

IMPRESSIONS

By

Jackie Martin

IMPRESSIONS

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IMPRESSIONS

Impressions was originally produced at North Cobb High School in Kennesaw, Georgia, directed by Candice Corcoran and featuring the following cast:

Walt..... Jon Beckman
Mrs. Ashby..... Haylee Hogue
Alex..... Olivia Doucelte
Daphne..... Aleisha Innocent
Carter Bloomfield..... Seth Morris
Shalayne Williams..... Savannah Tighe
Sandra St. Charles..... Amber Roldan
Miller St. Charles..... Julian Herrera
U/S for Sandra St. Charles....Caroline Greene
U/S for Shalayne Williams...Isabelle Flowers

IMPRESSIONS

CAST: 3M, 4F, 1Any

WALT	30s, male, kind but impulsive, keeping a secret.
MRS. ASHBY	50s or older, female, gallery owner, a snob.
ALEX	20s, any gender, the put-upon assistant of Mrs. Ashby.
DAPHNE	20s to 30s, female, a caterer and an aspiring artist.
CARTER BLOOMFIELD	40s or older, male, a reporter who is out of his element.
SHALAYNE WILLIAMS	20s to 30s, female, an influencer, shallow but not stupid.
SANDRA ST. CHARLES	30s to 40s, female, sardonic, vain, and bored.
MILLER ST. CHARLES	late 60s or older, male, self-important, the artist.

NOTES: The part of ALEX is written with female pronouns, but these can be changed if needed. No race or ethnicity is specified for any role. The play may be performed with or without an intermission.

TIME: Over the course of a few hours one winter evening. Present day.

PLACE: An exclusive art gallery, Ashby's Galleria, New York City.

IMPRESSIONS

IMPRESSIONS

ACT I
SCENE 1

The interior of Ashby's Galleria, a high-end art gallery on the Upper West Side of NYC. The gallery is stark, with perhaps one or two chairs or benches. The walls are white except for large paintings hung sparingly around the room. The paintings are abstract, certainly nothing special. The atmosphere is tense, an air of waiting. ALEX nervously looks over a checklist, the catering, the furniture. CARTER, SHALAYNE, SANDRA, and MILLER, all in formal attire, quietly observe the paintings while DAPHNE, dressed in plain black pants and a white shirt, serves champagne and tiny hors d'oeuvres. MRS. ASHBY, owner and curator, surveys the scene anxiously, occasionally looking at the door. When it opens, she stiffens, wide-eyed. WALT enters the room, fully bundled in a large winter coat, hat, scarf, and gloves. Mrs. Ashby deflates a bit and approaches him hastily.

MRS. ASHBY. Excuse me, young man, we're closed to the public tonight.

WALT. I'm here for the Miller St. Charles show.

MRS. ASHBY. The show will be here for six weeks, and you are welcome to come back during regular business hours. We'll open to the public on Monday. This is a closed premier. Invitation only.

WALT. I have an invitation. *(He pats his pockets, searching.)* You must be Camilla Ashby. I've seen your picture in the Ledger.

MRS. ASHBY. And you are?

WALT. Oh! I'm sorry, so rude of me. My name is Walt. Nice to meet you. *(Walt offers his hand. Mrs. Ashby does not take it, and after a moment, Walt continues searching his pockets.)*

MRS. ASHBY. Alex? *(Alex runs over with a clipboard.)*

ALEX. Yes, Mrs. Ashby?

MRS. ASHBY. Is there a person named Walt on the guest list tonight?

ALEX. *(Looks at clipboard.)* Uh, let me see...

MRS. ASHBY. There is not. You may go. *(Alex scurries away.)*

IMPRESSIONS

WALT. Wait, let me find it- *(Walt takes off his gloves, scarf, and hat, and hands them to Mrs. Ashby. He removes his outer coat and then a zip up sweatshirt and piles those on Mrs. Ashby as well. He looks nice, put together, but much less formal than the other guests. He reaches into his shirt pocket and produces an invitation. He reads it out loud.)* You are cordially invited to Ashby's Galleria for the world premiere of Miller St. Charles' newest art exhibition, "The Color of Light." Please bring this invitation for entry. *(He shows it quickly to Mrs. Ashby before putting it back into his pocket.)* I have as much a right to be here as any of your other guests. *(An uncomfortable silence as Mrs. Ashby considers him.)*

MRS. ASHBY. Alex! *(Alex hurries back over. Mrs. Ashby piles Walt's things onto Alex.)* Please take Mr....

