

BREVIS

By

Ben Josephson

"Man is in love and loves what vanishes"
W. B. Yeats

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Cast of Characters

ROLAND: Male, 80s
ELLIS: Male, early 20s
JEREMY: Male, early 60s
CORA: Female, early 20s
APRIL: Female, 80s

Scene

A mid-size American city. Scene One: An artist's studio.
Scene Two: A museum office. Scene Three: The studio.

Time

The second decade of the twenty-first century. Scene One:
day time. Scene Two: evening, about six months later. Scene
Three: early afternoon, about another six months later.

SCENE ONE

Day time. An artist's studio. High ceiling, bare walls with lots of window. A scrim to one side, up stage. Nothing in the room except a sink and a chair or two; and five paintings propped up on the floor, packaged in opaque plastic so that the canvases are not visible.

Roland alone. Then Ellis, wearing a baseball cap (without logo), enters and picks up a painting.

ROLAND

Not that one, Ellis.

ELLIS

You told me all of them.

ROLAND

Just...not yet.

Ellis puts the first painting down, picks up another.

ROLAND (cont'd)

Not that, either.

Jeremy enters.

JEREMY

Roland!

ROLAND

(To Ellis.)

Take number 195. Leave the others a few minutes more.

Ellis puts down the second painting, picks up a third, and exits with it.

JEREMY

Why are you still here?

ROLAND

I am expecting someone.

JEREMY

So am I.

ROLAND

A new tenant?

JEREMY

Yes. A brat. Who will jump down my throat if this place hasn't been cleared out by the time she gets here.

ROLAND

When will that be?

JEREMY

Right now. Just about.

ROLAND

You certainly didn't waste time finding a...a replacement for Matthew.

JEREMY

Roland, I loved Matthew. I miss him. You know that.

ROLAND

Yes. Yes, I know. But this...this is business.

JEREMY

I like number 195.

ROLAND

Why didn't you buy it, then?

JEREMY

I have only so much wall space. You don't like it.

ROLAND

It's not one of Matthew's best.

JEREMY

You're keeping number 183 for yourself.

ROLAND

I am. As well as 137, 219, 266 and 322.

JEREMY

Is that all?

ROLAND

I, too, have only so much wall space. Even with just those five, I'll have to keep rotating them from laundry room to living room and back.

JEREMY

That 183...you can have it. It lacks something.

ROLAND

Oh? What, exactly?

JEREMY

A...*je ne sais quoi*, you know?

ROLAND

Oh, yes. Of course. A *je ne sais quoi*. The clarity and incisiveness of your critical commentary, Jeremy, never fail to enlighten.

JEREMY

What 183 lacks is need. Gaze upon it with just a smidgen of insightful sensibility, Roland, and you will recognize that Matthew did not **need** to bring it into existence. On the other hand, when he painted 195---

ROLAND

Jeremy, do not go off on another of your rants about aesthetics and transcendence and the wondrous mystery of creativity. You know nothing about any of it. You have never created anything worthwhile in your entire life.

JEREMY

Not so. I once built a contraption for my cat to do gymnastics on. Look, Roland, when 195 came along, with its clarion imperative, Matthew painted it because he couldn't **not** paint it. Same thing happened in the case of number 244, and I wouldn't sell **that** piece for hundreds of times all the rent I have ever collected.

ROLAND

May I see it?

JEREMY

You **have** seen it.

ROLAND

Not since you bought it.

JEREMY

Sure, come over to my place whenever you like. You will always be welcome.

ROLAND

Thank you.

JEREMY

Just give me a heads-up. I'll make dinner.

Ellis enters.

ROLAND

That one next.

Ellis picks up the selected painting, and exits.

JEREMY

You aren't used to dining alone.

ROLAND

Oh, but I'm becoming really good at it. Meal preparation for one. Last night, I scrambled a couple of eggs. And then I ate...for dessert, I ate a banana.

Cora enters.

CORA

Jeremy! There's still stuff here! I have deliveries coming. Right now!

ROLAND

Take it easy, young lady. It is I who am responsible for the delay.

CORA

(To Jeremy.)

Kindly remove what's left in here, including yourself and...this gentleman.

ROLAND

I take it you paint?

CORA

And sculpt and construct and do whatever else that's necessary.

JEREMY

Necessary for what?

CORA

How many studios do you rent out?

JEREMY

Twelve.

CORA

And for how long have you been renting them?

JEREMY

Oh...forty years.

CORA

Now, tell me: what have your tenants been doing in these twelve spaces for the past forty years?

JEREMY

Lots of things. Many of them unmentionable.

CORA

What they have been doing that is **necessary** is art!

ROLAND

Well, art has certainly been done in **this** space. As for its necessity...

Roland shrugs.

CORA

Are you the guy who's moving out?

JEREMY

No. Roland was the guy's...

(To Roland.)

...whaddaya-call-it?

ROLAND

(To Cora.)

I was Matthew's beloved companion and bed mate. And he was mine. Till death did us part.

JEREMY

(To Cora.)

This is the best studio in the building.

(To Roland.)

Remember?

ROLAND

(To Cora.)

We arrived the first day Jeremy started renting.

(To Jeremy.)

You kept talking up several of the others, but Matthew picked this one.

JEREMY

Insisted on this one.

ROLAND

You knew nothing about light.

JEREMY

Or art.

ROLAND

You still don't know about **that**.

JEREMY

I know more than you.

ROLAND

Ha! But, well...okay. Yes, now you do know **something** about art. He taught you.

JEREMY

And I taught myself. I ended up teaching *him*.

ROLAND

You have got to be kidding!

(To Cora.)

But...it could be so.

(To Jeremy.)

Matthew did come to respect some of your opinions.

CORA

Well, I am going to have to make do without Jeremy's opinions.

(To Jeremy.)

Because as long as I occupy this space, you will not be welcome here.

JEREMY

Do you have something to hide?

ROLAND

Cut it out, Jeremy. Her work is not your concern unless she lets it be.

JEREMY

(To Cora.)

Are you putting a bed in here?

(Pause.)

Cora, these are work units. You can't live here. It's illegal.

CORA

Tell that to the guy upstairs, northeast corner.

JEREMY

Oh, he is impossible.

CORA

So am I.

JEREMY

(To Roland.)

But every so often he does come through with an impressive piece. I have one at home. I'll show it to you.

Ellis enters.

ROLAND

(To Ellis.)

Take...take that next.

Ellis picks up a painting, and starts to leave.

CORA

(To Ellis.)

Just a second.

Ellis stops.

JEREMY

(To Cora.)

I thought you were in a hurry.

(To Ellis.)

Go.

Ellis exits with the painting.

CORA

Is he a professional art mover?

ROLAND

Yes. Art and antiques.

CORA

I have a ton of stuff. I'm going to need someone like him to get it all here undamaged.

JEREMY

But that bed...is it an antique?

CORA

It is my **work** that I would be hiring him to move.

April enters.

ROLAND

(Kissing April.)

April! Thank you so much for coming. May I introduce you to...

(To Cora.)

Cora, I believe Jeremy called you?

APRIL

How do you do?

April and Cora shake hands.

APRIL (cont'd)

Hello, Jeremy.

JEREMY

Long time no visit.

APRIL

No visit **here**. There **are** studios elsewhere in town.

ROLAND

April, I want you to take these two.

APRIL

Number what and number what?

Ellis enters.

ROLAND

(To Ellis.)

Wait a a minute.

(To April.)

Never mind numbers. You have to look at them.

APRIL

Roland, I have seen every one of Matthew's oil paintings. I have made notes. And I have excellent visual memory.

ROLAND

All right, then. This is 303. This is 156.

APRIL

Really?! He showed me 156 the first time I came here. It's what got me to keep coming back.

ROLAND

So then---

APRIL

I'm afraid not. We would never hang it.

ROLAND

(To April.)

But it's superb. Both pieces are superb.

