

The Human Ounce

by Nicole Parizeau

ESTIMATED LENGTH: 70 minutes

"Art is not a mirror. Art is a hammer."
—Bertolt Brecht

Copyright 2020 by Nicole Parizeau
For information, contact Nicole Parizeau
at nicole-parizeau.net

The Human Ounce
by Nicole Parizeau

The World Premiere was produced by Central Works
at the Berkeley City Club in Berkeley, CA
Opening February 15, 2020

Directed by Gary Graves

with the following cast:

Champagne Hughes as Jory
Kimberly Ridgeway as Biz
Don Wood as Dodge

developed in the Central Works Writers Group

THE HUMAN OUNCE

CHARACTERS (2F, 1M)

- BIZ (Elizabeth) A strong, confident arts professional in her late 30s/early 40s. Department curator at the museum. Biz exudes intelligence and self-possession.
- JORY A confident young professional in her late 20s/early 30s. Museum educator. Crazy-smart, for sure...but focused and deliberate in her arguments.
- DODGE A practical, dignified tradesman in his 60s. An art technician at the museum. Sometimes the world appears to drift right over his head...but in the world that matters to *him*, he sees things very clearly.

A note about casting: The playwright asks that African American actors be cast in the roles of Biz and Jory. Casting for Dodge is colorblind.

SETTING & TIME

A museum gallery after and before opening hours.

Scene 1: Evening.

Scene 2: Morning.

SCENE 1

(JORY sits on a bench in a museum gallery, staring at a large painting. She clutches an arts journal and fitfully taps it. After a moment BIZ enters briskly, a little out of breath, wearing a coat.)

BIZ

Hey.

JORY

Oh hey.

BIZ

Got your text. I was on my way out.

JORY

It's a sad day, Biz. It's bad.

BIZ

Right, got that from your message. Apparently so bad it couldn't wait til morning?

(She checks her watch.)

JORY

So bad it has to be *handled* before morning. The National Gallery called, right at closing. They're tied up in knots about this too.

BIZ

I'm roasting here, Jory. WHAT.

(JORY looks despairingly at the painting.)

JORY

There's gruesome news about the Gelding.

(BIZ looks skeptically at the painting...then suddenly back to JORY, appalled.)

BIZ

Oh my God. It's a *fake*? *Who's* saying it's a fake?

JORY

It's not a fake.

(Beat.)

BIZ

The donor wants it back!

(JORY shakes her head.)

BIZ (Cont.)

It's Nazi plunder! The rightful owner has—[come forward...]

JORY

Elizabeth, stop.

(She holds up the journal.)

JORY (Cont.)

Came FedEx. Advance copy from the art-desk editor. You really only need to know one thing: Gelding was a pedophile.

BIZ

He what?

JORY

(Reading)

"In a boon to art historians of the period, Arthur Gelding's diaries have surfaced after more than a century." (Searching)
Yada yadaa...

BIZ

Well, that's a thing, but I—[don't see...]

JORY

Hang on. Here: (Reading) "But there's a brutal snag. The diaries unambiguously reveal that Gelding was a serial pedophile." And it goes on, with the evidence.

BIZ

(Relieved)

So we're talking about the artist. ...You had me scared.

JORY

Yeah, I know. (Beat) Wait...what do you mean?

BIZ

Well, so, Gelding was deplorable. It's sickening, of course, but it's also just another in a long, sordid line of scandals that surface every—[day and...]

JORY

This isn't an extramarital affair, Biz. This painting has flesh and blood on its hands.

BIZ

It's a painting, Jory, not Game of Thrones.

JORY

Oh, you think this news hasn't created a moral battlefield? The National, the Prado—this is hitting us all. The V&A...It's a wake-up call for Gelding exhibits across the planet.

BIZ

Just...take off your museum-educator hat for a minute. This is **A Painting**. Arthur Gelding is long dead. Then/done. (*Points to painting*) Here/now. It's a shame, but it's—[not as if...]

JORY

It's not a *shame*, Biz. It's corrosive. It changes everything we knew when we accepted the painting.

BIZ

For heaven's sake, it's not a Sackler donation.

JORY

Christ, Biz. Gelding preyed on children. The hairs should stand up at the back of your neck! The question now is how fast we take it down—and the answer, clearly, is *immediately*. Before the public streams in tomorrow morning to see what we've done about it.

BIZ

What do you mean, "done about it."