WALT. Walt.

MRS. ASHBY. Please take Mr. Walt's things to the coat room. And see that he gets a glass of champagne.

WALT. Thank you, Mrs.- *(Mrs. Ashby turns and walks away. Walt begins to move about the room looking at the art on the walls, until he is approached by Daphne.)*

DAPHNE. Champagne, sir? *(Daphne offers to hand Walt a glass. Walt flinches and freezes that way, expecting something.)* Is everything okay, sir?

WALT. Are you going to throw that in my face as soon as I look up?

DAPHNE. ...no?

WALT. Sorry. Camilla Ashby wasn't exactly happy to meet me, so I thought... you know... *(He mimes throwing a drink, then having a drink thrown at his face.)*

DAPHNE. No, no. This is very fancy. Very expensive. We only throw the cheap stuff.

WALT. In that case... *(He takes the drink. Daphne begins to walk away but turns back.)*

DAPHNE. Hey. I shouldn't say this, but don't worry about Mrs. Ashby. She's nervous.

WALT. Women like that don't get nervous.

DAPHNE. Oh, she's nervous. Trust me, sir.

WALT. What about? This is hardly her first major opening.

IMPRESSIONS

DAPHNE. It's not really about the show. It's that Jonathan Bixby is coming. *(There is a lengthy silence in which Walt stares at Daphne.)* You know who that is, right? Jonathan Bixby?

WALT. I do.

DAPHNE. He's coming. Here. *(Another silence.)* Tonight.

WALT. And?

DAPHNE. Well, come on. I mean, Jonathan Bixby.

WALT. Yeah, you said that already. What's all the fuss about?

DAPHNE. He's a billionaire. Not only a billionaire, a *reclusive* billionaire, which makes him way more interesting. Alex told me Mrs. Ashby nearly fainted when she got the reply.

WALT. Why?

DAPHNE. He's one of the wealthiest, most famous men in the world.

WALT. He's a businessman. He doesn't know the first thing about art. Why would anyone care about his opinion?

DAPHNE. They don't want him here for his opinion. They just want him here. *(She moves into a near perfect imitation of Mrs. Ashby.)* His mere presence will elevate the status of Ashby's Galleria and everyone associated with it. *(No reaction from Walt.)* Okay, I get it. You're too cool to be impressed by wealth, and power, and fame. But look around you. These people feed on that stuff.

WALT. Do you?

DAPHNE. I don't know. It's exciting. It's not every day you get to serve hors d'oeuvres to someone super famous.

WALT. Hm. What would you say if I told you I am Jonathan Bixby?

DAPHNE. I would say you're either delusional or you think I'm an idiot. Jonathan Bixby is about 100 years old.

WALT. Fair enough. I'm Walt.

DAPHNE. Daphne. I'd better get back to work. Ashby's giving me the stink eye. It was nice to meet you, Walt. *(Daphne hurries off. Walt turns his attention to some placards on the walls next to the paintings. Mrs. Ashby notices Carter Bloomfield taking notes.)*

MRS. ASHBY. Alex, is that Carter Bloomfield?

ALEX. Yes, from The Ledger.

IMPRESSIONS

MRS. ASHBY. I know where he's from. Why did they send Bloomfield and not Northrup?

ALEX. Mr. Northrup moved to L.A. Mr. Bloomfield is The Ledger's main arts reporter now.

MRS. ASHBY. What does Carter Bloomfield know about art?

ALEX. He wrote about all those TV shows and movies.

MRS. ASHBY. That's not art.

ALEX. I mean, there's some really good stuff out right now.

MRS. ASHBY. He's a glorified gossip columnist.

ALEX. Not anymore.

MRS. ASHBY. Oh, God. This is what I'm dealing with? And on such an important night.

ALEX. There's a bright side.

MRS. ASHBY. Well, don't keep me in suspense.

ALEX. He brought his fiancée.

MRS. ASHBY. So?

ALEX. His fiancée? Shalayne Williams?

MRS. ASHBY. Am I supposed to know who that is?

ALEX. Only if you ever watch television. She was one of the final two on *Primal Love* a few seasons ago.

MRS. ASHBY. Primal what?

