

BROKEN GARGOYLES

SELECT SCENE: FIRST TIME IN THE STUDIO FOR PORTRAIT-MASKS

Written by

Juliet Clare Warren

EXT. STREETS. PARIS. 1919 - DAY

Thomas walks through the streets of Paris. People mill about, bundled up against the extreme cold. A truck unloads rations of coal, which they exchange for several Francs.

Thomas keeps close to the walls of buildings as he walks; his right side facing the brick and stone. A cigarette hangs out of his lip on the left side.

Through this walk, a sense of Paris immediately after the war -- conditions are rough. People are worn, tired, and thin. However, there's an energy in the air. French flags fly in the wind; attached to several buildings.

EXT. STUDIO FOR PORTRAIT-MASKS. ARTIST'S QUARTER - DAY

Thomas looks at a darkened shop. The curtains on the front windows are drawn, but a light from inside declares the shop open.

He inhales the last of his cigarette, flicks it away, and takes an uneasy step forward towards the shop.

INT. PARLOR. STUDIO FOR PORTRAIT-MASKS - CONTINUOUS

Thomas enters the shop; nervous, wary, but also fascinated by the possibilities of his new future. The unmistakable SOUND OF FRIENDLY CHATTER.

After the entranceway is a sitting room. Several tables and sofas. Cigarette smoke lifts up and floats around in never ending circles.

THE SOUND OF CHATTER STOPS.

Thomas looks in the direction of where the sound had come from. Sitting around a small table, are TWO MEN, playing a card game.

At first glance, there's nothing extraordinary about this. But as Thomas walks closer, the two men's faces become more noticeable.

Thomas is drawn to them; fascinated. His focus is solely on their faces. Neither man recoils or reacts.

Standing directly in front of the men, Thomas finally stops; at a complete loss for words. Gently placed on each of the men's faces are impossibly thin pieces of tin, painted to match their skin color. The pieces are intricately designed.

On one of the men, the piece is fixed to his bottom lip, with metal ear pieces that hook round the ear.

The other man wears a much larger tin piece. Just as beautifully designed. His piece however, is held in place with spectacles sitting neatly atop a tin nose.

BLYTHE (O.S.)

Did I hear someone come in?

BLYTHE (20s) enters the room from the main part of the shop. She wears trousers and a button down. In normal circumstances this would be unacceptable for a woman of her stature, but these are not normal circumstances.

She stops as Thomas looks up at her, surrounded by the two men. For the first time we see his face in full.

A significant portion of his right cheek bone is sunken in. He's blind in one eye. Scars from skin grafts run all the way up to his temple.

Blythe doesn't avert her eyes, or look disgusted. She smiles brightly at Thomas, and walks further into the room. As she does, she leans to the men playing cards.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)

I told you boys you were allowed to play here, if you alerted me as to visitors.

The first man, PHILLIP (20s), removes a pipe inserted neatly in his mouth between his real lip and the tin lip.

PHILLIP

Thought we should give him a moment.

Blythe smiles at the two men, touches Phillip gently on the shoulder.

BLYTHE

Hello, I'm Blythe. I'm one of several sculptors here.

She holds out her hand to him. Thomas eyes it warily before taking it.

THOMAS

Thomas.

BLYTHE

Well -- it's lovely to meet you, Thomas.

Thomas looks over to the two men who have returned to their game of cards.

INT. OFFICE. STUDIO FOR PORTRAIT-MASKS - LATER

Thomas and Blythe sit down in an office. Blythe across from Thomas, the two at equal levels.

Blythe analyzes Thomas's face.

BLYTHE
Where did this happen?

Thomas is slow to talk; he shifts uncomfortably.

THOMAS
France. The Somme.

Blythe nods; an understanding look.

BLYTHE
And they took you to Aldershot?

Thomas looks inquisitively at her.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)
Would you mind removing your coat?

Thomas obliges; setting it neatly on the arm of the chair.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)
Up here --

Blythe points to scars on the side of his face, just below the cratered portion of his cheek.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)
I know of the surgeon who performed the procedure. Several other men I've seen have had significant reconstructive surgery, as well.

Blythe eases back into her chair from her forward position.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)
Have you seen any of our masks?

Thomas's eyes flick to the outside parlor.

THOMAS
Only those.

BLYTHE
Let me explain a bit about our
process.

Blythe leans forward once more; Thomas follows her lead.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)
Relax.

Thomas doesn't relax; at most his shoulders ease slightly.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)
We take a plaster cast of your
face. It's a painful process, as
the skin is still taught and the
plaster has to stay on for quite
some time.

Thomas nods; unfazed.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)
Then I and another sculptor will
fill in the sections.
(beat)
We'll need a photograph from before
the war, if possible.

Thomas thinks for a moment before committing.

THOMAS
I should be able to procure one.

BLYTHE
Using the plaster cast, we will
create a mask of tin. It's held in
place by several means -- whichever
is most comfortable for you -- it
can be fixed around the ear as a
pair of glasses; or held in place
with ribbon.

Blythe moves closer --

BLYTHE (CONT'D)
May I?

Thomas nods. Blythe gently touches his face by the chin;
Thomas moves his head to the side in accordance.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)
It would be best to create the mold
and pieces first before deciding on
a way to attach.

Blythe brings her hand back and sits more comfortably in the chair once more. Thomas does not follow her lead. The sense of touch on his face has an almost paralyzing effect.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)

(quieter)

If it's any small consolation, I've seen men come in here without noses and lips. They find comfort in the mask.

INT. PARLOR. STUDIO FOR PORTRAIT-MASKS - LATER

Blythe walks Thomas out. They pass the two gentleman once more who laugh and play cards as if their worlds hadn't broken down with their bodies.

Thomas breathes heavily -- overwhelmed. At the door he turns back to Blythe. He nods at Blythe. She returns his nod with an added smile.

BLYTHE

I'll see you tomorrow.