

# **THE PAINTER**

**Jane Miller**

## **Characters:**

Helen  
Nina  
Michael

Jane Miller

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**HELEN:** Discarded. No longer needed. Surplus to requirements. Then what do you do? Because everyone you know pities you and you're sure everyone you don't know knows

It's not like I had any idea. I was clueless. He could've come in from work and said "Helen, I'm flying to the moon today" and I would have been less shocked.

He didn't come in and say he was flying to the moon.

**MICHAEL:** Helen, I've had an epiphany. I feel like my eyes have been opened. For the first time. And it's not that I don't love you. You've been my first love.

It's just that Nina is just this whirl of fantastic frigging energy and I can't ignore that. It's turned my whole life upside down. Can you sort of see that? That it's not a plan. My plan was for us to grow old together. But Nina....

And the things is....Helen, I feel like a real bastard because you're the first...My first great love...

**HELEN:** I just wanted to say "Who is she? What did you say her name is?"  
I was standing in the kitchen with a box of rat poison in my hand. I'd found a dead rat in the laundry. I wanted to say "How can you leave me? I think we've got rats. And what did you say her name is?"

If you're going to be left, it can't be at a more pathetic moment than when you've just found a rat in your laundry. I would have preferred him coming to me after I'd won a Nobel prize. Then I could've said "Piss off you deceitful bastard. I have my Nobel prize".

But I didn't have a Nobel Prize. I had a dead rat in the laundry and a husband leaving me.

**MICHAEL:** I just can't get her out of my head. I think I'm a bit obsessed with her. Not in a strange way. It's like she's enslaved me. It sounds like bullshit but.... Do you think that happens?

She's doing a Masters. She's not stupid. Helen, she's really fascinating.

I can't think about anything else and that's why I'm behaving like such a shit. There's no question that's how you'd feel about me.... There's no chance you could see where I'm coming from? Is there?

It's just that I've been overpowered. By this amazing force of nature.

**HELEN:** Nina.

Michael and Nina.

Nina and Michael.

I said it so many times I forgot what Helen and Michael had sounded like. All those years ago.

When I was a "frigging whirl of fantastic energy".

Before a rat died in my laundry.

I assumed she was younger. I was wrong. She's the same age. For some reason that offended me more than anything.

Why couldn't she have been younger?

**MICHAEL:** None of this is you. You're a victim. Like me.

A victim of Nina. We're in the same boat.

And if you met her, Helen, I think you'd see that.

You'd see that I'm just...Powerless. You can see that ...Can't you?

**HELEN:** Not really.

**NINA:** We met at a party. He told me he was a painter. I could see it straight away. He was everything an artist should be. Sensitive. Strong He was so physical.

We were caught up.

Lured in.

Overexcited.

I told him "Don't leave her". But I wanted him to.

I wanted him to have no choice. Because meeting me had changed everything. Nothing could ever be the same. It was fate...And forever.

That first night, he told me he'd been a painter since he was 19. I told him I was doing a Masters. I was besotted.  
He was a painter.  
An artist.  
I would be his muse.

**HELEN:** When he left, he told me to keep the house.

**MICHAEL:** Keep the house. I'm such a shit. I don't deserve anything.  
Keep the house. You deserve that much. You won't believe this but I really hate myself.  
I know how you depend on me and I just hate myself.  
Have the house. Do whatever you want with it. It's yours.

You deserve-

**HELEN:** A consolation prize. Lose a husband. Win a house.

**NINA:** All I could think about was the man I loved wanting to paint me...It made me feel so desirable...And so loved.

One night he took me to the front of a big house and said he'd painted for them...

I thought he meant a portrait. Something hanging in the living room.  
Turned out he'd painted the fence. He was a house painter.

**MICHAEL:** Which is very creative in its own way. You have no idea what I go through to get the right finish. It's an honorable profession-.

**HELEN:** For the dishonorable.  
He painted this house.  
When we got married.  
It was one of those things you do together. To establish things.  
Choose the colours. Paint the house.

I wanted to choose different colours. He'd started again. I deserved to start again.

**NINA:** He was supposed to be an artist. He was supposed to want to paint *me*.

He offered to paint the bathroom. It just didn't sound as sexy.  
And then there was Helen.....When I finally met her. I was star struck.  
I spent hours getting ready.

I wanted her to look at me and see that he'd had no choice. That it was so  
much more than anything he'd had before. With her.

It was a disaster. The day we met. She'd had the house painted. That was  
the beginning.....of the end. The artist who was really a house painter  
seeing the house he hadn't painted.