ALEX. *Primal Love*? You're kidding, you've never seen it? It's that reality show where women compete in these vaguely prehistoric challenges for a chance to marry this guy- The Caveman, you know?- and they live in these weird huts out in the middle of nowhere-

MRS. ASHBY. Stop. I don't care.

ALEX. Right. Well. She was on that but she's managed to turn it into a whole thing. She's a celebrity. C-list but climbing.

MRS. ASHBY. *Primal Love*. People watch this?

ALEX. Tons of people. And they love Shalayne. She won Fan Favorite on her season *and* the all-star season. She has like, a million followers.

MRS. ASHBY. (*Looking around.*) Where?

ALEX. On her socials.

MRS. ASHBY. God, my head-

ALEX. Rumor has it she's about to get her own travel show.

IMPRESSIONS

MRS. ASHBY. Well. That's something, anyway. Let's make sure our little celebrity has a good time. *(She watches as Shalayne downs one of the two champagne flutes she is holding.)* But maybe not too good a time. Mr. Bixby should be here soon, and I don't want him slipping in a pile of C-list vomit. *(Mrs. Ashby begins approaching the couple.)* Charlene Something, you said?

ALEX. Shalayne Williams! Sha-layne.

MRS. ASHBY. Carter Bloomfield, what an honor to have you here for our little show.

CARTER. Camilla, nice to see you. This is-

MRS. ASHBY. Shalayne Williams, of course. No introduction needed. My, you're even lovelier in person. How exhilarating to have a celebrity in our midst.

SHALAYNE. Oh my God, stop. You're too much. *(She leans in conspiratorially.)* Is it true that Jonathan Bixby is coming?

MRS. ASHBY. It is.

SHALAYNE. Holy. Crap. I'm like, dead. Dead! How are you still standing? Aren't you crazy nervous?

MRS. ASHBY. Nervous!? Ha, no. No, no. I'm no stranger to the well-heeled, of course, as evidenced by your presence.

SHALAYNE. But Jonathan Bixby! I mean, can you *even*?

CARTER. You have to admit Camilla, Jonathan Bixby is not your everyday guest, even for Ashby's. *(He pulls out his phone, presses record, and puts it to her face.)* How did you manage to convince him to come out of hiding?

MRS. ASHBY. I simply sent him an invitation.

CARTER. I suppose when Ashby's Gallery calls, the upper class emerges- hey, that's not a bad opener.

MRS. ASHBY. It's *Galleria*, with an "i-a."

SHALAYNE. But he's one of those- what's it called?- well, he never goes anywhere anymore! You have to be thrilled that he's coming *here*. Paparazzi camp out outside his penthouse! It's like, worldwide exposure for your gallery.

MRS. ASHBY. *(Coolly.)* Is it? I hadn't considered that.

SHALAYNE. Oh! Oh, do you remember a few years back when he punched that one guy from the *Post*? Out of control.

IMPRESSIONS

MRS. ASHBY. I do believe tonight will be much less eventful.

CARTER. I certainly hope not! I'm looking for a story, after all! Now, I'll need you to introduce me to Mr. St. Charles, and who is that over there? That man? Is he someone I should meet?

MRS. ASHBY. Oh, dear, no. That is... an unfortunate error. Apparently, properly addressing invitations was too taxing for my assistant.

ALEX. But I-

MRS. ASHBY. I'm sure she was distracted by her phone.

ALEX. Mrs. Ashby-

MRS. ASHBY. Alex, what are you doing still standing here? Go and check outside to see if Mr. Bixby is arriving yet.

ALEX. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. ASHBY. I try to give her the benefit of the doubt, but honestly. How difficult is it to copy names and addresses from a list?

CARTER. Oh, now Camilla. It's disappointing, but it will all work out. He'll realize he's out of his element and go.

MRS. ASHBY. Let's hope it's before Mr. Bixby gets here. I don't want him thinking we'll let anyone in off the street.

CARTER. You make an excellent point. Exclusivity is the key to success.

SHALAYNE. Damn, Carter, that's deep. I'll drink to that!

WALT. (*Approaching Daphne, who is refilling her trays.*) Got any tacos?

DAPHNE. Not really a taco crowd.

WALT. I'm noticing that.

DAPHNE. Impressive that you haven't been kicked out yet.

WALT. I'd like to see the rest of the show first.

DAPHNE. No need. They're all pretty much the same. (*A moment as Daphne realizes what she's said.*) I'm sorry.