APRIL

Roland, I had a hard enough time persuading the higher-ups to acquire 241. Which, as you know, the museum never even exhibited. Look, if it were up to me, I would put on a grand posthumous retrospective. But my job is to know what's out there---out **here**---and to make suggestions. I don't get to decide. 241 has been in deep storage for years. Is that what you want to become of these two as well?

Funereal pause.

ELLIS

If you don't mind, Roland, I have another job today after this one.

CORA

Where are you taking these?

ELLIS
To---

ROLAND
To deep storage.

JEREMY
Matthew's life's work.

ELLIS
(To Cora.)
To the facility over on Station Road. Their units are the best in town. Clean, and bone dry.

JEREMY
His life's work.
(To April.)
Why did you even come today?

ROLAND
I asked her to come. She came because she is gracious and courteous.

CORA
(To Roland, as she looks up at the fourth wall.)
There is plenty of wall in this room. I would love to hang that...that 156. Sort of as a...a tribute to my predecessor, you know?

ROLAND
Sight unseen?

CORA
Though I'm afraid I couldn't afford to pay for it.

ELLIS
You have to pay for it. If it has value, and you take possession, you have to honor that value with more than sentiment.

ROLAND
Giving it a home is more than sentiment.

ELLIS
I'll buy it, Roland. How's fifteen percent off my fee?

ROLAND
But you haven't even looked at it.

ELLIS
Sure I have. I looked when I wrapped it.

ROLAND
Fifteen percent off is fine.

ELLIS
(To Cora.)
I hope you don't mind.

CORA
How much *is* your fee?

ROLAND
Enough so that fifteen percent amounts to something.

CORA
I was hoping it would be less.

ELLIS
Sometimes it is.
(To April.)
But when the museum hires me, it's always more.

APRIL
Good for you! And for starving artists everywhere. There is nothing like a collector who makes lots of money.

ELLIS
Money?! Me?! Ha!
(To Roland.)
Do I haul 303 along with the rest?

Roland throws his hands up,
hopelessly.

ELLIS (cont'd)
(As he picks up 303. Laughing.)
She calls me a collector! That painting, ma'am, now my one and only, does not a collection make.

Ellis exits with 303.

JEREMY
(To April.)
Roland asked. So you came. They **pay** you for this?!

ROLAND
Please, Jeremy. It's not April's fault that...that---

JEREMY
That everywhere you look there's crap, and that what's worth looking at stays out of sight?

CORA

Some of what's worth looking at is there to see.

(To April.)

The summer before last, the museum had a show: it was super.

APRIL

Remind me.

ROLAND

You know very well what show that was.

APRIL

There were two back then.

ROLAND

One was "Georgian Silver: Flatware, Holloware, Candelabra and Candlesticks."

(To Cora.)

"Introductions" is the show you meant, right?

CORA

Right.

ROLAND

(To April.)

Don't be so coy. Take credit, April.

(To Cora.)

They could never have put it on if she hadn't worked so hard.

JEREMY

Worked hard dredging up the most self-indulgent and pseudo-profound visual effluvia the whaddaya-call-it? "The artistic community" of this city had lately emitted.

CORA

Shut up.

(To April.)

That "Introductions," was it a one-time deal?

APRIL

No. Actually, we're putting together another right now.

CORA

I've never had a show. I mean, "Introductions" is for local people who have never shown, isn't it?

APRIL

Yes.

ROLAND

Local, and under thirty.

APRIL

Of course, those local young people have to have something to show.

CORA

Oh, I have---. That mover: is he gone?

JEREMY

He went to the cleanest, driest storage facility in town. Don't you recall? With the life's work of the best painter, hands down, that this city has produced in decades. Ellis will return, Cora. For number 156. And, it may be, for your hot little self.

(To Roland and April.)

Okay, you two. Let's get outta here. This space belongs to Ms. Genius now.

CORA

April, will you please come back?

APRIL

Only if Jeremy is nice to me.

CORA

Jeremy will not be around.

APRIL

Oh, my. You do not know your landlord.

JEREMY

(To April.)

When have I ever **not** been nice to you?

ROLAND

Just now, when you attacked her.

JEREMY

I was expressing myself. That's all.

APRIL

(To Cora.)

He tails me every time I enter the building.

JEREMY

You could try sneaking in when I'm not around.

APRIL

But I love it when you're here.

(To Cora.)

He has a point of view. And he's passionate. Of course, when his passion gets the best of him, he can be thoughtless and unkind.

(To Jeremy.)

(MORE)

APRIL (cont'd)

Even so, you are a perfect sweetie.

JEREMY

(To Roland.)

Please explain to this lady that Matthew was exceptional. That, if she is a cut above the hacks in her racket who haven't a clue, but proclaim to the world in spite of it that this art is fantastic and stupendous, while that doesn't warrant their precious attention; and if she is also a cut above the even more monstrous hacks who refuse to make distinctions altogether, saying everything's equally good and equally bad all at once...explain to this lady, Roland, that if she is unlike her contemptible peers and she **gets it**, she absolutely must insist, must **demand**, that the grandiose and over-endowed institution for which she works, place at least ten of Matthew's paintings on permanent display.

ROLAND

Jeremy, I am a shopkeeper. If I had died first, Matthew would have disposed of my inventory with as much care as I've been taking to dispose of his.

JEREMY

"Inventory?!"

ROLAND

It's just that...look, I am not a professional in this field. I can't argue with April.

CORA

(To Roland.)

What an artist leaves behind is **not** mere "inventory."

JEREMY

What artists leave behind is the same as what everyone else leaves behind. Roads not traveled, unpaid debts, misremembered memories...and failure upon failure upon failure. But, once in a while, in the rarest while, success. No: not success. Simply something good. And this something good...it's not even something the artist leaves behind. It was always there, always everywhere. Matthew opened himself to that something, and through him, in 195 and 244 and others, it revealed itself.

ROLAND

What on Earth can you possibly like about 195?

APRIL

Oh, but 195 is fabulous. It was the first piece to fulfill all that tantalizing promise I saw in 156.

JEREMY

Great. Then call Ellis. Tell him not to stick it in that clean, dry tomb after all. Tell him to bring it to the museum.

CORA

Really, April, if the painting is so good...

APRIL

It doesn't work that way, my dear.

JEREMY

(To Cora.)

That is correct. So you are in luck. By excluding what has value, they free up space for the kind of stuff I imagine you will be pitching to them.

CORA

I do wish I had enough money to rent somewhere else.

JEREMY

You don't even have enough to rent **here**. The check you gave me was your daddy's.

CORA

I am going to pay him back.

JEREMY

You spoiled kids...you all say that.

CORA

And it will be **I** who pay the rent from now on.

JEREMY

Yeah, sure.

CORA

I just got a job.

JEREMY

Oh? Then how will you find the time to manufacture masterpieces?

CORA

It's three days a week.

JEREMY

Minimum wage?

CORA

I am going to be a receptionist in a podiatry office. They pay well.

JEREMY

Well enough?

CORA

Listen, asshole, my mother **does** make the minimum wage. As for my father: he's been looking for work since they laid him off three years ago. You call me spoiled?! You, who just hang out while your twelve tenants fork over all that cash every single month?!

JEREMY

All what cash? I charge what people like you can afford. When you can afford more, do please move out.

ROLAND

But why ever would she want to?

CORA

Why ever **wouldn't** I?

APRIL

It's true, Cora. You won't find a better studio in this town at twice the price.

(To Jeremy.)

Or twice what Matthew was paying, anyhow.

JEREMY

I haven't raised the rent.

(To Cora.)

You are so-o-o right. I just hang out. That is all I do. But, damn it, once in a blue moon, duty calls.

(To all three.)

Please excuse me. I have to replace a faucet in the studio next door.

Jeremy starts to exit, then turns back.

JEREMY (cont'd)

(To Cora.)