JORY

The Gelding. Now that we know what Arthur Gelding was.

BIZ

Take it down? Uh, no.

JORY

(*Laughing*)

Yeah right, "no."

BIZ

(*Not laughing*)

Yeah. Right. No.

(JORY is dumbfounded.)

BIZ (Cont.)

Can we please work with a full box of crayons, here? First of all, you're what, suggesting we give it BACK? Contact

the donor and say thanks, but oops, didn't see *that* coming, so no thanks?

JORY

Of course not.

BIZ

Cause *that* would go down really well with our funders. We'd never—[get another...]

JORY

No, not give it back. The idea isn't to make it someone *else's* moral dilemma.

BIZ

WHAT MORAL DILEMMA?

(DODGE enters with homemade toolbox and a folded stepstool, white cotton gloves peeking from his back pocket. He sets the equipment down.)

DODGE

Hey, Jory. Wrapped up as fast as I could next door.

(BIZ smiles tautly at DODGE and speaks through her teeth to JORY.)

BIZ

What's going on, Jory? Why is Dodge here?

JORY

I passed him working, one over, and asked him to join us as soon as he was done.

BIZ

Yes I can see that, but—no offense, Dodge—(to JORY) why would you do that?

(JORY points to painting.)

JORY

Well, you and I aren't going to take it off the wall.

BIZ

You honestly just assumed we'd take it down. Right here, right now, *tonight*?

JORY

Anything else would show a spectacular lack of urgency.

DODGE

If this is a bad time...

JORY
No, it's not.

BIZ
Yes, it is.

JORY

(To DODGE) No, it's not. You're needed.

(To BIZ) It's fruit of the poisoned tree, Biz.

(To DODGE) Fruit of the poisoned tree.

(Mystified, DODGE studies the painting.)

BIZ

Oh come ON, Jory.

JORY

Well we can't *keep* the painting after learning about this... predator! We can't ignore the depravity of the man who made it.

BIZ

Whoa whoa whoa. This museum's not exactly blind to bad actors. The Sackler Trust is a perfect example! We suspended all further donations from the foundation and the public loves us for it.

(She removes her coat, fanning herself.)

JORY

And that was the right and righteous thing to do.

BIZ

So we're not *unconscious*.

JORY

And I'm proud of the museum for that decision. Win-win.

BIZ

Is it, though? Win-win? Who'll bankroll the new wing *now*, Jory? Who'll foot the bill for the next retrospective? ...Keeping the museum open means keeping it staffed. Attended. Sought out by the public. And that all means keeping it funded enough to expand, or buy new works—or fix the damn plumbing, for God's sake.

DODGE

Well George—[usually...]

JORY

Operations funding, Dodge. Not George.

BIZ

And Jory, it's not as if Gelding was caught eating his young.

JORY

The man RAPED LITTLE GIRLS.

(All react.)

DODGE

What, *this* guy? *Gelding*? He—that's disgusting.

JORY

Yes, exactly. And that taints everything he ever created.

BIZ

It's a **work of art**, Jory, an inanimate object. It has no clue about its origins.

JORY

But we know! *We* know its origins, now. Neutrality can't be an option for institutions claiming to have ethics at their core.

BIZ

Do we claim that?

JORY

Isn't it in the genetic makeup of "made environments"—museums, publishing houses, universities—to push truth to the forefront?

BIZ

Except that what we call "truth" is constantly morphing. It's like film developing in a bath of chemical information.

JORY

But that's not an impediment to truth, Biz, it's a reason to *monitor* for truth!

DODGE

But...it's a painting.

BIZ

You called this intervention, Jory. What *else*, exactly, do you expect me to do about this?

JORY

How are we not on the same page about this? It needs to come down!

BIZ

This museum can't just take down a work of art because we learn

that the guy who painted it was repugnant.

JORY

Not to be intolerably woke, but *what are you talking about?*

BIZ

You don't get to talk to me about woke. I'm not a fossil. I vote for woke.

JORY

Well this conversation is the inevitable consequence of your vote. It's high time museums acknowledged the poisoned artifacts hanging on our walls. In my book, we have no *choice* but to act.

BIZ

Well in the library of the *real* world, we certainly DO have a choice. In fact, even if I agreed with you, you're asking the impossible! I don't have that kind of power. Do you know what it takes to abruptly remove a painting? The "wringing of hands" over terms of the contract... special convocation of the board... abeyances to the donor so she won't—[walk away...]