WALT. Interesting turn of events. Are you an art critic in disguise? Undercover curator?

DAPHNE. Nope, I'm a caterer. Forget I said anything. I shouldn't have.

WALT. No, I'm intrigued. Tell me, what do you see that no one else sees? I mean, (*Walt gestures to a "painting" in front of him, on the 'fourth wall.'*) *this* is a Miller St. Charles original! Brand new! Never before seen by eyes outside of Miller's own head and here it is, fresh as a newborn babe, waiting to suckle at the teat of your adoration. What do you think? (*There is a long*

IMPRESSIONS

silence while Daphne and Walt look at the painting. Daphne squints, cocks her head to one side, then the other. She stands back to look at the entire thing, considering the painting carefully before making her judgment.)

DAPHNE. Meh.

WALT. Meh?

DAPHNE. You asked.

WALT. People all over the world would take offense to your meh. They'll be itching to own this canvas. St. Charles has made a fortune from his art.

DAPHNE. Oh, I know. I have a print in my apartment.

WALT. Which one?

DAPHNE. "Girl Walks on Water." It's my favorite. I'm a huge fan of Miller St. Charles.

WALT. Yeah, I could tell.

DAPHNE. His early work is so unusual. It's beautiful.

WALT. And his current work?

DAPHNE. I don't know. I guess his later stuff all started to feel a little... stale? A little commercial. "Girl Walks on Water" may have been his last great painting. The lines, the movement. You can feel her joy, her weightlessness. It used to be that way. Seeing a Miller St. Charles could make you *believe*. It assaulted you with emotion. But this thing? (*Gesturing to the painting in front of her.*) I mean, you can find something like this in any dentist's office. It's white noise.

WALT. You know what you're talking about.

DAPHNE. Well. More champagne? Escargot?

WALT. Ah, no and definitely not, thank you.

DAPHNE. Oh, do you not like snails?

WALT. Not especially. (*Sandra St. Charles saunters up behind Daphne as she continues.*)

DAPHNE. I know, they look like snot, right? I don't get to choose the food I serve; this is all Ashby. And honestly, I don't get it. How did these nasty little things become associated with wealth and class? I mean, what are these people, seagulls? Some of the most influential people in New York prowl these halls. You'd think they'd be eating tiger meat or whatever, something powerful. (*Sandra clears her throat, alerting Daphne to her presence.*)

IMPRESSIONS

Daphne turns to her.) Champagne? Escargot? (Sandra takes a glass and stares at Daphne until Daphne awkwardly walks away.)

SANDRA. It's usually the same old crowd at these things, but I haven't seen you before.

WALT. I recently moved back to New York from Cambridge.

SANDRA. Oh, England?

WALT. No, Massachusetts.

SANDRA. Ah, well. That explains the wardrobe.

WALT. Yes, I- what?

SANDRA. Tell me, Cambridge. What do you think of this painting?

WALT. This one? Well... truthfully, *(He lowers his voice a bit.)* I'm not terribly impressed with this painting *or* any of the others. *(Daphne, still nearby, hears him and stops. She glares at him, trying to subliminally send him a warning.)*

SANDRA. Oh, really?

WALT. No... these paintings- well, I mean they're *fine*, but nothing compared to his early work. It's simply that... well... *(He sees Daphne but, believing she is annoyed that he is stealing her words, he smiles and winks at her and continues.)* Those paintings, they, well... They made you *feel* things, didn't they? The artist had a point of view, something to say. These new pieces are pedestrian at best.

SANDRA. Pedestrian?

WALT. Yes. I fear our acclaimed Mr. St. Charles may be a sell-out.

SANDRA. Do you? How interesting.

WALT. Either that or he's out of inspiration. Maybe his muse left him. Maybe years ago, he had some beautiful woman in his life that inspired greatness, and now she's gone, dooming him to a life of throwing paint around with no real meaning. Or... maybe she's turned into some horrible slag.

SANDRA. Fascinating theory.

WALT. Maybe we'll never know for certain. I'm Walt, by the way.

SANDRA. Hello Walt. I'm Sandra. Sandra St. Charles.

WALT. Hell... oh.

IMPRESSIONS

SANDRA. Yes, isn't this a funny little moment? Oh, Miller! (*Miller St. Charles approaches.*) Walt, I'd like you to meet my husband- and the man of the hour- Miller St. Charles.