You want to have nothing to do with me. Fair enough. But tomorrow, should you have discovered any imperfections here that require my attention, or if you choose to seek my assistance for any other reason, you can find me on the roof, patching it up and cleaning out the gutters.

Jeremy exits.

ROLAND

(To Cora.)

Matthew was a travel agent.

APRIL

Roland, nobody her age can possibly know what you're talking about.

ROLAND

(To Cora.)

Once upon a time, before people got to tapping upon the screens of devices in order to buy plane tickets and make hotel reservations...

CORA

Yes, yes, yes, yes. He was a travel agent. So?

ROLAND

A full-time travel agent. Till ten years ago. We got to take trips on the cheap. All over the planet.

APRIL

Including the Caribbean.

ROLAND

Sometimes we even went for free.

APRIL

(To Cora.)

It was in the Caribbean that Roland found his calling.

ROLAND

(To Cora.)

Well, like I said: he used to be full-time. But that still did not stop him from producing all his...his---

APRIL

Life's work.

CORA

I want a full-time job. I asked for one. I took what I could get.

APRIL

If you found one, I don't doubt you would still be very productive. But as it is, you are even better off, aren't you, having an extra couple of days a week to do what you love to do?

CORA

What I **need** to do.

APRIL

Okay. Need to do. For now.

CORA

Now? I don't understand.

ROLAND

Matthew kept at it for over sixty years.

CORA

I want to be in that show.

ROLAND

Matthew never **was** in a show.

APRIL

I will be happy to give you due consideration, Cora. If we end up placing one of your pieces in the next "Introductions," tell me: will that fire you up?

CORA

Oh, yes!

APRIL

And so, will you burn brilliantly and, as quickly as you came to shine, then turn to ash? Or, when the show comes down, and no one pays attention any longer to the fruits of this "need" of yours, will there at least still be living embers?

CORA

There will still be **flames**.

APRIL

Don't you think you're bound to end up joining the countless others, from my generation and generations before, who, at your age, could not dream of giving up but, after a year or three or five of rejection, of frustration, of isolation, gave up altogether?

CORA

I will never give up.

APRIL

Not six years from now, when you have your first baby?

CORA

Baby?! There will be no babies for me.

ROLAND

Matthew had four kids. I have two.

APRIL

Who cost you a fortune.

ROLAND

Did Matthew tell you that?

APRIL

If Jeremy doesn't watch out, he's going to wake up as a daddy one of these days, too.

ROLAND

No he won't. He went and got himself fixed. Ages ago. That is a tidbit Matthew told **me**. Anyway, my kids were worth every penny.

APRIL

(To Cora.)

And in twenty years, when you're contemplating the cost of sending those children, whom you are now determined not to have, to college, and when you're beginning to wonder what you'll live on when you're old...will this exhilarating and marvelous and laughably mysterious **need** still drive you?

ROLAND

According to Jeremy, there is nothing laughable about it.

APRIL

Yes. Isn't he wonderful?

ROLAND

(To Cora.)

According to Jeremy, when the need's not there, there's no need to bother.

APRIL

More than that, Roland: he thinks that when the need's not there, there is a need **not** to bother. Because since what one is after, or should be after, is nothing but the wheat, you don't want to have to pick through bigger and bigger piles of chaff in order to find it.

CORA

Who is Jeremy to say which is the wheat and which is the chaff?

APRIL

Who is **he** to say and...who am **I** to say? But I have this job, and so I have to say.

CORA

You have qualifications.

APRIL

So you presume.

ROLAND

(To Cora.)

Do **you**?

CORA

I have a B.F.A. And an M.F.A. I had great teachers.

ROLAND

Matthew went to Korea right out of high school. "Boredom punctuated by moments of terror." That's what war is, according to some, at least, who ought to know. He took up drawing to kill that boredom, and never looked back. Never went back to school, either.

APRIL

That was the smartest decision he could ever have made.

ROLAND

You think so? He always wondered.

APRIL

Why? What could he have learned? I thought I had a place to go before I went to college. Then they "educated" me, and I headed elsewhere.

CORA

Where **was** that place you had to go?

APRIL

(Laughs.)

Damned if I know. Or knew then, for that matter.

CORA

So what's wrong with elsewhere?

APRIL

Nothing. For me. I've been going elsewhere after elsewhere my entire life, and it has been great. But Matthew was someone who knew, more or less, while in a curious way exactly, too, where he had to go. And elsewhere, certainly if it was outside the arts, but even if it was right there within them, was not it. He kept on the right path, and kept arriving at the right destinations, no matter how much he may have second-guessed himself.

ROLAND

It was rough for him, April. No one caring, except me, and what did I know about painting anyway?

APRIL

Jeremy cared.

ROLAND

Jeremy? He blew Jeremy off. Right from the git-go. Thought the guy was loopy. But after a while---quite a while---yes: Jeremy's interest gratified him. Yours did, when you finally came along, too. But for a long time, we had a tough time. Oh, I could take the sulking, and the raging, and the wagon-loads of sour grapes, but when the bitterness took hold, when he hardened into that bleak, icy, wordless clench that went on and on, and wouldn't let go, and seemed to wrench his soul away...

APRIL

You took him on yet another of your trips to Barbados.

ROLAND

No. To Aruba. And **I** didn't take **him**. I made **him** take **me**. Matthew got us a fantastic package deal. Oh, my, how he hated it there! I, on the other hand, jauntily equipped with my trusty snorkel, was in heaven. After a week, I was so happy, **he** started being happy, too.

CORA

Was he bitter when he died?

ROLAND

Well, the bitterness did creep back when we got home. But then, gradually, it just shriveled up...wasted away. He went on, free of it, for years and years, canvas after canvas. I have no idea what makes you young artists "need" to do what you do, but way after Matthew left his own needful youth behind, and his middle age...all through those later years until he passed, what kept him at it wasn't need at all. There was no drive, no compulsion. Nor any aspiration, either. There wasn't anything you could even call a reason. He and his work had become one and the same. And I...I shall keep doing all I can for his work, because it is what is left of him. I will tell Ellis to bring back 195...

(To April.)

That is the one to save, isn't it?

APRIL

It is one of thirty or forty or maybe more.

ROLAND

(To Cora.)

Ellis will bring 195 back when he comes to pick up his 156, and you can hang it here. When he starts to tell you all over again that you can't keep it if you don't pay for it, feel free to clobber him just like you went about clobbering Jeremy.

(To April.)

Storage is expensive. I can't support it for more than a year. I will then hire Ellis again to empty the unit and

(MORE)

ROLAND (cont'd)

take everything in it to the dump. You're not going to change your mind, I know, but remember that for the next year...year or so, or maybe even for the tiniest bit more than a year or so, remember that just in case you do change your mind about 303 or...or...you know the numbers, about some other---

Roland cries. April embraces him. After a few moments, he kisses her, then heads for the door.

CORA

Come back, Roland!

Roland turns back.

CORA (cont'd)

Matthew's painting...I want you with me when I hang it.

ROLAND

(To April.)

You may give Cora my contact information.

Roland exits.

APRIL

My own degree---the only degree I have---is bachelor of science. In nursing. Wherever it was I had once thought I had to go, I found myself working on the wards. There were enormous wards back then: long rooms, and open, but stifling, with rows of curtained beds. People died of all kinds of things they no longer die of nowadays. At least in countries like ours. This, they call progress. Tell me: in art, what is progress?

CORA

Innovation?

APRIL

To what end?

CORA

To wake people up?

APRIL

Who says they're asleep?

(Pause.)

And if they are, why should yours, Princess Charming, be the kiss that awakens them?

CORA

I apply myself. I wrestle. I concentrate. And then I execute.

APRIL

Expecting what?

