

PRICELESS

by
David Robson

PRICELESS

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PRICELESS

Till Sonja, med kärlek

PRICELESS

Priceless, then titled *Paint/Gun*, had its first reading at Walking Fish Theatre in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 2013, followed by a reading at the Painted Bride Art Center in Philadelphia in 2014.

Priceless received its world premiere at Penguin Rep Theatre in Stony Point, New York, in October 2015. This published version represents the author's intended text.

CHARACTERS

ZACKE—*in his 30s* (Pronounced the Swedish way, “Sack-uh”)

REMY—*in his 30s*

ARTHUR—*in his 40s or 50s*

PLACE AND TIME

Grand Hôtel, Stockholm, Sweden; the present.

NOTE

The painting should be positioned on the easel so that its painted surface faces upstage, away from the audience. We see only its back: the canvas, the wooden frame. This is essential. The painting itself must remain invisible to the audience throughout the play.

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Lights rise on a high-end hotel suite—couch, coffee table, chairs. REMY sits on the couch and plays with his cell phone; ZACKE admires the contents of the minibar.

ZACKE. Fan, ha nånting. [Damn, have something.]

REMY. Nej tack. [No thanks.]

ZACKE. Kom igen för fan. [Come on.]

REMY. Det är bra, tack. [I'm good, thanks.]

ZACKE. Why not?

REMY. I don't want to.

ZACKE. Vad säger du? [Are you serious?]

REMY. Can we keep it in English, please?

ZACKE. Va? Har du glömt svenskan, din djävul? [What? You forget your Swedish?]

REMY. I'm out of practice, okay? Now, did you get the tennis bracelet?

ZACKE. Ja.

REMY. What about the blue dress with the flowers? Because if they find that—

ZACKE. Shit, look at this. (*Zacke holds up a bottle of booze.*) They have everything here. High-end, low-end—well, maybe not so much low end...

REMY. You know the first rule of wine-buying?

ZACKE. What's that?

REMY. Avoid bottles with animals on the labels. You know, birds, iguanas, kangaroos. If there's an animal on the label, it's shit. Second rule: keep it French.

ZACKE. Grey Goose is French.

REMY. That's vodka, not wine.

ZACKE. (*Holding up a bottle.*) This one has a moose on it.

REMY. Then it's Swedish and it's terrible.

ZACKE. Fuck you. Sweden makes great wine.

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REMY. Sweden makes great lingonberries and meatballs. Now, did you get the dress?

ZACKE. I got the fucking dress!

REMY. Good.

ZACKE. You know you're sitting in the finest hotel in Stockholm, right?

REMY. I know.

ZACKE. You ever stayed here before?

REMY. No, but I can see—

ZACKE. Then how do you know it's the best?

REMY. It looks like it must be the best. Now, how about the photo?

ZACKE. That's not empirical evidence.

REMY. What?

ZACKE. Empirical fucking evidence: observation, experience—

REMY. I know.

ZACKE. You don't fucking know. Have you even heard of empirical evidence before?

REMY. Sure, I have.

ZACKE. But you didn't know what it meant until—

REMY. Whatever! Now, when you were in the apartment, did you see the picture of the two of us?

ZACKE. I don't know, man.

REMY. You don't know whether you took it? I told you not to leave without the picture.

ZACKE. I thought you considered yourself an educated person, but if I have to explain that kind of shit to you—

REMY. The picture, Zacke!

ZACKE. I got the fucking photo, alright!? You're safe.

REMY. Good. That's good. Now, why are you picking on me? So, I didn't remember empirical evidence. Who cares? I don't remember them teaching us that at Sigtuna. You must have picked it up after we graduated.

ZACKE. Sure, I did. My education didn't end with boarding school. Sounds like yours did.

REMY. I went to university.

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ZACKE. I'm not talking about formal education, okay. I'm talking about the education that only life—the real fucking world—can give you.

REMY. What time is it?

ZACKE. Huh?

REMY. Time!

ZACKE. Oh, yeah. Time he was here—past time.

REMY. You nervous?

ZACKE. Do I sound nervous?

REMY. Honestly? Then again, didn't Olivier say that if you don't get nervous, you're crazy?

ZACKE. Who said that?

REMY. Laurence Olivier.

ZACKE. Oh.

REMY. The actor.

ZACKE. Right, the actor. *That* Laurence...uh, uh—

REMY. Olivier! There's only been one.

ZACKE. I was getting him confused.

REMY. With who?

ZACKE. Some other guy.

REMY. Another actor?

ZACKE. Yes, another actor. Of course, another actor.

REMY. Which one?

ZACKE. I don't remember. What did he say again?

REMY. It doesn't matter. Have another drink.