MILLER. Walt, eh? I've been watching you standing here, looking at this piece. Appreciating it. You're enjoying the show then?

SANDRA. Oh, Walt here has all sorts of thoughts about the show. Don't you Walt?

MILLER. Really? What thoughts?

SANDRA. Go on. (*Mrs. Ashby begins to approach, listening nervously; Daphne hurries away.*)

WALT. Oh, I don't think I ought to.

SANDRA. Nonsense! A man with such strong opinions should have the fortitude to air them publicly.

MILLER. What's that? Don't you like it?

SANDRA. Walt here thinks that you're a sell-out and that I'm an evil old witch you don't want to sleep with anymore.

WALT. You're putting words in my mouth.

SANDRA. Not really.

MILLER. What's the meaning of this?

MRS. ASHBY. Mr. St. Charles, please come with me, I'd love you to meet Carter Bloomfield from The New York Ledger. He's right over here-

MILLER. Not now. (*To Walt.*) What did you say about my wife?

WALT. I wasn't talking about your wife. I was talking about your muse.

SANDRA. So now I'm not his muse?

WALT. I didn't know - I didn't realize she was your wife. She's so... and you're so...

MRS. ASHBY. I'm sorry, Mr. and Mrs. St. Charles. Please allow me to have this man escorted out.

WALT. You can't kick me out for having an opinion.

MRS. ASHBY. I can kick you out for causing a scene.

WALT. Me? I'm perfectly calm. He's the one turning purple.

SANDRA. He's right darling, take a breath.

MILLER. Don't tell me how to breathe.

IMPRESSIONS

WALT. Look, it doesn't matter what I think. If *you* feel that your work is true, and organic, and beautiful, then what does it matter what anyone else has to say?

MILLER. You're right. It doesn't matter what you think. Look at you. You're nobody. You're probably the only person in the world who doesn't see the majesty in this painting.

WALT. (*Laughing.*) Well, that's not exactly fair. Where is... oh, Daphne! Come over here! (*Daphne, who is across the room, stiffens. All stop and look toward her. She turns slowly toward them.*) Tell him what you told me.

DAPHNE. I...uh... I was saying that "Girl Walks on Water" is one of my favorite paintings of all time, and that its beauty overtakes me every time I look at it.

WALT. Not that, the other thing. About the dentist's office.

DAPHNE. I don't know what you're talking about, *sir*.

WALT. She said-

DAPHNE. Right! I said that if... I... were in a dentist's office... then, I'd be lucky if this painting were there because... it would calm me down to see the beautiful colors.

WALT. No, no, remember? You said-

MILLER. Who cares what she said? I'm supposed to be offended, am I? I'm supposed to be sad that some bum off the street and a *waitress* don't understand my genius?

WALT. But who decides what's genius? What's genius to you may be... what was it? White noise, to others.

MILLER. White noise?!

WALT. I'm not trying to start an argument. I simply find the debate interesting.

CARTER. Who exactly is this guy?

MRS. ASHBY. He's nobody.

MILLER. Precisely.

MRS. ASHBY. Alex, please gather this man's things.

WALT. I'm not going anywhere. Listen, all I'm saying is that what makes good art is subjective. You know, beauty and the eye of the beholder and all that.

IMPRESSIONS

MILLER. That old nonsense. Silliest saying there is. Beauty is obvious. Beauty is the universal language. (*Walt scoffs.*) I mean it! You and I could not be more different, but we are both men. We know beauty when we see it. We can't help but have a physical reaction.

WALT. Are you saying that your paintings give you a-

MILLER. I'm *saying* that spouting some nonsense about beauty being subjective or worse, being on the *inside*- it's not doing anyone any good. People like to think everything exists on a spectrum, but the truth is, if something is not beautiful, it's not worth as much.

WALT. That's not true.

MILLER. Appearances matter.

SHALAYNE. That part's true. (*She holds up her empty glass.*) Can I get another one of these?

MILLER. Look at you. You knew that when you chose to show up here today dressed like a hobo, you were going to stand out.

WALT. I look fine.

MILLER. Sure, for a night at the bar. For a literary reading.

WALT. What does it matter?

MILLER. You say you received an invitation; did you read it? Did you gloss over the dress code, or do you not know the meaning of the phrase, "Formal Attire?" No. Not you. I just met you, Walt, but I can tell you are a man who deliberates.

