grimaces.

WILLIAM
I guess you might as well know. I
am dying, from consumption.

Charles looks at William and then turns away.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
It's funny, my only regret is that
I was not able to be a father. A
good father, to make up for the
mistakes my father made with me.

He looks down at the blade in his hand.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Hiding in a bush, stalking a woman
in a park, I can't say I've done
much better as mistakes go.

CHARLES
Well...

William looks at Charles.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
You've been like a father to me.
These past few weeks, I mean. No
one has ever taken the time to
teach me.

(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)

To specifically want to teach ME something. I'm grateful that you've done that.

William smiles and heads out from the bush. He catches up to the woman and pauses just before he grabs her.

CHARLES (V.O.)

"You've been like a father to me."

William freezes. The woman turns and screams. She swings at William and gets sliced on her arm as she knocks the knife from his hand. He grabs her.

ADELINA

Let me go!

The struggle continues. William swings the woman around into the light of a lantern.

WILLIAM

Ad... Adelina?

The struggle stops.

ADELINA

William?

Charles strikes her on the back of the head. She falls to the ground, unconscious. William kneels to check on her. The WHISTLES of police grow near. Charles grabs the blade from the ground and pulls William away.

INT. WILLIAM'S HOME - NIGHT

William paces the floor. Charles sits on the sofa.

WILLIAM

I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. I froze. I just, I couldn't do it. That's, that's never happened before.

Charles looks up at William.

CHARLES

You reacted in the moment. It's fine.

WILLIAM

It's not fine!

William runs his fingers through his hair.

CHARLES

Maybe this should be our last time out.

WILLIAM

You're absolutely right. Just promise that you'll continue to pursue your art.

CHARLES

Always.

They embrace and shake hands.

WILLIAM

Can you promise me one last thing?

CHARLES

Anything.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Joseph sits next to the Adelina's bed. She comes to. He leaps to her side.

ADELINA

Oh. What, what happened?

She blinks repeatedly to focus.

ADELINA (CONT'D)

William? Where's William?

JOSEPH

Miss, is that how you got the cut on your arm? William? William Gladstone?

Adelina sits, dumbstruck. She stares at Joseph.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Joseph marches down the road towards William's house, 4 other uniformed OFFICERS, various ages, accompany him. Another OFFICER, 25, approaches from the front.

OFFICER

Detective! People have reported seeing blood and what they believe to be a body at Gladstone's studio. The other officers are waiting for you to arrive before entering.

INT. ART STUDIO - DAY

William sits at an easel in the center of the class. He laughs and cackles. He scrawls on the canvas in front of him.

EXT. STREET - DAY

JOSEPH

Damn it!

Joseph's runs and the officers follow.

INT. ART STUDIO - DAY

Charles enters the studio. He looks around confused and approaches William, who continues to scrawl on the canvas. William stops, looks over his shoulder with a grin and holds up his blade.

WILLIAM

Thanks for coming... son.

EXT. ART STUDIO - DAY

Joseph and the other Officers arrive and approach the ONLOOKERS, various ages, are held back by a large OFFICER, 30, at the entrance.

INT. ART STUDIO

Joseph enters the studio. He looks around and listens for any movement. He steps into the classroom. A cloaked figure sits motionless at an easel.

JOSEPH

You there, with the cloak, identify yourself!

Joseph inches closer, his pistol trained on the figure.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Gladstone! Get up. It's over.

Joseph grabs the hood of the cloak and snatches it away. He stares for a moment. Joseph lowers his gun. He looks at the painting on the easel, turns to walk away.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Shit!

The other Officers approach the body. The face of William Gladstone is mutilated with a large grin carved into his face. The easel in front of him has the words, "TRY AGAIN, DETECTIVE," written in William's blood.