CORA

Right now, I expect that you will---

APRIL

What I will do is evaluate your work, Cora, on the basis of a committee's criteria and a modicum of my own judgment. A few months as a nurse, then I quit. Went to Paris. Nine days on a marginally seaworthy tub nobody ever heard of. Nine days of ever-changing ocean under ever-changing skies. Sunups, sundowns, and weathers...the rousing rush that suffuses you when you dare first venture into the great wide world. Unless, of course, your voyage takes place within the crowded confines of a metal tube at thirty-five thousand feet. That ocean, that air, that spray...the endlessly restless power that buffets and envelops you.

CORA

What did you do in Paris?

APRIL

For a living? Odd jobs.

CORA

This was when?

APRIL

The fifties.

CORA

Wow! I mean, all those great people! Matisse, Derain...

APRIL

By the time I showed up, Cora, they had both been dead for over a year.

CORA

But Braque was still there, wasn't he? And Picasso...

APRIL

...was not in Paris. He was in the Midi.

CORA

Marie Laurencin was in Paris. That, I am sure of. Oh, how I would have loved to meet Marie!

APRIL

The day I arrived, I'm afraid, was the very day she happened to die. But yes: for a twenty-two year old newly-minted bohemian, it **was** "wow." I took up etching. The very **un**modernist Rembrandt was my inspiration, but I didn't tell anyone, because I wanted everyone to think I was cool.

CORA

And wanted to have cool lovers?

APRIL

I wanted lovers, cool or otherwise, whom I actually respected and whose company I enjoyed.

CORA

What high standards you had!

APRIL

Perhaps. But not so high that I haven't a lot to recall with pleasure.

CORA

I enjoy the company of **my** lovers. Most of the time. And I sort of respect some of them, too.

APRIL

Good bye, Cora.

CORA

I didn't mean to suggest I'm indiscriminate.

APRIL

Just horny?

(Pause. With a laugh.)

How shockingly natural. As for me...let's say I have long since reached another stage in life. You think you're a real tiger, don't you?

CORA

When I want a guy, I get all over him. I drive him wild. Then the guy gets all over me.

APRIL

That will do. My question was not an invitation for you to elaborate upon your *modus operandi*.

CORA

Do you respect Jeremy?

(Pause.)

For whatever crazy reason, you clearly do enjoy his company.

APRIL

While I was living the life in Paris, Jeremy was gearing up for kindergarten. Look at me. Tell me I'm not old.

CORA

Jeremy is old, too.

APRIL

In your eyes, child, yes. In your bright eyes. But he's not **that** old, and he certainly doesn't feel it. Matthew used to tell me Jeremy wished that he himself were gay, because he couldn't stop craving women---ripe ones, in their prime---who drove him nuts. He kept wishing the lust would go away, so he could be content.

CORA

With no companionship at all?

APRIL

If Jeremy were capable of being solitary, he wouldn't keep constantly hovering around his menagerie of tenants. Whereas **I** could go merrily along without ever seeing or talking to anyone ever again.

CORA

Oh, yeah. Right.

APRIL

If I could squeeze enough income out of what savings I have, I would move, quite alone, into a little house on a dirt road somewhere in the Great Basin desert's farthest reaches.

CORA

Jeremy enjoys **your** company, April.

APRIL

How do you know?

CORA

I just watched the two of you in action. He also respects you. Respects you so much that it doesn't only pain him, it **disappoints** him when you say or do what he doesn't like. May I please have your card?

April hands Cora her card, then turns to leave.

CORA (cont'd)

I'll call you as soon as I'm all moved in.

April turns back.

APRIL

He enjoys my company. I enjoy his. Who needs it? You are right, though: he also respects me. And, absolutely in spite of myself, I can not deny I respect that fervent, maddening man right back.

April exits.

###END OF SCENE ONE###

SCENE TWO

About six months later. Evening. An office in the museum. Two or three desks, upon one of which sits Ellis' baseball cap. A coffeemaker on a table or counter, with a mini fridge beneath. Some chairs.

Jeremy on his feet, Ellis seated.

JEREMY

...concerns of that nature notwithstanding, I **am** willing to admit, even the stuff that is irrefutably dreadful does deserve attention.

Jeremy partially opens the door, and looks out. The unintelligible voices of a partying crowd become audible. He shuts the door.

JEREMY (cont'd)

But, honestly, when you went around picking up all the purportedly artistic what-not that constitutes this show, didn't you wish April had had the good judgment, in at least some cases, to select other pieces instead?

ELLIS

I want them to pay me, that's all.

JEREMY

Of course. **I** want my tenants to pay **me**.

ELLIS

Don't they?

JEREMY

Sooner or later. Not entirely without exception, but when there's genuine hardship, you do really have to make allowances. I have never ended up evicting anyone. Except for a certain slob who didn't take out his garbage. He was actually saving it all. Maybe for some conceptual project. Which, if he had finished it, the overseers of the art world would no doubt have heaped with praise. Or maybe he was saving it because he was psychotic. Who knows? Anyway, the whole building stank. The Health Department showed up. I kicked him out.

ELLIS

I can't live on I-O-U's.

JEREMY

Yes, April told me a few minutes ago you told her that. She then, you will be happy to know, proceeded to corner the pompous flunky who writes this place's checks.

ELLIS

Really?

JEREMY

And went about chewing him out. "Oh, April," the guy protests, "not now. We mustn't talk money at an opening. Do have a glass of merlot."

ELLIS

You and another party come to an agreement. You do the job right, and on time. Why doesn't the other party pay on time?

JEREMY

Has this not ever happened to you before?

ELLIS

It has. I still don't get it, though. That Wofford woman is out there. Did you know the Wofford Gallery actually stiffs artists altogether when she finds buyers for them? Says they should be grateful, that after enough of their work sells, she can promote them more effectively and raise their prices, so in the long run she'll be able to pay them a whole lot more?

JEREMY

I saw Cora and Wofford with their heads together right before I came in here.

(Pause.)

Hey, relax. April's tough. Old and dried up, but what a backbone! You will get your check tonight.

(Pause.)

You **have** warned Cora about Wofford, haven't you? Why is she even giving that slimeball dealer the time of day?

(Pause.)

Hey, Ellis, everyone knows you've been doing Cora. And believe me, no one detests small talk as much as I when the business at hand is copulation. But really, you should have warned her.

(Pause.)

Well, if I may resume my observations about this exhibition whose opening impresses me primarily with its shortcomings, I do admit, and I'm willing to admit to April, one ought to allow for uncertainty. To provide exposure to questionable material and give novices the benefit of the doubt. Because if you don't encourage people who risk and dare and make a mess of things, you're liable to knock off that rare bird who could actually take flight. Don't you think?

ELLIS

Why ask me?

JEREMY

You bought Matthew's 156.

ELLIS

On a whim.

JEREMY

You knew what you were doing.

ELLIS

It was an act of charity.

JEREMY

Bullshit. The painting has "value." That is the word you used.

ELLIS

So I made an investment.

JEREMY

There was another word you used. "Price" was not it.

ELLIS

It didn't have to be. I still got the thing for a song.

JEREMY

The other word you used was "honor." And so, whether you like it or not, Ellis, I am inclined to credit you with discernment, and hold you in more than a little regard.

April opens the door. Partying voices again. Those lines that are intelligible emerge just above the din.

VOICE #1

...know, of course, what they say: *ars---*.

VOICE #2

Ars longa, yes.

VOICE #3

Hey, try this gorgonzola!

April enters, shutting the door. The voices become inaudible.

APRIL

(Handing Ellis a check.)

Here.

Ellis takes the check, looks it over.

APRIL (cont'd)

(To Jeremy.)

Your girlfriend's looking for you.

JEREMY

What girlfriend?

ELLIS

(Pocketing the check.)

Thanks, April.

APRIL

You earned it. Now, tell Jeremy you can't continue talking about whatever it is you've been talking about.

JEREMY

The woman is my date. That's all she is.

APRIL

She sure is sexy.