WALT. I wear what I feel like wearing. I don't put that much thought into it.

MILLER. What you wear tells the world what to think of you before you ever open your mouth. When you first meet a woman, you notice the way her clothes fit, what they say about her. By the time you've made it to her face, you've already made up your mind about whether you want to sleep with her.

WALT. You can't be serious.

MILLER. And a man's wardrobe alerts others to his status, his way of life.

WALT. You think I can't afford a suit?

MILLER. No. I think you came in here tonight wanting to make an impression: the impression of someone who doesn't care about dress codes. You want us all to see you as someone who thinks differently, someone too

IMPRESSIONS

good for the status quo. But you're not a unique snowflake, young man. I could get off the L train at Bedford Avenue and see twenty different versions of you before I get to street level. All of you walking around like you're somebody interesting.

CARTER. (*Recording.*) Now, do you feel, Mr. St. Charles, that this young man represents a certain misunderstanding or, perhaps, rejection of standards among his generation?

SHALAYNE. You are not seriously writing about this.

CARTER. Are you kidding me? If Bixby doesn't show soon this might be the most interesting thing to happen tonight.

MILLER. Excuse me?

CARTER. Other than these superb paintings of course. I mean... The color! The light!

MILLER. Yes! Yes! That's why I called the show "The Color of Light!" He gets it.

WALT. Because he said the name of the show?

MILLER. He gets it, I can tell. Go on then, Mr....?

CARTER. Bloomfield. New York Ledger.

MILLER. Mr. Bloomfield. Well. Go on, tell him. Tell him what you think. (*Everyone stares at Carter expectantly. He panics.*)

CARTER. I... I think... I mean, the paintings, they're beautiful, aren't they? They're so full of... color... and... light...both of those things, but also... and they're very... You know, of course... the immediate, uh, *aesthetic*... well, it it it appears to be that of impressionism but... as one looks, um, closer, one sees a... a *pragmatic* approach similar to... to to to... that of the classical Italian painters. There's a, erm... a *societal* commentary here... you see... within the subtleties and, ah, intricacies of the bigger picture. It's... well, ah... it's... very... and... it's so... and they're... I mean, *big* but also there are some small ones... and well. You see. It's very... (*He takes a very, very long sip of champagne.*) It's integral. (*There is a long, tense silence.*)

MILLER. Now, here's a man who knows what he's talking about.

WALT. You can't be serious.

CARTER. It's so obvious to me. I don't see how you can miss it.

WALT. Miss what? What exactly did you say?

IMPRESSIONS

CARTER. Well, if you can't understand.

SHALAYNE. I understand perfectly.

WALT. But you didn't say anything at all.

CARTER. Non-linear! Influential! Demonstrative!

WALT. Now you're yelling adjectives.

MILLER. Here it is again! You waltz in here and say negative things just to be negative. But I see right through you. I know you understand beauty exactly as I do. Look at my wife, for instance, and then put her next to... ah! put her next to the waitress. You bring these two, as they are right now, to any place, any person, and ask, what is beauty? Which is a masterpiece, and which is a forgery?

SANDRA. (*Uncomfortable.*) Miller, you're being unkind.

MILLER. There's too much dishonesty in this world. We need to tell the truth, like good art does. (*Winking at Daphne.*) No offense darling, you'd do in a pinch. (*Daphne, horrified, leaves. After a moment of shocked silence, Walt follows.*) People get their feelings hurt so easily these days.

SANDRA. That was cruel.

MILLER. And what about you? Putting that boy on the spot. What kind of game are you playing?

SANDRA. I wanted him to see how foolish he was being.

MILLER. Liar. You wanted *me* to feel foolish. You thought you could bring me down a few pegs.

MRS ASHBY. Please, Mr. St. Charles, don't let that man upset you.

MILLER. Him? He didn't upset me! Some unwashed plebe doesn't understand my work? So what? I make art for the people who are worthy of it, not the likes of him. No, what upsets me is *this one* taking any opportunity she gets to try and drag my name through the mud.

SANDRA. I defended you!

MILLER. When was that? I certainly didn't hear it!

CARTER. (*Recording.*) Now, Mr. St. Charles, what other examples of this alleged muckraking can you describe? Have you both been feeling this way for some time? At what point exactly did you start noticing-

MRS. ASHBY. Mr. Bloomfield, that's enough please.