**MICHAEL:** When did you do this? When?  
I just don't understand why you had to have it painted.  
I could've done it for you Helen. For Christ's sake....I'm a painter. That's  
what I do. How do you think I feel.... Knowing that not only have you had  
our house painted...But you've paid my competition to do it?

That's the ultimate betrayal for a tradesman.

Jesus Helen....How do you think that feels?

**HELEN:** A bit like your husband leaving you for the "frigging fantastic whirl of  
energy with a Masters" that he's been screwing behind your back for  
months.

**NINA:** It was just a house. I thought he had a new life. With me. In a different  
house.

**MICHAEL:** I know I said to do what you want but how could you get someone else to  
paint our house. The house I painted. For you.

I hate the job they've done around the eaves. They've spilled more paint  
than they've slapped on back there.

Jesus Helen I know technically I don't-

**HELEN:** Live here or have any right to comment?

**MICHAEL:** Who painted it? I demand to know. Helen...I don't ask much. I don't care if you're seeing someone...A man...Or something... Just tell me who painted the house.

**HELEN:** It was none of his business. What I did, who I saw and who painted my house. My house. Every inch a different colour. Every inch a different house.

**MICHAEL:** For fuck's sake Helen. It's a shithouse job.

**NINA:** It was like seeing him for the first time. At the same time he began to disappear...

**MICHAEL:** I'll find out. Don't worry about that Helen.  
The painting fraternity is tight knit.

**HELEN:** It drove him to distraction. I enjoyed it.

**NINA:** He was obsessed..  
He phoned other painters pretending to ask for a quote.

**(MICHAEL TALKING INTO THE PHONE)**

**MICHAEL:** There's a house on Chapel Hill Road, I really like the paint job and I'm wondering if that's one of your jobs? No?...Well you wouldn't know who....

I'd ask the owner but she's a lonely, slightly demented single woman and I don't like to bother her. I think she's had a breakdown.

**HELEN:** Not a breakdown. Just a new coat of paint.

**NINA:** He was like a spoiled child. I pitied him.

**MICHAEL:** I'm closing in on this, Nina. There's only three possibilities left. One of them is a woman! A woman house painter! Don't worry. I'll find out who painted that house. Then things will get back to normal.

**NINA:** Nothing goes back to normal. We'd never had normal. We'd had sexy, illicit, dangerous. Then this. There was nothing to go back to.

**MICHAEL:** The whole thing is like-

**HELEN:** A betrayal.  
I felt revitalised.

**NINA:** It ruined everything.  
So many questions....Never any answers.

**MICHAEL:** Helen didn't mention anything... That day.....She didn't give you any clue? About the painter? Think back carefully.....Nina? Nina? I don't think you're listening to me.

**NINA:** I wasn't. There wasn't anything left.

A woman phoned looking for him. Day and night. Over and over. I knew they were screwing. I could hear it in her voice. It's always in the voice.

**MICHAEL:** Jesus, Nina....How can you accuse me of something like that? I've been completely devoted to you. I've hardly thought about anything else. It's always been you. Only you.

**NINA:** Except when it had been Helen....And Helen's freshly painted house.

**MICHAEL** This is all because of that Masters.  
That frigging Masters has taken over your whole life.  
Why is it taking so long to finish?  
I'll tell you one thing...My name should be on any certificate they give you. I've paid for half that Masters...I've paid for it with cash and blood sweat and tears no question about that. Nina...Nina, are you listening to me?

**NINA:** There was no Masters. That was for him. To make me worthy of the artist. But there was no artist and there is no Masters.

Her name is Pippa. The woman who phoned day and night. Pippa. She's a painter. Pippa the painter. I think he thinks she's the one.

**HELEN:** She wasn't. She isn't.. The person who painted the house is the last person he'd suspect. It would never occur to him. It's not a possibility he'd entertain.

He left Nina. For another woman. A painter. I wonder how she feels.

Everything gets a fresh coat. The cracks disappear. Eventually. With preparation.... It can all be a different colour.

**NINA:** I got a package in the mail. From Helen. I worried about opening it. I thought it might be a bomb or a dead rat. But it was a paintbrush. And a roller.

**MICHAEL:** Christ Nina. This is persecution. Now you've had the frigging bathroom painted. I offered to do it for you. When we met...Remember? That's the greatest gift a tradesman can offer...

Nina?...Are you even listening to me? Nina? Nina....

**HELEN:** A different colour.  
Brighter.

**NINA & HELEN:**  
Better.

**HELEN:** So much better you can't imagine what it looked like before.

**LIGHTS DOWN**