JEREMY

Which is why she is my date. It so happens, also, that she is a bore. Until it is time to take her home, I will therefore go on conversing with this fine young man.

ELLIS

Jeremy, I have nothing to say.

APRIL

(To Ellis.)

You go back out there yourself. You should be with Cora.

JEREMY

What we have been talking about, April, is what is dear to your heart. Ellis may not be able to tell, in every single case, what has artistic merit and what doesn't, but he has a feel. He's on his way. One day, he may even be as perceptive as you.

APRIL

I? Perceptive?

JEREMY

Of course.

APRIL

You are saying I'm perceptive?

JEREMY

Correct. And you judge wisely, and your instincts are uncanny. You, April, have depth. And a soul.

ELLIS

She is also elegant, wouldn't you say?

JEREMY

What does that have to do with it?

ELLIS

And she's beautiful.

APRIL

What is with you two?

JEREMY

The thing that offends me is you persist in doing the bidding of fools.

APRIL

That's more like it.

JEREMY

No, it isn't. Before I got here, I made a resolution: to bend over backwards this evening, and be indulgent.

APRIL

Good. Tell me you're wild about the show.

JEREMY

It is deficient.

ELLIS

You like Cora's piece, don't you?

JEREMY

Not all that much.

ELLIS

You bought the maquette.

APRIL

He did?

ELLIS

(To Jeremy.)

The finished sculpture is nothing but the maquette writ large.

JEREMY

It is the maquette blown up with bombast and smothered in superfluous patina.

ELLIS

April?

APRIL

Roland likes it.

JEREMY

That's no argument. But I **did** resolve to be indulgent this evening. We know the pool of work you had to choose from was what a less tolerant man than I might, with justification, call execrable, and so if the show is deficient, it is not your fault. It occurred to me, though, that Ellis, while making his rounds, had the opportunity to see stuff you did **not** select, and I was wondering if he might be inclined to second guess one or two of your picks. Not by way of challenging you, but as an exercise. To sharpen his wits.

ELLIS

My wits are plenty sharp enough. The maquette can't hold a candle to the full size, completed sculpture.

Cora opens the door. Partying voices again, some intelligible above the din.

VOICE #4

...is calling our babysitter right now...

Cora enters. She shuts the door, and the voices become inaudible.

CORA

April! Do you have a tablet? I forgot to bring my iPad.

April opens a desk drawer, takes out a tablet.

ELLIS

They paid me.

CORA

Hoo-ray.

APRIL

(Typing in her pass code.)

It's unlocked. Here.

CORA

Do I need a wi-fi code?

APRIL

It's connected.

CORA

Thanks!

Cora opens the door. Partying voices again.

VOICE #3

...oh, but that is so fucking vulgar!

Cora exits, shuts the door behind her. The voices become inaudible.

ELLIS

(To Jeremy.)

Not only is she a great sculptor. Have you seen her acrylics?

JEREMY

Yes.

ELLIS

And...?

JEREMY

I resolved this evening to refrain from---. Have **you** seen her acrylics, April?

APRIL

I have. Jeremy, when you escort a woman to an event like this, you do not strand her in the crowd.

JEREMY

She's a big girl. And she can spout high-falutin' nonsense with the best of 'em. The lady is in her element. You do prefer oil to acrylic, April, don't you?

APRIL

If Cora pursues her acrylic painting with the same modulated and insightful unpredictability she applies to her work in clay, I will continue to keep an eye on her.

JEREMY

What if she goes digital?

(Pause.)

That digital installation you selected for inclusion, April...

APRIL

Yes?

JEREMY

I would not dream of disparaging it.

APRIL

(To Ellis.)

You, of course, are bound be enthusiastic about whatever Cora does.

JEREMY

(To Ellis.)

Are you?

(Pause.)

You like her. Super. But don't let that blind you, man. Be cold.

APRIL

You're not cold.

JEREMY

Oh yes I am. I have taken in this show with the iciest detachment. Do strive to ensure that next time "Introductions" comes around, it affords dispassionate museum-goers like me the opportunity to savor, among other things, the cream of those *objets d'art* that 3-D printers will by then no doubt be puking out.

Roland opens the door. Partying voices again.

VOICE #1

...said was **shapes!**

VOICE #3

...wild pitch with two out in the...

Roland enters.

ROLAND

Have you seen Cora's web site?!

VOICE #1

I did not say **forms!**

Roland shuts the door, and the voices become inaudible.

ROLAND

I need to sit.

Roland sits.

ROLAND (cont'd)

(To Ellis.)

She is a very impressive young lady.

(To Jeremy.)

I bet you can't stand that sculpture of hers. What a jerk you are, Jeremy.

APRIL

Now, now, Roland. We have been having a calm and reasonable discussion. Jeremy offered his opinion about her piece and,

(MORE)

APRIL (cont'd)

believe it or not, he never did go so far as to say he can't stand it.

ROLAND

I was on my feet all day at the store. These festivities are way too much for me. The festivities, April, not the show. The show is superb. You did a splendid job.

JEREMY

The show is not superb. There is no Matthew in it. No Matthew-**ness**. Not one single piece belongs to his universe.

ROLAND

His oil painting universe is retro, Jeremy. Haven't you heard?

JEREMY

I am not talking about medium. Or about genre, or about style, or about whether or not something is there that amounts to "content." What I am saying is that in this entire show, not one single piece conveys what Matthew brought to his work.

ROLAND

Insufferable self-importance.

JEREMY

No. And don't be peevish. You used to keep pissing him off with your insufferable flippancy, Roland, but he kept on loving you dearly. Just as you loved him. Yes?

Roland nods, slowly and with feeling.

JEREMY (cont'd)

What Matthew brought to his work, that is absent here, is a fierce resolve to never stop contending with the sweep of things.

ELLIS

What is that supposed to mean?

APRIL

It means that Jeremy is a lot sharper than you may think.
(To Roland)

How are your fish?

ROLAND

A couple of my dottybacks died. But I just got a shipment of neon gobies and valentini puffers. All in excellent health, thank you very much. Jeremy, do please let me set up an aquarium for you.

(Pause. To Ellis.)
He never fails to turn me down.

(To Jeremy.)
I'll sell you everything at cost. The tank, the pump, the heater. Filters and chemicals. Corals and inverts...and a perfectly balanced population of the most gorgeous creatures you could ever hope to see.

Jeremy gives Roland a look, then goes to the door.

APRIL
Atta boy, Jeremy. Go! Back to that oh-so-sexy date, and conquer her with your irrepressible charm.

ROLAND
What charm?

Jeremy opens the door. Partying voices again.

VOICE #1
...whether or not all that impasto actually enhances the...

Jeremy exits. He shuts the door, and the voices become inaudible.

ROLAND
You meant what you just said, didn't you?

APRIL
Absolutely. If he's going to end up in bed with her, the least he can do is be a pleasant companion.

ELLIS
Jeremy is a dope.

APRIL
How come you are not out there with Cora?

ELLIS
If he weren't a dope, it would be you he took to bed.

APRIL
My, oh my! Ellis! How gallant of you!

ELLIS
You love him.

(Pause.)
That's what Cora says.

ROLAND

(To April.)

Do you deny it?

APRIL

I have loved many men.

ROLAND

With satisfaction.

APRIL

And without, as well. Roland, don't look at me like that. I'm not pretending it's all the same to me. But you and I have reached an age where we should be glad to have what we have, and expect nothing more.

ROLAND

(To Ellis)

That is some web site Cora has! Photo upon photo of her marvelous work!

(To April.)

I have lunch with her.

APRIL

So she has told me.

ROLAND

(To Ellis.)

You two **should** be together out there.

(Pause. To April.)

We have lunch once a month. Every third Monday. By every **second** Monday, I find myself dying to see what she's been up to. She's showing her web site around right now. Going to hook up with a dealer. Just you watch.

APRIL

Wofford, I hope.