MILLER. Let him tell the world. She's always doing this. Steps right on my neck, every chance she gets.

IMPRESSIONS

SHALAYNE. But you were saying such nice things about her a minute ago.

MILLER. I said she was beautiful. It's a fact, not an endorsement!

SANDRA. (*Calmly.*) Your blood pressure, Miller.

MILLER. She'd better be beautiful for how much of my money she puts into it.

SANDRA. Here we go.

MILLER. She sits around all day, sipping cocktails and pulling at tiny wrinkles in the mirror, and she resents me for my acclaim! Because I'm an artist, and she's nothing.

MRS. ASHBY. Let's get you some water.

MILLER. Do you know what she does? She finds little snippets of criticism of my work online. She'll print them out and leave them around the house for me to find, as if I'm supposed to be bothered by what some no-talent misfit writes from his mother's basement. (*Miller stops and puts his hand on his chest, taking a deep breath.*)

SHALAYNE. Are you alright?

SANDRA. You're far too old to be acting like such a child, Miller.

MILLER. You know... that man back there didn't know a thing about my muse. But maybe he was right about my wife.

SCENE 2

Outside the gallery, in a back alley. Daphne is sitting against the wall or on the steps. Walt enters, sheepishly. She ignores him for a while.

WALT. Hey. Hi. Uh. That was... what he said back there... He was way off.

DAPHNE. Okay.

WALT. You're... I mean... I think you're very-

DAPHNE. We don't know each other. You don't have to check on me.

WALT. I feel bad. I kind of pulled you into that whole thing.

DAPHNE. You *one hundred percent* pulled me into it.

WALT. I did, didn't I? But you got back at me by throwing me under the bus, and then watching as it dragged me along behind it.

IMPRESSIONS

DAPHNE. That was your own fault. If you had to open your big mouth you should have left me out of it. I'm here to serve hors d'oeuvres, not to comment on the art. I'm invisible.

WALT. That's silly. Just because you're working doesn't mean you can't have an opinion.

DAPHNE. It's literally what Mrs. Ashby tells me before each show. "You're here to serve hors d'oeuvres, not to comment on the art. You're invisible."

What could you have possibly thought I'd say?

WALT. I thought you'd say what you believe.

DAPHNE. Not in front of the artist.

WALT. What kind of artist can't handle criticism?

DAPHNE. Is this the first actual artist you've ever met?

WALT. He might be now that you mention it.

DAPHNE. Maybe he's right. You should stick to breweries and bookstores from now on. Might be more your speed.

WALT. Hey, hey now. I love art! I don't like lying about art, though certain other people don't seem to mind it.

DAPHNE. Okay, you can come down from your soapbox now.

WALT. What are you so afraid of?

DAPHNE. Getting fired, for one.

WALT. Catering is your dream job, huh?

DAPHNE. Rude.

WALT. I'm sorry. You're right.

DAPHNE. Some of us have bills to pay. (*Walt approaches.*) Go inside. It's freezing out here. (*Walt sits next to her.*) You're a strange man.

WALT. Yeah, that's probably true. But I came out here to see if you're okay, and that's more than anyone else can say.

DAPHNE. Why did you?

WALT. I've never had a problem saying what I think, and I forget that most people have a filter. I'm sorry. Also... I followed you because you're way more interesting than any of those paintings.

DAPHNE. That's quite a line.

WALT. It's a compliment, not a line.

DAPHNE. Right.

IMPRESSIONS

WALT. I promise, I'm not hitting on you. If I were, my husband might have something to say about it.

DAPHNE. Oh. Well. Compliment away, then.

WALT. You are the only person here who has been even a little bit kind to me. You're funny. I thought- the thing about eating tigers? That was pretty funny. You're discerning.

DAPHNE. I can tap dance, too.

WALT. And you're beautiful. Please don't let that windbag in there make you feel like anything less.

DAPHNE. I don't. I mean, that was gross, but I'll get over it. What bothers me is that he's such a complete jackass.

WALT. I see.

DAPHNE. I know people think that way, but what kind of monster says those things out loud? To strangers? He's a dirt bag. No, it's worse than that. He's a disappointment. One of his paintings hangs on the wall across from my couch. Sometimes I sit and stare at it and wonder, where did it come from? How did he put brush to canvas, and make a whole story come to life in this one frozen moment? There has to be something good in him to have created a painting like that. There's magic in it. I can look at that painting and then close my eyes and suddenly *I'm* the girl. I can walk on water. I would give anything to make someone feel like that with my paintings.

