

GRAND UNION CANAL

by

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v2.0

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FADE IN:

1a EXT. CANAL - DAY

1a

Drops of water create ripples in the canal. The drops come from the foot of PORTIA LANCASTER-HALL, 16, very pretty but very dead, as four POLICE OFFICERS carry her sodden body from the edge of the canal and deposit her on the towpath.

Two police officers roll Portia onto her back. Portia stares up through glassy eyes. The buttons on her school blouse are misaligned. A piece of wet, folded paper clings to her leg.

JOAN TIDMARSH, 16, complicated, watches from a bridge.

2 EXT. FOOTPATH - DAY (FLASHBACK)

2

Joan paces grumpily along the footpath in her school uniform. She jots in a notebook as she paces. A square of folded paper protrudes from the bottom of the notebook.

Portia and two other cool girls, OLIVIA and KINSEY, follow a little behind Joan, giggling.

A HANDSOME BOY, 18, paces past Joan. She eyes him longingly. He ignores her, his eyes on Portia and her friends. After he passes they burst into song:

SCHOOLGIRLS

"Plain old Joan/Plain old Joan/She
plays nic-nac on her own/With a nic-
nac-paddy-whack-give-a-Joan-a-bone/
Plain old Joan goes rolling home"

Joan accelerates, looking hurt. She shoves the notebook into her bag. The folded paper catches on the lip of the bag and flutters to the ground.

Portia, Olivia and Kinsey swoop onto the folded paper. Portia wins the race and unfolds it in triumph. The three girls read it. Portia's eyes widen with wonder as she reads:

THE WATER IS STILL AND SILENT
NO-ONE SEES IT PASS ON BY
DON'T THINK IT HAS NO FEELINGS
'CAUSE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN WATER CRY

Olivia and Kinsey laugh derisively then stroll down another footpath. Portia is mesmerised by the poem. She looks up and sees Joan stride off some distance ahead.

On the other footpath, Olivia and Kinsey stop and look back.

OLIVIA
Coming, Portia?

KINSEY
Po, you fat-arse --

Portia hesitates then runs after Joan.

PORTIA
-- Joan -- Joan --

JOAN
What?

PORTIA
(offers paper)
You dropped this.

Joan snatches the paper off Portia.

PORTIA (CONT'D)
It's beautiful.

JOAN
What?

PORTIA
You write the most beautiful words
on paper. Why don't they ever come
from your mouth?

JOAN
What? D'you mean that?

Portia flashes a dazzling smile.

1b EXT. CANAL - BACK TO SCENE 1b

Portia's lifeless face, her mouth gaping. An officer lowers
their mouth onto Portia's and tries to resuscitate her.

3a INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK) 3a

A modest townhouse. The doorbell rings. Joan enters and opens
the door, revealing Portia.

PORTIA
Hello.

JOAN
Oh, hi... What are you doing here?

Portia offers Joan a small present. Joan hesitates then
accepts the present and opens the door for Portia.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Wow, thanks. Come in.

Portia enters. Joan leads her into the --

3b KITCHEN

3b

Joan puts the present on the table and opens the fridge. She produces a bottle of cherry-flavoured Dr. Pepper's.

JOAN
D'you want a drink?

PORTIA
Yes, please.

Joan pours two glasses and hands one to Portia.

PORTIA (CONT'D)
Aren't you going to open it?

JOAN
(embarrassed)
I wasn't sure if, ah...

Portia smiles encouragingly. Joan unwraps the present. It's a picture frame. Portia and Joan's pictures have been cut from a school photograph and placed side-by-side in the frame.

PORTIA
D'you like it?

Joan paces off. Portia hesitates then follows her into her --

3c BEDROOM

3c

The walls are covered with poems on scraps of paper. Portia gapes. Joan opens the back of the picture frame and pulls out the pictures of her and Portia. She takes a poem off the wall and inserts it into the picture frame.

PORTIA
What are you doing?

JOAN
People are ugly. Only words are beautiful.

PORTIA
Yes. How silly of me.

Joan stands the framed poem on a table and smiles at Portia. Portia reads the framed poem.

PORTIA (CONT'D)
 "Leaves flutter on an autumn day
 Each one's a life blown away
 What was green now is brown
 What did float now does drown"
 (strokes Joan's arm)
 You're so lucky.

Joan twists away from Portia's caress.

JOAN
 You're the lucky one.