ELLIS

Wofford?! You must be kidding?!

APRIL

She is the one gallery owner in this town who doesn't interfere with the people she represents. If Cora lands Wofford as her dealer, she will be able to move along without pressure or misdirection. Again, Ellis: Why aren't you out there with her?

(Pause.)

Have you two been fighting?

ELLIS

No.

ROLAND

Lovers not fighting? That isn't normal.

ELLIS

Normal?! Who are **you** to talk about lovers who are **normal**?!

A momentary take between Roland and April, who then heartily crack up.

APRIL

I gotta go mingle.

April opens the door. Partying voices again.

VOICE #4

...was...was totally obliterated.

VOICE #1

Wiped off the face of...!

April exits. She shuts the door, and the voices become inaudible.

ROLAND

Okay, Ellis: out with it.

(Pause.)

I know what it is to be a lover. And, just like you, I **am** a **man**.

ELLIS

Cora and I are fine.

ROLAND

What do you do together?

(Pause.)

Talk?

ELLIS

Of course we talk.

ROLAND

About what?

(Pause.)

What else do you do?

(Pause.)

Do you laugh?

(Pause.)

C'mon. I know you laugh.

(Pause.)

You hold each other, don't you?

(Pause.)

My wife and I...we used to hold each other. Matthew and I...it's been nearly a year since **we** did. April and I,

(MORE)

ROLAND (cont'd)

too...we held each other on that day you cleared out the studio. Her tender consolation, that moment of grace in the bleak night of my grief...but it wasn't the kind of holding, and being held, I miss. My wife and I, we used to hold each other and...we used to make love, too. I liked it. For me, though, it was...well, it was **queer**! Yes! That is the word! Exactly. What was **never** queer for me were the straightforwardness and irrepressible potency of men. A man's embrace. Matthew's embrace. Walking out on my wife was the cruelest thing I have ever done. But she got over it. How would Cora feel if you dropped out of her life?

ELLIS

It isn't as if we were married.

ROLAND

Is it as if marriage would be out of the question?

ELLIS

No. Not for me, at least.

ROLAND

Well, then, if it wouldn't be out of the question for her, either, I recommend it. Do you want kids?

ELLIS

Yes.

ROLAND

Cora doesn't.

(Pause.)

Well, there **are** women who don't. I once asked April, point blank, if she had children. She did not actually say no, mind you, but my hunch is---. In any case, when I asked, what she did was change the subject. So I got in her face. I challenged her to open up. She stared me down. "None of your business, Roland." That, without uttering a word, was what she told me. Who knows? Maybe she does have children. And grandchildren. Even great grandchildren.

(Pause.)

Ellis, I have taken an interest in you and Cora. I couldn't help it. I am fond of you both. I apologized to April for my prying back then. I apologize to you for my prying just now. I merely want to emphasize that it **is** normal to fight. About petty things, no less things, like having a family, that are anything but. Differences do, yes, sometimes turn out to be irreconcilable. But sometimes, when the differences between people who love one another seem irreconcilable, those people end up...reconciling.

ELLIS

You say April once shut you up with a look. Me...I'll stick to words. You are clueless. Butt out, Roland.

ROLAND

(Standing.)

I've had a long day. I'm not all that steady tonight. But I want to make one more go 'round before I leave.

Roland opens the door. Partying voices again.

VOICE #3

Cheddar?

VOICE #2

Ars longa, vita brevis does not mean what you think it means.

ROLAND

Come, please.

VOICE #3

Who eats cheddar?

ROLAND

I need your arm.

Ellis takes Roland's arm and, as the two exit, shuts the door. Pause. The door opens. Partying voices again.

VOICE #3

...this climate denier walks into a bar and he---

April propels Cora into the office, then shuts the door. The voices become inaudible.

APRIL

No, Cora! Not Pelton! If you---

CORA

His clientele are astute buyers who hold the Pelton Gallery in the highest esteem.

APRIL

"Gallery?!" That place?! It is a den of schlock. What did he say to you?

(Pause.)

That your acrylics are sensational? That you have a future at the top? That all you have to do to get there is...what? Tweak your focus? Shift your palette just a bit?

CORA

He said if I continue to paint, with some adjustments, along the same lines as I have been doing, he is sure he can sell my acrylics. Yes, April, that's right: with adjustments. He thinks I have talent, and he looks forward to dropping some of the names I networked with at school. We talked percentages, and settled on fifty-fifty, with no deductions from my portion on any pretext, whether it be incidental costs or anything else. He will come to my studio tomorrow, and if we then find we are still on the same page, we will head straight to the office of a notary and formalize our agreement.

APRIL

What about your sculpture?

CORA

It's a dead end.

APRIL

You can't know that.

CORA

Where do you propose I go with it?

APRIL

Where would you like to go with it?

(Pause.)

Dead end, my foot.

CORA

I have no interest any more in clay.

APRIL

Fine. What does interest you? Stone?

CORA

I would like to try that. And to play around with some metal, too. But not at the pathetically small scale I have been working at. If I sculpt again, it is going to be big.

APRIL

When you sculpt again. How 'bout making that tomorrow, with apologies to Pelton, whom you will of course be unable to meet?

(Pause.)

What's up with Ellis? He's been brooding.

(Pause.)

Well, he has high expectations of people. Unrealistic, maybe but...how can you not admire him for that?

CORA

And love him for that.

APRIL

For that, and other things?

CORA

Shall I count the ways?

APRIL

Do you have the time to count them? You are never not in a great big hurry.

CORA

I am ambitious, April.

APRIL

Do you ever just sit still?

CORA

To do the work I would like to do, I need money. Not just for rent, and materials, and to feed myself. But for debt payments. My education wasn't cheap. Every month, the bank extracts a hefty chunk of change from me, and it's going to keep on extracting for a long, long time. I earn a few bucks at my job. I apply for grants: no luck yet. If Pelton can sell my acrylics, and I can keep cranking them out, then I will keep cranking them out.

APRIL

And set sculpture aside?

CORA

I'll get back to it.

APRIL

When?

CORA

Soon enough.

APRIL

In a year?

(Pause.)

In two?

CORA

In no more than...certainly no more than five.

APRIL

I'll see that bet, and give you more rope yet by raising it to ten. Most likely, I will no longer be around by then. But if I am, and my mind still works, I will track you down,

(MORE)

APRIL (cont'd)

Cora. I have always managed to bite my tongue when I could have said to someone "I told you so," but I will not bite it when it's time to say that to you.

CORA

Why are you so sure you won't like my acrylics?

(Pause.)

You like the ones I've done up until now, don't you?

APRIL

They're okay. What Ellis has been brooding about...would I be wrong to presume it has something to do with you?

CORA

I can't make him happy.

APRIL

What's become of those other guys you used to conquer with your erotic skills?

CORA

Search me. Since I got to know Ellis, I've only been with him.

APRIL

What a lucky fellow he is! The sole beneficiary of that lusty femininity Cora brings so ferociously to bear.

(Pause.)

Tell me about him.

CORA

Tell you what? You know him pretty well.

APRIL

I know he's industrious and reliable and ethical. Well...so is Jeremy, for that matter. Jeremy the stud. Ellis doesn't seem at all like Jeremy *that* way.

(Pause.)

He doesn't foam at the mouth like Jeremy does, either. Would you call him a man of few words?

CORA

He talks enough.

APRIL

About what?

CORA

Everyday things.

APRIL

And intimate things?

(Pause.)

Do **you** talk to **him** about intimate things?

CORA

It's fascinating to listen to him, actually. He's enormously curious and well-read. Did you know he was a Ph.D. candidate? In history. He goes on and on with facts I never knew and the most interesting ideas I have ever heard.

(Pause.)

We don't talk about intimate things.

APRIL

I should think that after the first flush of excitement, and having spent so much time with him to the exclusion of anyone else, you would want more than just to chitchat about everyday things and to take in his facts and ideas with fascination.

