

THE PORTRAITIST (a screenplay): Synopsis

TIME: The present summer and summers past

PLACE: Monkshead Island, New England

CHARACTERS:

FAY LOCKE: The Green family portraitist and tutor to her niece, Francine; age mid-thirties

YOUNG FAY: Fay Locke from age twelve through fifteen

FRANCINE AMBLER: The niece of Fay Locke; age early teens.

MURIEL DAUBLER: Young Fay's British tutor; from age thirty to fifty.

CASSANDRA GREEN: A dying paleontologist; age mid-forties

PHILLIP GREEN: Cassandra's estranged husband; a travel writer; age mid-forties

LUCY GREEN: Cassandra and Phillip's daughter; age early teens.

PLOT SYNOPSIS: The Portraitist explores the mystery at the heart of the creative process through the story of a young portraitist in transition -- from being a mere copyist to becoming a true artist. While teaching her young niece, Francine, to paint, Fay Locke recalls the lessons of her own tutor, Muriel, who professed that to know one's subjects fully one must know them passionately. After Muriel's seduction and subsequent departure, Fay settles for a life of dreary isolation, dispassionately pleasing her subjects instead of herself. The arrival of Francine is a catalyst for Fay's development, because in her niece, Fay sees herself as she was, and experiences anew the natural freedom and optimism of an uninhibited child. As Fay's artistic prowess grows, she begins to resemble Muriel, adopting her anecdotes and myths in order to explain the power of color and form to evoke strong emotions. In a sense, Fay attempts to pass the spirit of her gifts to her niece, to create Francine in her own image as Muriel tried to create Fay in hers. Fay is also challenged by the amorous devotion of a wealthy man she has been commissioned to paint, and tries desperately to resist. Fay expresses this resistance in a painting unlike any she has ever created, thereby releasing new passions with an energy she has long ago suppressed. The portrait and the reactions it provokes bring Fay to a new understanding of her potential as she becomes the conductor of her own symphony, capable of portraying personalities in a style that is truly her own.

The Portraitist explores the loss of innocence through the crossing of personal and sexual boundaries between a teacher and her student; the damaging intensity of thwarted passions; and the power of art to express anguish and rapture.