ZACKE. Why not? It doesn't affect me. *(Zacke drains the booze left in his glass, then grabs a bottle of Grey Goose vodka and looks at its label. Remy checks his cell phone.)*

REMY. What I can't figure out...I'm looking and it's not in *Le Monde*; it's not anywhere. I'm checking all the headlines.

ZACKE. They probably haven't found the body yet.

REMY. After three days?

ZACKE. Sometimes it takes a week—more. You know, for the smell to drift into the hallway.

REMY. Oh, Jesus.

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ZACKE. I'm just telling you.

REMY. Don't say that.

ZACKE. You asked.

REMY. No, I didn't.

ZACKE. You kind of did. Forget it.

REMY. I can't.

ZACKE. Put the phone down. Seriously!

REMY. You're absolutely sure she's...? That she didn't—?

ZACKE. She's not getting up, Remy. Trust me.

REMY. But you're certain—

ZACKE. She's gone. It's done. Now, stop checking your fucking phone.

REMY. I just keep thinking about—

ZACKE. Don't. Put it in a box. Lock it away.

REMY. I'm trying. It's just...I've never done this before.

ZACKE. That's why I'm here.

REMY. But what if something goes wrong? What if he's not interested?

ZACKE. He's interested.

REMY. What exactly did you tell him?

ZACKE. I told him that we have in our possession something priceless.

REMY. That could be anything—jewelry, Incan pottery.

ZACKE. He's a fine art guy not a fucking archaeologist.

REMY. So, he knows it's a painting.

ZACKE. Yes, he knows it's a painting. Of course, he knows.

REMY. And he said he's willing to buy?

ZACKE. He's not the buyer. His job is to...to—What do they call it—?

REMY. I don't know.

ZACKE. He verifies, you know, makes sure it's real and all.

REMY. He's an authenticator.

ZACKE. That's the word.

REMY. So, he won't buy it outright.

ZACKE. He just has to make sure it is what we say it is. Then, he tells his contacts—

REMY. They give him the money—

ZACKE. Uh huh, and then he gives us the money. Simple.

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REMY. Good, good. I like that. And you told him 14, right?

ZACKE. He doesn't work like that.

REMY. What do you mean? I told you to tell him how much we want.

ZACKE. I did, but he said his contacts decide.

REMY. On what?

ZACKE. On an offer.

REMY. I don't like this.

ZACKE. It's standard practice.

REMY. He said that?

ZACKE. It just is.

REMY. You're sure?

ZACKE. Okay, look, different people do it different ways, and this is the way he says his contacts do it.

REMY. It's worth at least that much.

ZACKE. Says who?

REMY. Says me! I researched this.

ZACKE. It's all about what the market will bear, my friend.

REMY. How do you know what the market will bear? Or did you just say that so it sounds like you know what you're talking about? Because, honestly, it makes you sound like a dumb ass.

ZACKE. What did you do?

REMY. What?

ZACKE. What did you do that you need all this money?

REMY. That's none of your concern.

ZACKE. Look, I'm in this too, so it is my concern.

REMY. Not really.

ZACKE. Well, I did all the grunt work here, so just remember that whatever the final number is I'm getting half.

REMY. I'm fine with that.

ZACKE. You don't have a choice.

REMY. You think 14 million is too much?

ZACKE. Probably, but we won't take less than five.

REMY. Are you kidding me?

ZACKE. That's pretty good—two and a half for each of us.

REMY. That's not enough.

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ZACKE. That's a big score.

REMY. No.

ZACKE. You're going to have to let me handle negotiations once he gets here.

REMY. Not if you'll settle for five million.

ZACKE. That's rock bottom.

REMY. I didn't do this for two and a half million.

ZACKE. How much do you need?

REMY. At least three.

ZACKE. We'll see what happens.

REMY. Is that Euros or dollars?

ZACKE. Dollars—these guys deal in dollars.

REMY. We may need a second opinion.

ZACKE. Why?

REMY. We can talk to someone else, maybe start a bidding war.

ZACKE. This isn't fucking Sotheby's, Remy. On the black market, five million, even for something like this, is pretty fucking good.

REMY. I told you, five isn't enough! Have you worked with him before?

ZACKE. Who?

REMY. This guy.

ZACKE. When?

REMY. When you've done these kinds of deals before!

ZACKE. Oh, no. I don't know him, but I made a couple of calls, heard he was the best. This guy's expertise on these kinds of things is unrivalled apparently.

REMY. Are you sure?

ZACKE. I didn't check his references or anything.

REMY. Then how do you know?

ZACKE. I trust my contacts. Man, you're so fucking paranoid.

REMY. This is all my fault.

ZACKE. What is?

REMY. This, all this.

ZACKE. What are you talking about?

REMY. I shouldn't have...

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ZACKE. What?

REMY. You know, “friended” you in the first place.

ZACKE. So, why did you?

REMY. Your face came up. I saw we had a lot of mutual friends from school, and—

ZACKE. And you needed something.