(Pause.)

That first flush of excitement: how did it go?

CORA

It was a disaster.

APRIL

And the second flush?

CORA

Also a disaster. Before him, guys always got...y'know...

APRIL

Aroused, yes. Go on.

CORA

Well, there has been no third flush. When we're apart, neither of us can wait till we're together again. When we're together, he...it's like he's afraid of me.

APRIL

Sit down, Cora.

(Pause.)

Sit.

Cora sits. April draws up a chair next to Cora's.

APRIL (cont'd)

(Putting on Ellis' cap.)

I am Ellis. Hi, Cora. Lovely evening, isn't it?

April sits.

CORA
He doesn't sit next to me.

APRIL
All right.

April gets up, moves her chair
opposite Cora's, and sits again.

APRIL
I have never talked to you about Metternich and the
partition of Poland, have I?

Pause. April takes the cap off.

APRIL (cont'd)
Okay. You be Ellis.

April puts the cap on Cora.

APRIL
I am now you. Hi, Ellis. How did it go today?
(Pause.)
Play along with me, Cora. How did it go today?

CORA
I...I moved some Shaker tables and...

APRIL
Keep it up.

CORA
...paid down my student loan a few dollars more.

APRIL
Keep going.

CORA
And, well...

APRIL
(Pause.)
Ellis holds forth. That's what you told me. So get your
mouth in gear and hold forth.

Ellis opens the door. Partying
voices again.

VOICE #3
Camembert? Yes!

Ellis enters.

ELLIS

Where is my...?

VOICE #1

...according to Theodor Adorno...

Ellis shuts the door, and the voices become inaudible.

ELLIS

(Seeing the cap on Cora's head.)

...my hat?

APRIL

Cora was role-playing, Ellis. As yourself. Holding forth. On history and all the other things she loves to hear you talk about. I was not impressed.

ELLIS

By her impersonation, or by my gibberish?

CORA

My impersonation left a lot to be desired.

ELLIS

I can't believe that. Cora, you are the best mimic I know.

(To April.)

She does a great April.

(To Cora.)

Show her.

APRIL

Please, no. Do spare me.

ELLIS

Well, I admit it. I talk too much. Not always, though. Mainly when Cora's around. I hope you weren't making fun of me for that. She is such a great sport. She puts up with me no matter how incoherent I get. Did she tell you I've been thinking hard about art? It depends utterly on something I can't describe. Can you?

APRIL

I used to try.

ELLIS

And then it dawned on you, didn't it, that if you can pin it down, it has nothing to do with art after all? Science is different. You have facts, and you make theory you can test. You test, you pin it down, and you use it. So there is art, in its place; and there is science, in its. **Real** science. There is also fake science. It can't test. Instead, it cooks up "models." What fake scientists do, basically, is

(MORE)

ELLIS (cont'd)

cherry-pick facts in order to promote and to advocate. I quit grad school the minute I figured that out. If I had been studying metallurgy, say, or pharmacology, I would have stuck to it, because those are strict and honest disciplines. People in them end up **making** things. Not that I didn't learn while I was there. What does the name John Law mean to you?

APRIL

I'm not sure it rings a bell.

ELLIS

He was born in Edinburgh, 1671. Actually, it doesn't matter if you never heard of him. All you need is common sense to understand the moral of his story. And to toss aside what the academic charlatans of our day expect you to believe. Which is the same as what politicians, and the interests who own them, expect you to believe, too. But I am afraid there is so much at stake for these rarefied and overpaid stakeholders who have real weight to throw around, that the likelihood of the sum total of all the common sense in the world stopping the juggernaut we are on is close to zero. Anyhow, April, as for the show: I am with Roland. It is superb. You did a splendid job. An exemplary job. In the end, honest work, done well, is what it's really all about.

Ellis snatches the cap from Cora's head, then goes to the door and opens it. Partying voices again.

VOICE #4

...no such thing as post-racial, she said, and I said...

Ellis exits and closes the door.
The voices become inaudible.

APRIL

You are Ellis. I am you. Proceed.

CORA

You just heard him. What am I supposed to add?

APRIL

"Honest work, done well," he said. Take it from there.

CORA

(Standing.)

This is silly.

APRIL

Down!

Cora sits.

APRIL (cont'd)
Ellis, would you like some coffee?

Pause. April stands, pours a cup of coffee.

APRIL
You would like your coffee with...?

CORA
Just milk.

APRIL
Is that how Ellis takes it, or is it how Cora does?

CORA
Just milk.

April adds milk to the coffee, then hands the cup to Cora.

APRIL
For a while, Ellis, let's not talk. Okay?

CORA
Sounds good to me.

APRIL
Who is "me?"

CORA
The girl you're looking at.

APRIL
I am looking at Ellis. Let's not talk, okay?

Cora stands.

APRIL (cont'd)
Plop your ass back down onto that seat!

Cora sits.

APRIL (cont'd)
Ellis, let's not talk. Okay?

CORA
Why not?

Why not, Cora. APRIL

Why not, Cora? CORA

Shhh. APRIL

There is a long, long pause. April pours herself a cup of coffee, then goes about fussing with the coffeemaker, fridge contents, and snack paraphernalia.

April---. CORA

Stay in character. APRIL

Why...why, Cora, don't you want to talk? CORA

I am content just to be with you. APRIL

Another long, long pause as April goes on fussing.

This is weird. CORA

Are you saying that in character? APRIL

In and out, both. CORA

Out is no good. APRIL
(Sitting again opposite Cora.)
Stay in.

A long, long, l-o-n-g pause. April sips her coffee.

This feels so strange. CORA

Does it, Ellis? APRIL

CORA

Yes, it---. Yes, Cora, it feels strange.

APRIL

Don't let it feel strange. Please, Ellis. Because for me, being with you---just being with you---feels wonderful. I love it when we talk, but I love being silent with you, too. When we first touched, I felt...it was like nothing I ever felt before. I want to be with you, Ellis. That is all I want. Even if we never touch again.

(Long, long pause. Then, waving her arms.)

Okay, Cora. April here. Why hasn't Ellis replied?

(Pause.)

Across from Ellis, I...that is, Cora, just sat silently, and still. When the silence finally broke, and my Cora spoke to your Ellis, why did he not reply?

CORA

There was nothing he could say.

APRIL

So it was a stalemate, was it? Were Cora and Ellis going to sit there till they mummified?

CORA

He had an impulse to...to take Cora's hand.

Pause. April stands, puts down her coffee cup, then goes to the door and opens it.

VOICE #1

Art is forever. *Ars longa!*

VOICE #2

Ars brevis.

APRIL

Shall I tell Pelton your meeting with him tomorrow is off?

CORA

No.

VOICE #3

Jeez, Louise, they are fresh out of cheese!

April exits, closing the door. The voices become inaudible. Cora sits still.

###END OF SCENE TWO###

SCENE THREE

About another six months later. Early afternoon. The studio. Two easels facing upstage, so that the paintings on them are not visible. Some wrapped canvases, propped up on the floor. An array of draped objects, evidently sculptures, by the wall and perhaps on some pedestals. A bed. A small shaving/makeup mirror by the sink. A table and a couple of chairs. On the table, there are soda cans and a pizza box, in which a couple of slices remain.

Cora stands at the sink, washing brushes and palette knife, and capping tubes of paint. Roland, a walking stick now at hand, sits at the table and finishes off a slice of pizza.

ROLAND

You make clean-up look easy. For Matthew, it was a chore.

CORA

He was cleaning up oil paint. These are acrylics. Not so messy.

ROLAND

Why do you keep inviting me back?

CORA

You keep paying for the pizza.

ROLAND

(Looking up at the fourth wall.)