1c EXT. CANAL - BACK TO SCENE 1c

The police officer gives up trying to resuscitate Portia.

4a INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK) 4a

"SUNSET BOULEVARD" plays on a video. William Holden's body floats face-down in the swimming pool.

Joan and Portia sit side-by-side on the couch. They sip Dr. Pepper's and watch the video.

PORTIA
 This is great, Joan.

JOAN
 What?

PORTIA
 (raises glass)
 This...
 (indicates video)
 This... Everything.

Joan glances uncertainly at Portia.

PORTIA (CONT'D)
 I never watch black'n'white movies,
 but this is fantastic.

JOAN
 Gloria Swanson comes in soon.

PORTIA
 Who?

JOAN
 Gloria Swanson. She's brilliant.

PORTIA
 I bet.

Joan glows. Portia chinks her glass against Joan's.

PORTIA (CONT'D)
Well, bottoms up.

Dr. Pepper's slops onto Joan's blouse. Joan stares down at the cherry-red stain over her heart.

PORTIA (CONT'D)
Shit, sorry.

JOAN
It's okay. Back in a sec'.

Joan hurries into the --

4b BEDROOM

4b

Joan removes her blouse and throws it into a washing basket. She sifts through her wardrobe. She turns and sees Portia in the doorway, possession in her eyes. Portia closes the door.

JOAN
What?

Portia unbuttons her blouse.

JOAN (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

PORTIA
Eye for an eye, Joan. Beauty for beauty.

Joan stares aghast at Portia. She seizes a shapeless sweater and quickly pulls it over her head. She grabs a notebook and pen then paces to the door, leaving Portia bewildered.

PORTIA (CONT'D)
What?

JOAN
I'm going to the canal. I can feel a poem coming on.

PORTIA
Why the canal?

JOAN
That's where I write.

Portia hurriedly buttons her blouse out of alignment.

PORTIA
You're going to write? Can I come?

- 1d EXT. CANAL - BACK TO SCENE 1d
An officer picks the wet square of paper off Portia's leg and carefully unfolds it. The sodden paper dissolves into mush.
- 5a EXT. CANAL - DAY (FLASHBACK) 5a
Joan paces along the towpath, hounded by Portia.
- PORTIA
Write one for me, please --
- JOAN
I can't.
- PORTIA
Why not?
- JOAN
It doesn't work like that.
- PORTIA
What? How does it work?
- 4c INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - BACK TO SCENE 4c
The room is empty. "SUNSET BOULEVARD" plays on the video. Gloria Swanson is on the screen.
- JOAN (V.O.)
You can't make beauty into what you want it to be. Ugly people do that.
- 5b EXT. CANAL - DAY (FLASHBACK) 5b
Joan admires the trees and sky reflected in the canal.
- JOAN
Real beauty is just itself.
- PORTIA
What would you fucking know about beauty?
- Joan turns on Portia.
- 4d INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - BACK TO SCENE 4d
On screen, Gloria Swanson pursues William Holden towards the swimming pool.

6a EXT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY (DREAM) 6a

Joan pursues Portia towards the pool. She shoves Portia, who shrieks and falls in. Portia splashes about in desperation.

PORTIA

-- Help -- I can't swim --

Joan watches impassively as Portia founders.

4e INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - BACK TO SCENE 4e

On screen, William Holden floats face-down in the pool.

6b EXT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY (DREAM) 6b

Portia floats face-down in the pool.

Joan kneels and rests her notebook on her knee. A rapturous look fills her face as she writes. Joan rises. She tears the page from her notebook, folds it into a square and throws it into the pool. It lands near Portia's leg.

JOAN

It's for you. It's beautiful.

4f INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - BACK TO SCENE 4f

On the video, Gloria Swanson preens herself for the camera.

GLORIA SWANSON (ON TV)

I'm ready for my close-up now, Mr.
De Mille.

1f EXT. CANAL - BACK TO SCENE 1f

A police officer covers Portia's dead face with a blanket. Two officers lift Portia and carry her away.

Joan ambles off the bridge, singing quietly to herself:

JOAN

"Plain old Joan/Plain old Joan/She
plays nic-nac on her own/With a nic-
nac-paddy-whack-give-a-Joan-a-bone/
Plain old Joan goes rolling home"

Joan disappears, leaving only the placid waters of the canal.

FADE OUT

THE END