REMY. Now, wait a minute.

ZACKE. I get it.

REMY. That’s not true.

ZACKE. Come on.

REMY. How was I supposed to know you did these kinds of things?

ZACKE. You knew me well enough back then to take an educated guess: Small-time criminal in high school to big-time criminal today. It’s not so big a leap, is it?

REMY. People change.

ZACKE. I didn’t. It’s not like I’m ashamed of it.

REMY. Why should you be?

ZACKE. People are who they are.

REMY. I think you’re right.

ZACKE. So, if you didn’t contact me to help you with your problem, why did you? You used to hate my guts.

REMY. You used to beat the shit out of me.

ZACKE. We were kids.

REMY. What difference does that make?

ZACKE. You’re exaggerating.

REMY. I still have the scars to prove it.

ZACKE. Where?

REMY. They’re more...emotional than physical.

ZACKE. See, you’ve got nothing.

REMY. You were an asshole to me.

ZACKE. But we had some good times too, right? Come on.

REMY. Did we?

ZACKE. We were the two biggest Stones fans in the place.

REMY. We were. That’s true.

ZACKE. You didn’t know shit about them ‘til I told you.

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REMY. You used to tell me that the best Stones album was *Aftermath*—the British version. You were right.

ZACKE. I knew you'd come around eventually.

REMY. I should have trusted your expertise.

ZACKE. We can blame it on immaturity.

REMY. I appreciate your understanding in this matter. Hey, remember that night we all slept outside.

ZACKE. Huh?

REMY. You know, under the stars, and you were kind of scared. Hell, you were freaked out.

ZACKE. I don't remember.

REMY. Sure, you do.

ZACKE. No.

REMY. There's no way you forgot this. Bjurhammer took maybe eight of us out, and we were there next to each other in our sleeping bags. It got really quiet, like we were the only two there. And I see you shaking like a leaf and ask what's wrong—

ZACKE. It must have been somebody else.

REMY. It was you! I moved a little closer to make you feel better, and you...you reached out. Your hand was shaking.

ZACKE. I told you I don't know what the fuck you're talking about!

REMY. You were terrified. Not of the dark, but of...

ZACKE. Drop it, Remy! I mean it.

REMY. It must've been somebody else then.

ZACKE. It was.

REMY. Okay. So, with this, with this guy, you said he's the—

ZACKE. I'm told that he's the perfect person for this kind of shit. I wouldn't fuck this up, trust me. You're working with a professional.

REMY. It's just that I've never done anything like this before.

ZACKE. That's why you have me: to handle the negotiations, and the complications.

REMY. What complications?

ZACKE. It's a figure of speech; there won't be any complications, trust me.

REMY. Why should I?

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ZACKE. Because if I can't make it happen, I don't get paid either and I'm here to get paid.

REMY. It's a cash business.

ZACKE. Yes, it's a fucking cash business. I don't accept personal checks or debit cards. Now chill the fuck out. (*Zacke picks up a glass and pours more Grey Goose.*) Have a drink.

REMY. I don't want a—

ZACKE. Have a fucking drink, Remy! (*Zacke puts the glass into Remy's hand. Zacke sings a Swedish song.*) Helan Går...!

REMY. Oh, no...

ZACKE. Javisst! (*Continues singing.*) Sjung hopp faderallan lallan lej/Helan går/Sjung hopp faderallan lej/Och den som inte helan tar/Han heller inte halvan får/Helan går! Respect your countrymen, Remy, and drink their drink!

REMY. I'm as American as you are.

ZACKE. Half American. And don't tell me you prefer wine.

REMY. I don't like wine either. I don't drink. And I hate that song.

ZACKE. Va?

REMY. I mean, why would they make you sing a drinking song at school?

ZACKE. We sang it at graduation. And nobody made us. It's a Swedish tradition. Come on! Helan Går...!

REMY. I don't think so.

ZACKE. Why not?

REMY. It's fucking weird.

ZACKE. You're fucking weird. It's a great song.

REMY. The best thing about leaving Sigtuna, and Sweden, was it meant that I never had to sing that song ever again.

ZACKE. I love it.

REMY. I can tell.

ZACKE. Reminds me, you know, of the way things used to be.

REMY. You'd go back if you could, wouldn't you?

ZACKE. In a minute—best time of my life.

REMY. That's sad.

ZACKE. Why?

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REMY. We were idiots.

ZACKE. Speak for yourself.

REMY. You can't live in the past.

ZACKE. I'm not living in the past. I just like to remember the good times once in a while. It's called nostalgia.

REMY. I don't like looking back—serves no purpose.

ZACKE. I guess we're different that way.

REMY. I guess. This will be the end of it, won't it?

ZACKE. What?

REMY. Once you get your money we're done.

ZACKE. If that's the way you want it.