WALT. You paint?

DAPHNE. Catering is not my dream job, but it gets me in the door.

WALT. What good is it to get in the door if you're invisible once you're in the room?

DAPHNE. I haven't figured that part out yet. But there are always important people here. Artists, buyers, patrons... Maybe one day I'll be in the right place at the right time. And I'll get to talk to some of those people, and they'll listen, and maybe one of them will give me a chance. This probably sounds stupid.

WALT. It doesn't.

DAPHNE. I don't have a ton of opportunities so I'm trying to find them where I can. If you don't have a lot of money, or power... if you don't have connections... you have to find a way to slip in through the cracks.

WALT. What do you paint?

IMPRESSIONS

DAPHNE. Oh... well, I do have some pictures on my phone.

WALT. Can I see?

DAPHNE. Yeah but... It's hard to see them, obviously. It's not the same as seeing them in person, and I'm not sure if they're any good. There are a few I'm sort of happy with, but I feel like I have a long way to go before-

WALT. Stop apologizing for your work and let me see it. Please. *(He holds out his hand. Daphne starts to hand him her phone, then stops.)*

DAPHNE. Be nice. *(Walt takes the phone and looks through. He takes some time zooming in on areas of the first painting, then moves to the next. Daphne fidgets nervously.)*

WALT. Daphne, these are beautiful. Really, really good. *(He scrolls.)* This one is- wow. Arresting.

DAPHNE. I know I said to be nice, but you don't have to overdo it.

WALT. I'm being serious. I'd love to see these in person. I can tell even from these photos that you're very talented.

DAPHNE. Well. That's kind. Thank you.

WALT. Do you work out of a studio?

DAPHNE. Not yet. I'm looking for a studio to rent, but whenever I find one that I can afford, there are waiting lists to get on the waiting list. Even then, it seems to be all about the people you know.

WALT. I didn't realize.

DAPHNE. That's why I keep this gig. I mean, yeah, it keeps the lights on. But also... If I can meet the right person- someone that will give me a chance- it'll have been worth it. *(A bitter laugh.)* You know what's so stupid? When I first started booking gigs here, I actually believed I'd be able to get Mrs. Ashby to host a "new artists' night" or something where I could show my work. Pretty naïve of me, right?

WALT. It's hopeful.

DAPHNE. It was futile.

WALT. Well, it's a good idea, anyway.

DAPHNE. That's me. Plenty of good ideas, no way to execute them. Ugh, sorry. I don't mean to be such a bummer.

WALT. I don't think you're a bummer.

DAPHNE. Maybe tonight is my lucky night.

WALT. Yeah? What makes you say that?

IMPRESSIONS

DAPHNE. Jonathan Bixby is coming. He could be in the market for a new trophy wife.

WALT. You are overqualified for that particular position.

DAPHNE. I don't know. I could imagine it. Being a gajillionaire's wife.

WALT. It's not all it's cracked up to be.

DAPHNE. Is *your* husband a gajillionaire?

WALT. No.

DAPHNE. Then what do you know about it? I think it would suit me. Sitting in my mansion, spending my days painting.

WALT. Listening to your cantankerous old husband scream about the quality of toilet paper these days.

DAPHNE. Wow, that's... extremely specific. Weirdo. *(Daphne's phone alarm goes off.)* Break's over. *(Daphne holds her hand out and Walt puts the phone back in it. She turns off the alarm, then puts it in her pocket.)*

WALT. Daphne. I just realized; I met you before I met Miller St. Charles.

DAPHNE. So?

WALT. So, I was wrong before. *You're* the first artist I ever met. *(A smile creeps over Daphne's face. She starts to walk away, then turns back.)*

DAPHNE. Are you sure you're not hitting on me?

WALT. I'm sure.

DAPHNE. Because I have to say... If you *were*-

WALT. Oh, I know. I'm very good.

DAPHNE. Yeah. Really pretty good. I've gotta get back to my snails, make sure they're perfect for Mr. Bixby whenever he decides to show up. You coming?

WALT. Be right there. And Daphne? Jonathan Bixby isn't good enough for you or your snails. *(Daphne laughs and goes in. Walt sits for a moment, thinking.)*

END OF ACT I

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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