

A New Canvas
By Ryan Harding

Act 1

Opening Image

WE OPEN on a painting, divided down the middle by a red line. On the left, somber colors depict a lone man by a blank canvas, desperate and frail. On the right, vibrant colors depict a beautiful woman with a similar blank canvas, surrounded by crowds of adoring fans.

We focus inward on the man, towards the canvas, until...

Status Quo

It becomes a whiteboard, filling up with various math equations. Teenage STUDENTS chatter and fill up their notebooks with work. In the back, a boy who clearly will grow into the man in the painting squints his eyes, struggling to stay awake while scribbling something in his notebook. The TEACHER yells at him to focus, and gives him detention.

In detention, CARLOS SERA struggles with his busywork, all while continuing to scribble to the side of his notebook. The teacher gets impatient with him, and goes up to him, taking his notebook.

Inciting Incident

The teacher looks at what he's doing, and is shocked to see in the notebook dozens of beautifully-crafted drawings, the best he's ever seen. He asks Carlos why he never took an art class, why he's bothering with advanced calculus.

Carlos explains that his parents told him he needs to take advanced classes to prepare him for "real jobs", and that his "doodles" won't get him anywhere. The teacher tells him he has a real talent, and tells him he can pull some strings with the school to get him transferred into a studio art class. Carlos reluctantly agrees.

They walk to the door together, and step through...

Escalation

Into the future, at an art college out west. Carlos, now aged in his early 20s, is the star of his art program. He has a free ride scholarship, the adoration of his professors, and of course, the attention of many young women drawn to his newfound confidence and

his status. Carlos, now convinced of his own genius, has no problems at all with the legions of women throwing themselves at him.

At an exhibition on campus, Carlos is in the midst of showcasing his magnum opus, a sensual depiction of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, greeting a man who looks very much like himself. The audience loves it, every girl in attendance shoots bedroom eyes at him. All except one...

A young woman who is unmistakably the woman from the opening canvas, shifts around to the side, trying to get her own painting out of her bag awkwardly. A rude MALE STUDENT yells at her to get out, Sera's already won! Carlos hears this and, in a cocky tone, shuts down the student while implicitly hitting on DAHLIA.

Dahlia rolls her eyes at him, and unveils her painting. It is beyond any work we've seen thus far, work beyond the level of a student. A depiction of a garden, with a lone young woman, who looks very much like Dahlia, surrounded by terrifying, masculine trees.

Suddenly, the crowd splits. Some, like the most "dudebro" of the men and the most "in love with Carlos" of the women stay by him. Most of the rest move over to Dahlia's painting. Even Carlos is stricken by its skill and beauty. Despite some women coming over to him, offering themselves to him, even he leaves his own painting behind.

He arrives at Dahlia's painting, stun-locked. She turns to him, asks if he has anything to say now. All he can say?

"It's better than mine"

She shoots him the first smile she's given. And with that smile, Carlos never wanted another woman again.

Act 2

Rise

We see the artists begin to work together, and become a couple. As their relationship flourishes, so does their career. Beautiful landscapes, haunting faces, work both optimistic and cynical follows them.

We see press events initially focused on Carlos become dazzled by Dahlia's work as well. But as both are receiving attention, both are happy.

Crux 1

At a gallery, they each present a piece they painted individually. They expect to both

be the talk of the town once more. But to Carlos' shock, the press completely overlooks his landscape, a borderline rehash of a work he already presented before.

Meanwhile, Dahlia's painting, a blisteringly beautiful portrait of a young girl in an empty home, pictures of her parents foregrounded on a desk, becomes the immediate highlight.

Dahlia is happy and turns to Carlos, who is dejected but feigns happiness.

Fall

We see Carlos' work continue to suffer and face outright criticism for its repetition and perceived lack of complexity, while Dahlia's career skyrockets. She's even put on talk shows and discussed beyond their confined art world. Not to mention becoming richer than him and buying *him* a house.

Carlos begins to lash out at her when they're together. When apart, she's on talk shows or presenting her art and he's out drinking.

They get into screaming matches about how she only got successful because he gave her a platform, she would still be working off her student loans if he hadn't immediately offered to work with her after her first showcase. She retorts that her first work eclipsed his at that showcase years ago, and that it was only the field's male-dominated nature that caused her to continue to struggle for attention.

She makes friends with handsome male artists. He enjoys female attention at the bar but can never bring himself to fully cheat on her.

She moves out of their house. He breaks down drunk, and passes out.

Midpoint

In a dream, Carlos sees Dahlia married to one of her handsome artist friends. Carlos looks around and sees the slums he grew up in. The place he'll be without her, as his now-derivative and poor artwork can't sustain him. His art or his ego. It's his choice.

We flash forwards six months. Carlos in AA, receiving a six months token. He drives home, and finds Dahlia's car in his driveway. She's still inside, questioning whether or not to get out. Carlos doesn't force her out. Instead he confesses that as he's lost his touch, he's become unable to handle her being better than him. He shows her the only thing he's painted since she left. The painting we opened on.