REMY. It's probably best that way.

ZACKE. Kind of cold though, don't you think?

REMY. Don't take it personally. It'll just be better to sever any ties.

ZACKE. I don't like getting unfriended. Fucks with my self-esteem.

REMY. Really?

ZACKE. Kind of. I see I've been unfriended, and I start searching for who'd be most likely to do it.

REMY. Are you serious?

ZACKE. Don't you do that?

REMY. No.

ZACKE. Bullshit.

REMY. Wait a minute. How do you know when you've been unfriended?

ZACKE. I see I have fewer friends.

REMY. You mean you keep track?

ZACKE. Everybody does that.

REMY. I don't think so. I can't speak for all users, but I don't think most of them do.

ZACKE. I'm weird then.

REMY. I think you're weird. And once this whole thing is over—

ZACKE. Once it's over we go our separate ways.

REMY. Yes.

ZACKE. Why can't we stay friends though? It doesn't mean we have to be in constant contact.

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REMY. After this is done, I don't want any contact.

ZACKE. Why not?

REMY. I don't really like you.

ZACKE. That's a nice thing to say.

REMY. I didn't mean it like that.

ZACKE. You contacted me, remember?

REMY. What choice did I have?

ZACKE. You had a choice; don't make it sound like you didn't have a choice.

REMY. You were a last resort.

ZACKE. Do you enjoy insulting me?

REMY. Don't take it personally.

ZACKE. How am I supposed to take it?

REMY. You always were a little oversensitive. Look, I needed your help—

ZACKE. See, I knew it.

REMY. What can I say?

ZACKE. You could have done something different.

REMY. With what?

ZACKE. With her!

REMY. She wouldn't listen to reason. I couldn't let her ruin my life, could I?

ZACKE. She didn't ruin your life.

REMY. She did, by not agreeing to, you know, sell it when I asked her.

ZACKE. But it was hers to sell, right? I mean, she didn't owe you anything.

REMY. I needed the money.

ZACKE. Why was that her problem?

REMY. But what good was it doing just sitting there?

ZACKE. What difference does that make? You ruined your own life.

REMY. How do you know what I did?

ZACKE. I'm assuming, or else—

REMY. Why would I be here.

ZACKE. It doesn't take a rocket scientist.

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REMY. I fucked up. I got into a situation. I had it on good authority—no, expert authority—that all I had to do...it was a sure thing, no risk. Signing over the mortgage was just a formality. It was such a sure thing that they even spotted me an extra three million. It was a chance to leave an ordinary life behind—to, to not struggle all the time, to give my daughter a better life—

ZACKE. You have a kid?

REMY. I told you that.

ZACKE. No, you didn't.

REMY. There's just never enough money. I'm already in debt up to my, my...

ZACKE. So, I guess the sure thing...

REMY. It wasn't. Now, I owe these people, and I've put them off for the last three months, but they're coming after me, after my family, unless—

ZACKE. That's a big fuck up, Remy.

REMY. Don't lecture me.

ZACKE. Not lecturing—

REMY. Yeah, you are, but I don't need lessons in morality from someone like you.

ZACKE. Someone like me?

REMY. I'm saying that, you know, you're used to living a life that skirts society's hard and fast rules.

ZACKE. You don't know that.

REMY. You're a thief.

ZACKE. So are you!

REMY. Look, I just want to unload this painting—

ZACKE. This stolen painting.

REMY. I don't like that word: "Stolen."

ZACKE. But that's what the thing is: stolen.

REMY. What you call stolen, I call rightfully mine.

ZACKE. How do you figure it was rightfully yours?

REMY. She and I were...

ZACKE. You were fucking her.

REMY. Okay.

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ZACKE. You weren't married to her. And even if you were... Anyway, I did what you asked me to do, but that doesn't mean I agreed with your decision to have me do it.

REMY. That makes no sense. A hitman isn't supposed to agree or disagree.

ZACKE. Don't call me a hitman. I told you I'm a professional.

REMY. Is that what you put on your tax form: "Professional"?

ZACKE. I don't pay taxes, okay, but that's beside the point. The issue here is that a professional, regardless of the work he's paid to do, still has an opinion, even if he doesn't share that opinion with the person he works for. Tell me, does your wife know?

REMY. About—

ZACKE. Her.

REMY. Yes. Not really.

ZACKE. I don't know what that means.

REMY. She probably suspects. We don't talk about it.

ZACKE. You don't talk about your mistress with your wife. Well, that's good.

REMY. I mean, Jesus, we're French. It's a sliding scale, you know? We've been married a long time, and I go off and do my own thing from time to time, and so does she.

ZACKE. You're okay with that.

REMY. What—me doing my own thing?

ZACKE. No, your wife!

REMY. What am I supposed to do about it? I'd rather not know.