It's different: number 195. Every time I come, it captures my gaze; and every time, I see something new. How odd. It *is* the same painting, after all. My fish are never, even for an instant, the same. They swarm and they spawn...rippling, and winking, and flashing more colors than the most dazzling rainbow could ever reveal. But what I see when I sit back and watch them, with the shop lights dimmed and my tanks all aglow, is one vast picture that never changes. Never. If I were to give that picture a title, it would not be a number. I would call it "Time Immemorial." It is more still than that unsettled and elusive, but altogether inert, painting up there.

Cora goes about brushing her teeth.

ROLAND

Would you like me to take off now?

CORA

In five minutes or so.

ROLAND

Do you invite me back because you pity me?

CORA

I don't pity you.

ROLAND

But I'm old and alone and getting frailer by the day.

CORA

You don't pity yourself. Stop pretending you do.

ROLAND

You win. I am at one with the guy I have become. Cora, it is a genuine joy to see you every month. But the fact is, I don't much need the company of people any more.

CORA

Just the company of fish?

(Pause.)

Do you talk to them?

ROLAND

I have lately been debating a particular hi-fin swordtail, an especially argumentative member of the species *Xiphophorus*. We cover the full spectrum of contemporary hot button issues.

CORA

You?! Debating issues?! Ha! Whenever I bring up an issue that matters to me, you doze off. Roland, you do not give the least shit about issues, hot button or...or cold zipper or otherwise.

ROLAND

I didn't say I did.

CORA

Then why, all of a sudden, would you be debating them?

ROLAND

Because when you have come to discover that a fish of yours can talk, you would be a damn fool not to keep it talking.

CORA

Let's have a sausage pizza next month.

ROLAND

Why **do** you keep having me back?

CORA

I like you.

ROLAND

That's not an answer.

CORA

It's the vibes in this place. You told me about Matthew, and I adopted him. In spirit. You belong to the vibes. You provide the continuity.

ROLAND

Aha! An opening for me to inject into our conversation the wisdom of the sage. Very well. One sees things in one's unique way. Art is a result of the way its creator sees things. Opinion, upon whose existence those infernal hot button debates depend, is a result of the way the opiner sees things. Why does this individual's understanding of the world produce art, while that one's understanding produces opinion?

CORA

It isn't either/or. Artists have opinions, like anyone else.

ROLAND

That is so. But why does your own understanding of the world, Cora, result sometimes in the creation of the one, and sometimes in the articulation of the other? What determines whether any given expression of your unique understanding becomes art or opinion?

CORA

Art is for what is special.

ROLAND

What *is* special?

Cora goes about checking/fixing herself in the mirror.

ROLAND (cont'd)

Matthew would say that what is special is: that in which there is truth.

CORA

There is truth in opinion.

ROLAND

Oh, yes! But it isn't Matthew's truth. He would contend that in order to close in on, or at least circle around, *his* meaning of this impossible word, you have to situate it. The truth which is situated within the realm of opinion appears in many guises. As we attempt to exploit, in this realm of opinion, the biases of our interlocutors, and to recruit their sentiments, we invoke truth in whichever of its guises will help us to persuade. In the realm of art, on the other

(MORE)

ROLAND (cont'd)

hand, or so Matthew would have us believe, truth does not appear in many guises, or in any guise; and it does not make itself available for use. What it does is: abide. Merely abide. Its defining characteristic is this: it is **vital**. Such, then, was Matthew's...how shall I say? Opinion. About the nature of truth, and what place it may have in the realm of art, I will not myself opine. But nor will I hold back my opinion about the realm of opinion. It is spectacularly devoid of, and doomed forever to be devoid of, any truth, whatsoever, that is **vital**.

CORA

That sausage pizza, Roland: whaddaya say we have it with mushrooms?

ROLAND

Sausage and mushrooms it shall be.

(Standing, with effort.)

It is time for me to absent myself from the premises, is it not?

There is a knock on the door. Cora opens it.

CORA

April!

APRIL

(Off stage.)

Hello, Cora.

CORA

Come in. Come in.

April enters.

APRIL

I was just visiting one of the studios upstairs.

Jeremy enters, leaving the door open.

ROLAND

You and your shadow.

APRIL

How are you doing, Roland?

ROLAND

Well enough, thank you.

APRIL

(To Cora.)

On the spur of the moment, I thought I would drop by. Am I intruding?

CORA

No, no! April, you could never intrude on me. I owe you so much.

APRIL

You owe me no more than what any of the other three dozen participants in "Introductions" owes me.

CORA

But I do owe you more.

APRIL

You had one single piece in that show, Cora. No big deal.
(Indicating the easels.)

May I?

CORA

(Hesitant pause.)

As you like.

Cora stands in place and watches.
April walks around to face the front of an easel, as Jeremy follows, and they both look. Pause.

JEREMY

(To April.)

What do you think?

(Pause. To Roland.)

She takes her time. Upstairs just now, she looked and looked and looked, and then finally came out with a string of comments that...oh, Roland, you should have been there! Every word she spoke was brilliant.

Cora remains still. April moves over to look at the other canvas, and Jeremy follows. Pause.

JEREMY

Cora, about this one, I would like to know---.

APRIL

Let's not plunge into yet another orgy of analysis right now, Jeremy, okay?

JEREMY

"Analysis?!" C'mon, April. You weren't just analyzing upstairs. You were way into it. **Excited!**

APRIL
(Eyes on the pizza.)

Pepperoni.

ROLAND

And garlic.

JEREMY

You do know, Roland, how much I get around.

ROLAND

(To April.)

And onions, too.

APRIL

Pepperoni with garlic and onions. Hmmm.

JEREMY

(To Roland.)

You know how, over and over, I get involved with women who are painful to listen to, or even just to be with. Well, I gotta tell you, if I were to meet a woman like April, one single woman like her, I could live happily ever after.

ROLAND

You **have** met a woman like April.

JEREMY

Huh? No, I haven't. Who?

ROLAND

The woman standing there.

(Pause.)

Take her in your arms.

JEREMY

This painting, Cora---

Cora remains still.

ROLAND

Jeremy, take April in your arms!

JEREMY

(To Cora.)

The painting...the painting aside, have you seen my mallet? I've been missing it ever since I replaced those broken tiles in your water closet. Maybe I left it there.

Jeremy exits behind the scrim.
April turns to face, squarely, a still-motionless Cora.

APRIL
 May I have a slice?

April and Cora stand eye-to-eye.
 Pause. Pause. Pause.

APRIL (cont'd)
 Just one slice?

Cora nods.

APRIL
 Thanks.

April picks up a slice of pizza and bites in. As Cora, continuing to stand still, watches, April, with the slice in her hand, exits. Pause. Cora then turns and takes a step or two toward the scrim.

CORA
 Come out, Jeremy. She's gone.

Jeremy enters from behind the scrim.

CORA
 It is time for Roland to leave. Please help him to his car.

JEREMY
 (To Roland.)
 Hey, man, have you had Ellis empty that clean, dry unit? And haul Matthew's paintings to...to...?

ROLAND
 To the dump? No. I asked him, but he refused.

JEREMY
 Good for him.

ROLAND
 He charmingly protested, with the most poignant fervor, that he could never contribute to the destruction of anything "graced," he said, with what he called "the essence of life."

(The briefest pause.)
 I had no trouble finding someone else to do the deed.

In an evanescent flare of dismay, Jeremy and Cora commiserate with each other by exchanging the most cursory of looks.

ROLAND

Let's go.

JEREMY

Not before Cora explains the inconsistencies in this picture, and justifies certain aspects of it that in my---

Ellis bursts into the room.

JEREMY (cont'd)

...in my opinion---

With a whoop, Ellis scoops Cora up, bringing her down with him onto the bed. As they tussle, giggles and hoots and growls and squeals fill the air, along with Ellis' cap. Roland grabs Jeremy's arm and, as the two exit, pulls the door closed behind them while sundry articles of Ellis' and Cora's clothing proceed to fly. The lights slowly fade.

###THE END###