She tells him she still loves him, but he needs to make a promise. He will stay sober. And he will not paint a single drop until he has gotten over his ego. When he does, she's ready to work with him again, in addition to reuniting as a couple.

He accepts, and they embrace.

Rise

We see the couple on talk shows together once more. Dahlia the artist, and Carlos the supportive husband taking a backseat role helping her sell her work. When asked about his own career, Carlos merely states that he hasn't been in the right headspace to paint himself in a long time.

We see them in their lavish home after the show, a romantic dinner set out by Carlos. He tells her he's sketched something for the first time in a while. He hands her a folded up napkin. As she unfolds it, she sees a sketch of herself at the table, and Carlos down on one knee. She looks past the napkin, and the image is real. She screams "yes!" And they embrace.

Crux 2

We see their wedding. Other artist friends surround them. The clearly jealous male artist friends look on with envy at Dahlia giving herself to Carlos. They promise to put each other, and the wonderful family they are soon to have, above everyone else.

That night, as Dahlia sleeps, Carlos sneaks over to his canvas, hoping to paint her something beautiful to wake up to. But as he stares at the canvas, and at her completed artwork to his side, nothing comes to mind. All he's ever painted is what he wanted.

Right now, he has all he's ever wanted. And there is nothing to long for. No art to make.

Fall

We see the beginnings of their marriage. Continued success for Dahlia with her art. Carlos being supportive. But we also see him continually go to his canvas, hoping to get his inspiration back. It never comes. Dahlia, who once made him promise not to paint, even tries to help him get back to it.

Nothing works. He knows now why his work slumped before. He only knows how to paint from longing. But now he only longs for painting.

We see Dahlia throwing up in the morning. Coughing, wheezing. Carlos tells her they should see a doctor. She refuses, she has a gallery to attend. At the gallery, she nearly faints. Carlos rushes her to the hospital.

False Victory

Dahlia is not sick. She's pregnant. At first the two are scared out of their minds. They weren't quite ready for this yet, and according to their doctor, Dahlia may be at a serious health risk if they go through with the pregnancy.

But that night, for the first time in two years, Carlos sits at his canvas, and paints. Dahlia stirs, and looks as he paints before faking sleep so as not to interrupt him. When she wakes, she finds Carlos slumped at a desk, next to a canvas of the two of them holding a radiant baby.

She smiles, knowing whatever happens, the baby will grow up with a father who loves them dearly.

Dark Night of the Soul

We zoom in on the image, and find it's real. Carlos holding his baby girl in his arms. Dahlia in the hospital bed. Frail, almost zombie-like. The joy we see in them is strained, and passes into knowing worry. Dahlia begins coughing again. The machine starts beeping faster and louder. Nurses enter. Dahlia asks just to hold their baby girl. They let her. She kisses her daughter's forehead. Carlos takes her as she begins wheezing again.

The machines screech as Carlos is rushed out of the room. He keeps trying to feign joy for his daughter, but they both begin crying at the sound of a flatline.

Act 3

Rebirth

Four years have passed. Carlos works a "normal job" to feed his daughter. He's asked about art, but never makes anything. He knows the only thing he longs for, the only thing he can bring himself to draw or paint is Dahlia. And his daughter, Bailey? She's the light of his life. All he lives for now, is her.

We see Carlos picking her up from pre-school. She excitedly tells him she made him something. She passes him a crumpled up piece of paper. Carlos unfurls it. It's a drawing of him. "My daddy". It's rudimentary, but it nonetheless looks remarkably like the way his wife used to draw him.

Carlos cries, Bailey asking him why. "Mommy and I used to draw like this". "You did?". Bailey doesn't know her father was an artist too, though she's seen her mother's paintings. Carlos nods. "Can you show me? I wanna draw like mommy and you!".

Carlos takes her home and shows her his paintings. She really likes them, but the ones of her mother make her sad. She asks why there are none of her, he tells her he stopped painting. "Why?". "I can only paint mommy. And that makes me sad."

“I wanna see mommy.”

Carlos tears up, but sees through it. His daughter wants him to be happy. In spite of how good a father he’s been, she’s always noticed, even at her age, his longing. Carlos hugs his daughter and nods. “I’ll paint the three of us”.

Climax

We skip forwards another two years. Carlos and Bailey are at a gallery, this one for children’s drawings and paintings. Bailey is up presenting.

“Me and my daddy painted this picture. This is my family.”

She unveils a painting, very much like the one we saw at the beginning. Only this time, there is no audience at all, and there is only one canvas. Shared by Carlos and Bailey. On the canvas in the picture is Dahlia. Painted by Bailey, who’s skill even at six years-old eclipses that of both her parents.

We see Carlos in the crowd, teary-eyed. But he’s not sad. He’s incredibly proud. He knows Dahlia is too. We zoom in on the painting, towards Dahlia. Her stoic face in the painting turns to the radiant smile she had at the beginning as we fade out.