ZACKE. See, I'd have to know.

REMY. Why?

ZACKE. It's my fucking wife!

REMY. You said you weren't married.

ZACKE. If I *were* married, I'm saying.

REMY. You've got to grow up. Attraction happens and sometimes I act on it. I'm guessing that she does too. We still want to be married to each other for a whole host of reasons, and the way I look at it, I'd rather not know. If she told me, it would probably get under my skin, so we've made a pledge to be together but live our own separate lives from time

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to time. Anyway, Chantal does not officially know about Carol. Why should she, and why would I want to hurt her by telling her? I love my wife. Your problem is you have no clue how the real world works.

ZACKE. Like hell I don't.

REMY. Come on, you're a trust fund baby.

ZACKE. So what? You think my father just pours money into a bank account for me somewhere? I have to pull my own weight, motherfucker.

REMY. No, you don't.

ZACKE. You don't know anything about my life anymore.

REMY. All I'm saying is that we have to make this thing work today. There's no other solution.

ZACKE. What about your marriage?

REMY. It's all I have left.

ZACKE. And that's not worth much.

REMY. It's worth everything. You think my wife doesn't know I'm in trouble? She knows. She's just waiting to see if I can fix it before she takes our kid and disappears into her family's money. This painting? It's my marriage, my family, my entire fucking life.

ZACKE. Then why'd you risk it all in the first place?

REMY. Because I was tired of living on her family's terms. I wanted to be the one with the money for once. Stupid, right? Look, I have a stable marriage and that's what's kept me sane all these years.

ZACKE. You call fucking another woman the basis of a stable marriage?

REMY. People do it all the time.

ZACKE. Divorced people.

REMY. Married people!

ZACKE. You're a trip, Remy: you get me involved with all your bullshit, but somehow, I'm the immoral one. I'm the criminal.

REMY. I never called you that.

ZACKE. Sure, you did. "People like me..." If people only knew the truth.

REMY. Life is a ruse.

ZACKE. A what?

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REMY. A ruse—a trick!

ZACKE. That's not a real word.

REMY. It is, sure.

ZACKE. I don't believe you. *(He takes out his cell phone and looks it up.)* Shit, you're right.

REMY. You never heard "ruse" before.

ZACKE. I must have missed that day.

REMY. You missed a lot of days, as I recall.

ZACKE. But the funny thing is we ended up in exactly the same place, didn't we? The only difference is now you owe me.

REMY. I owe a lot of people.

ZACKE. The good news is that once this is over, we'll both be looking a little better, right?

REMY. That's the plan. Hey, did you, uh...?

ZACKE. What?

REMY. Did you do it yourself?

ZACKE. Do what?

REMY. You know.

ZACKE. Oh. I can't talk about it.

REMY. You can't or you won't?

ZACKE. Why do you care, anyway? It's done.

REMY. Because I think about it.

ZACKE. I told you to put it in a box in your mind, put it away.

REMY. I'm trying, but I'm having a hard time.

ZACKE. That's not my problem.

REMY. I know it's not.

ZACKE. I did what you told me to do. I can't be responsible for pangs of regret.

REMY. All I'm saying is that sometimes, maybe, I don't know, I wish...

ZACKE. Don't say that! Don't fucking say that! We're here because you wanted me to do it.

REMY. And you wanted to do it.

ZACKE. I'm not a serial killer, Remy. I don't just go around killing people because I need it or something.

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REMY. But you'll do it?

ZACKE. Don't make this about me. You had a job; I needed a job; and now you're going to pay me.

REMY. If he authenticates—

ZACKE. He's going to authenticate it.

REMY. We don't even know if it's really valuable.

ZACKE. Are you crazy? With what you've got—

REMY. It could be worthless for all I know.

ZACKE. Don't tell me that!

REMY. I don't know!

ZACKE. Well, it better be worth something, or else—

REMY. What? You're not a killer. You said so yourself.

ZACKE. Don't push me, Remy! Don't fucking push me! *(There's a knock at the door.)* Shit!

REMY. You think that's him?

ZACKE. Who else?

REMY. Room service? *(A second knock.)*

ZACKE. You—okay—you stay there, right?

REMY. I'm not moving.

ZACKE. I'll get the door. He's expecting me; we talked.

REMY. Are you okay?

ZACKE. Hell yes, I'm okay—did this a million times. Now, relax. Don't, don't talk much. Don't talk at all.

REMY. I'll have to talk—

ZACKE. But don't talk too much. You go on and on when you're nervous, and then you say something stupid.

REMY. He's going to leave.

ZACKE. Shut up. I'm opening the door now. *(Zacke opens the door.)* Just like you fucking Americans to be late. I'm kidding. Come in, come in.

ARTHUR. *(Entering, carrying a briefcase.)* Forgive me, but I got off on the wrong floor—got lost.

ZACKE. No worries.

ARTHUR. The hotel is enormous.

ZACKE. Big is how we roll in Stockholm, homie.

PRICELESS

ARTHUR. (*Looking around.*) Corner suite, top floor. Harder to surveil, multiple exit routes—smart choice.

ZACKE. We just liked the view. How about a drink?

ARTHUR. Water is fine.

ZACKE. Come on, the bar is stocked.

ARTHUR. Just water, please.

ZACKE. Whatever you say. (*To Remy.*) What are you looking at? Get the man some water. (*Remy fetches the water. To Arthur.*) Have a seat.

ARTHUR. (*Adjusting his jacket—we catch a glimpse of something in an inner pocket.*) Thank you. (*He sits, along with Zacke.*)

ZACKE. When did you get in?

ARTHUR. Just this morning.

ZACKE. Where from?

ARTHUR. New York.

ZACKE. Long flight, huh?

ARTHUR. Not compared to Tokyo. No, this wasn't bad at all.

REMY. Is this your first trip to Sweden?

ARTHUR. Hardly. Stockholm is one of my favorite cities in the world. They call it the Venice of the North, you know.

ZACKE. Swedes don't like that.

ARTHUR. Pardon?

ZACKE. Calling it that. (*Remy brings the water for Arthur.*)

REMY. Yeah, see, here they call Venice the Stockholm of the South.

ZACKE. What? No, we don't. You're not fucking funny, alright. I told you...

ARTHUR. Yes, well, I suppose we should just get down to business.

ZACKE. Right. No fucking around. (*To Remy.*) Get it ready. (*Remy opens a suitcase and removes a folded stand, which he unfolds and sets up. He then carefully takes out a large, flat object covered by protective cloth and sets it on the stand so that its back is to us.*) What we have on offer is a rare artistic find—the rarest, in fact. This shit has been hidden for over a hundred years. No one has seen it. I mean, a few people have seen it, but—

ARTHUR. A preamble is unnecessary.

ZACKE. What?

PRICELESS

ARTHUR. This buildup of yours is not—

ZACKE. I thought you should know a little something about what we got here—

ARTHUR. The work itself will tell me everything I need to know.

REMY. *(To Arthur.)* He spent hours on that.

ARTHUR. That's all well and good, but time is money.

ZACKE. That's the problem with the world today: it's all about what you can get out of something. Where's the, you know, poetry?

ARTHUR. That's the reality, I'm afraid. I think it's best to move this along.

ZACKE. Whatever you say! Now, are you ready for this?

ARTHUR. It's what I came for.

ZACKE. You won't be disappointed. *(To Remy.)* Show him. *(Remy uncovers the object—a painting. Silence.)* What do you say about that? Pretty awesome, huh?

ARTHUR. May I get closer?

ZACKE. Don't touch it.

ARTHUR. I wasn't planning on touching it. I want to get a better look.

REMY. Look all you want.

ARTHUR. Thank you. *(Arthur moves closer, takes his time.)*

ZACKE. What do you think?

ARTHUR. A minute, please.

ZACKE. My bad.

ARTHUR. The brushstrokes are somewhat consistent with his style.

ZACKE. Somewhat?

REMY. What else?

ARTHUR. The color palette is familiar—but maybe not quite. *(He leans in.)* Then again...

ZACKE. What?

ARTHUR. The canvas is period-appropriate: Belgian linen. It's an aged piece and depending on how it's been kept—

ZACKE. Right! How it's been kept, under what conditions...

ARTHUR. *(Stepping back.)* I'm not familiar with this painting. *(His hand unconsciously goes to his jacket pocket, touching something there, before he takes out the magnifying glass.)*

PRICELESS

REMY. No one is.

ZACKE. What are you looking for now?

ARTHUR. Could you be quiet, please?

REMY. He's looking for fingerprints.

ZACKE. How do you know?

REMY. I've been reading about art appraising.

ZACKE. *(To Arthur.)* Is that what you're looking for? *(Arthur shoots him a look.)* Sorry. *(Arthur continues his silent examination of the painting. After some time, he steps back.)* Can I talk now?

ARTHUR. You may.

ZACKE. Is he right, you were looking for fingerprints?

ARTHUR. Yes, and other things.

ZACKE. Because I didn't see any.

ARTHUR. You're not trained to look for them, now, are you?

ZACKE. You got me there.

ARTHUR. Any chance you'll let me take this with me?

ZACKE. You mean, like, by yourself?

ARTHUR. You're welcome to join me. I have a friend with a shop nearby.

ZACKE. Not a chance.

ARTHUR. I could study it closer.

ZACKE. Nope.

ARTHUR. I understand your reluctance, but I assure you—

ZACKE. All you have to do is assure yourself that what you have in front of you is a goldmine.

ARTHUR. I'm a skeptic by nature, and with what I see before me—

ZACKE. What you see before you is the last canvas painted by one of the greatest artists of all time.

REMY. A never-before-seen painting by the master himself.

ARTHUR. But it can't be, can it?

ZACKE. If you're asking me—

ARTHUR. I'm not. I've seen dozens of his paintings up-close, but...Then again, I mean, if it were, well...Usually I can tell a fake straight away, but this...at first glance—at second glance, really—I must say, I don't know what to think.

PRICELESS

ZACKE. What's it worth? On the open market, I mean.

ARTHUR. I'm not here representing the open market. Ours would be a private transaction.

ZACKE. I know, I know—

ARTHUR. Then its worth on the open market is irrelevant to our purposes here.

ZACKE. Okay, so what's your verdict?

ARTHUR. I have yet to make that determination.

ZACKE. It shouldn't take this long, should it?

ARTHUR. In some cases, it can take weeks.

ZACKE. We don't have that kind of time. You're supposed to be the best. Come on, you can tell. It looks real, doesn't it?

ARTHUR. You must know that's not enough.

ZACKE. Don't tell me you're willing to give up this kind of once-in-a-lifetime chance.

ARTHUR. I'm telling you that for my clients to take an interest I must first authenticate the piece, and I have yet to do so. It's as simple as that.

ZACKE. You're just fucking with us.

ARTHUR. Not at all.

ZACKE. Yeah, you are, and that's bullshit!

REMY. *(To Zacke.)* Calm down. Give the man a second to—

ZACKE. This guy's playing us for a chump.

ARTHUR. We can end this meeting right now if you'd like.

ZACKE. Don't fucking threaten me—

REMY. *(To Zacke.)* Can I talk to you, please? *(To Arthur.)* Will you give us a minute?

ARTHUR. As you wish.

ZACKE. *(To Arthur.)* Don't do anything stupid. *(Zacke and Remy move out of Arthur's earshot.)*

REMY. Let him take his time.

ZACKE. Time is dangerous.

REMY. But maybe he's got it all in his little briefcase there.

ZACKE. The money, you mean.

REMY. Yeah. This could all be over in five minutes.

ZACKE. How can you be sure?

PRICELESS

REMY. I can't, but I've negotiated before.

ZACKE. What, you're saying I haven't?

REMY. I didn't say that.

ZACKE. I'm the professional here, so you let me handle this, okay?

REMY. But—

ZACKE. Just keep your mouth shut. I know what I'm doing.

REMY. It doesn't seem like it.

ZACKE. Are you calling my expertise into question?

REMY. Yes.

ZACKE. That really hurts.

REMY. Who gives a shit? We don't have time for hurt fucking feelings, Zacke. We're talking about millions of Euros at stake here.

ZACKE. I told you: they work in dollars. Now, back off before I kick your ass.

REMY. You don't scare me anymore.

ZACKE. Don't fuck with me, Remy. I'm serious. *(Turning to Arthur.)* It's nice, right?

ARTHUR. It's interesting.

ZACKE. Is that all you can say?

ARTHUR. At the moment.

REMY. Take your time.

ZACKE. *(Simultaneous with Remy's line.)* We need to speed this up. I'm not sure why we're still waiting for an offer.

ARTHUR. I make no offers. I believe I told you that on the phone. I make suggestions to my clients, and then they make the offer.

ZACKE. Right, but maybe you could call your people, and get them to make an offer. Like now.

ARTHUR. When this kind of money is at stake, my clients expect accuracy. My work depends on it.

REMY. So does your life, I bet.

ZACKE. Remy!

ARTHUR. Though crudely phrased, Monsieur Remy has a valid point. And thus, you see, time must be taken. I do have a request though.

ZACKE. What's that?

ARTHUR. I'd like to touch the piece.

PRICELESS

ZACKE. No way.

ARTHUR. Very gently, of course. It's standard procedure.

ZACKE. Not with this.

ARTHUR. With all the pieces I examine. Please. (*Zacke looks at Remy, who gives his silent assent.*)

ZACKE. Okay, but if you fuck it up...

ARTHUR. There's no chance of that. (*Arthur opens his briefcase, removes latex gloves, and puts them on. He spends a few moments examining the brushstrokes of the painting with his fingers.*) I can say one thing. It's unfinished.

ZACKE. It's—

ARTHUR. Whoever painted it didn't quite finish his work.

ZACKE. You can't tell that.

ARTHUR. This is why I'm here, my friend; I know these things. Look at the wheat stalks, look at them closely: their tops are too thin. By this time of year, they're usually quite a bit fuller. (*Zacke takes a closer look.*) Do you see?

ZACKE. Not really.

REMY. (*To Zacke.*) He has a trained eye.

ARTHUR. I do.

ZACKE. I still can't see it.

REMY. But he's right.

ZACKE. What?

REMY. The painting is unfinished.

ZACKE. Remy, we should talk about this privately.

REMY. The artist didn't quite complete what he set out to do.

ZACKE. (*To Remy.*) You didn't tell me anything about this.

ARTHUR. (*To Remy.*) I'm glad you agree. That's why although I believe you have a very worthy imitation here, I cannot and will not authenticate it as genuine.

ZACKE. But there's no way he completed every painting. Some must have been, you know, not polished sometimes.

ARTHUR. You are correct, of course, although he was surprisingly thorough most of the time. But the other giveaway is that the painting has no history and is not mentioned in any of his letters or notes. We

PRICELESS

have a very definitive inventory of each of his canvases, including the ones that have been, uh, acquired by other means.

REMY. Stolen, you mean.

ARTHUR. Yes, and that's why I feel I can say with unimpeachable authority that since there is no record of this work it is a fraud. Thank you for your time, gentlemen.

ZACKE. Wait a minute. Even if it's a forgery it's got to be worth something, right?

ARTHUR. No.

ZACKE. Come on!

ARTHUR. Good day. *(Arthur turns to leave.)*

REMY. What about René Secrétan, monsieur? *(Arthur stops.)*

ARTHUR. What did you say?

REMY. You've heard of him.

ZACKE. Who?

REMY. You want proof that the painting is authentic. I can give it to you.

ARTHUR. Citing a long-forgotten name proves nothing.

REMY. But if I have the proof and you miss an opportunity to buy an unknown painting by Vincent Van Gogh, your black-market clients will abandon you. You'll be ruined. Now, we've already wasted this much of your time. What's two more minutes?

ARTHUR. My associates don't appreciate these kinds of games, and neither do I. I've told you that your little painting there cannot possibly be a Van Gogh because there's no record—

REMY. That's because the art world doesn't know about this painting.

ARTHUR. Come out with it, Monsieur. What do you have to show me?

ZACKE. Yeah, what's all this about, Remy?

REMY. Let me handle this, please. Have another drink.

ZACKE. Don't mind if I do. *(Zacke pours more vodka.)* Anybody else?

REMY. Sure. Why not? Monsieur...?

ARTHUR. Call me Arthur. Maybe later.

REMY. *(To Arthur.)* I'd like you to take a look at something. *(He retrieves a cigar box that has been sitting on the coffee table from the beginning. Remy hands the box to Arthur, who takes it.)* Open it. *(Arthur*

PRICELESS

opens the box to discover an object in a cloth bag. He opens the bag and withdraws a small revolver. He holds it in his hands.)

ARTHUR. What is this?

REMY. It's the gun that killed him.

ZACKE. Killed who? Van Gogh? That gun?

ARTHUR. You're not serious.

REMY. No one's laughing.

ARTHUR. You seem very earnest, monsieur, but it's impossible. That infamous gun has been missing for over 100 years.

REMY. Until now. You don't believe me.

ARTHUR. I believe no one until I'm given reason to. Now, tell me, how did this come into your possession?

REMY. Like the painting, I obtained it from a friend.

ARTHUR. Ah! And how did he or she—?

REMY. It was her father's.

ARTHUR. And before that?

REMY. It belonged to his father.

ARTHUR. Her grandfather.

REMY. Yes. But from what I understand it was her great-grandfather who first owned it. The family kept records—letters, a journal. Carol showed me once. Her great-grandfather confessed everything on his deathbed, made his children swear to keep the secret. His name was—

ARTHUR. René Secrétan.

REMY. Oui.

ARTHUR. How did her great-grandfather know Van Gogh exactly?

REMY. I'm told the two were residents of the same town in France—Auvers. Her great grandfather summered there with his family. His brother, Gaston, was a fledgling artist and befriended Van Gogh.

ARTHUR. And René?

REMY. Family legend says that he was more mischievous, could be cruel sometimes, and Van Gogh often became the butt of his practical jokes.

ZACKE. What did he do?

ARTHUR. He poured a little salt into the artist's coffee, put snakes in his paint box.

PRICELESS

ZACKE. Harmless shit.

ARTHUR. Van Gogh was an erratic personality to say the least. He wasn't one to put up with such "harmless shit," as you call it.

REMY. But he did put up with it. He took to Gaston.

ARTHUR. Yes. René called Van Gogh crazy—"fou." Later in life, as an old man, René admitted he'd dress up like Buffalo Bill and carry around a .38-caliber revolver. On the afternoon of July 27, 1890, Vincent was shot in the wheat fields. He died the next day in the arms of his brother, Theo. (*Arthur, still holding the gun, looks at it for a long moment, turning it over in his gloved hands.*) To think, one small decision, one pulled trigger, and everything changes. The artist dies. His work becomes priceless. One man's tragedy becomes another man's fortune.

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