JORY

Oh yes you DO have the power! As curator you can't *de-accession* a painting on your own, delete it from the collection—but remove it from the gallery? You *absolutely* can decide what goes up or comes down within your purview. You're avoiding the issue, Biz.

BIZ

But your issue isn't my issue. My focus isn't moral reflection. My job is curating the most representative collection of nineteenth-century work—[of the...]

JORY

I know. And you're *immensely* skilled—you're my North Star, Biz. ...So deploy your skill now! *Take* the Gelding down. Light the fuse for change across the art world!

BIZ

I fought long, hard, and clean to land this position, Jory. You watched me do it! I'm not about to be labeled a cowboy curator and lose it now.

JORY

Well the *Louvre* had the guts. They renamed the Sackler Wing after news broke about Purdue Pharma. Why are we so squeamish?

BIZ

Yyyes, but the Sackler Foundation—[and others...]

DODGE

The Sacklers sure come in handy.

BIZ

They do, don't they? (To JORY) Sackler, Johnson & Johnson... they're not a *product*. They're human stakeholders laundering reputations by giving lavishly to the arts. *That's* what's being renounced today by the Louvre. I mean, think about it: You don't see the *OxyContin* being punished.

JORY

Well...Germany, then! Angela Merkel. When we learned that Emil Nolde wasn't (as famously assumed) a beleaguered painter who was a *victim* of the Nazis, but actually a Nazi *acolyte*, Chancellor Merkel publicly took Nolde's paintings down. She took a stand, right there and then.

BIZ

But if a *museum* played moral judge and jury like that, people would scream censorship!

JORY

Doesn't a loathsome person bring censorship on himself?

(She looks to DODGE.)

DODGE

Oh I don't really ask those kinds of questions...

(She looks harder. He holds up his palms.)

DODGE (Cont.)

Hey, I'm Switzerland, here.

JORY

See, now there's another example right there.

BIZ

Who, Dodge?

DODGE

Who me?

JORY

Switzerland. Neutral during the war? Really?

(She ticks off her fingers.)

JORY (Cont.)

Compassionate asylum? For Jews, not so much. *Economic ethics?* Enh. More like steady exports to maintain trade with the Nazis—and surprise, surprise? After the war, Swiss business was WAY ahead in the merchandizing game. ...As in, nice Omega, Dodge.

(DODGE looks at his wristwatch. BIZ discreetly covers her own. JORY continues ticking off.)

JORY (Cont.)

Swiss loans to Germany? ...*Geneva Freeport*, a storage haven for looted art?

BIZ

So you're scolding us over the Matterhorn? Really?

JORY

The *point* is, every slice of life poses a test of conscience.

(DODGE fidgets.)

JORY (Cont.)

What.

DODGE

But, so, if I become a person who does that—who boycotts Roman Polanski movies, or, or Paula Dean's biscuit recipe because she's a bigot...or stops banking at B of A because it's corrupt...if I do all that because someone or something is bad news...is that who I'm supposed to be from now on? On guard forever, and for everything?

JORY

Well *that's* a little reductive.

BIZ

Is it, though? If everybody's a Mussolini, then Mussolini isn't a monster among ordinary people. If *everybody's* a bad actor, then even Mussolini isn't a Mussolini. If you follow me.

JORY

Listen, I'm not saying I don't understand the challenge, but calling out wrongdoers has to start somewhere!

BIZ

But what's the logical endpoint, Jory? I mean, can I not donate to the Salvation Army anymore because the organization is

homophobic?

(DODGE fingers his shirt.)

DODGE

Uh-oh.

JORY

The question isn't where does virtue *end*. The question is where does it start? "Nail your colors to the mast, for queen and country!"

(Blank looks.)

JORY (Cont.)

Master and Commander? ...Ship at war? ...Flying its flag? Good book, great movie.

DODGE

Oh! ...But, Russell Crowe...

JORY

Yyyeah. But there's a difference between being a dickhead and being a predator.

(DODGE moves to the middle.)

DODGE

Then I guess I'm not clear. Where DO you draw the line?

BIZ

(To JORY)

Right! And who gets to draw the line, if there is one? ...Why are we confusing morals and art *anyway*? And when did you become the public conscience?

JORY

Oh you think I'm alone in thinking this way? ...Dodge! Let me ask you a very important question. (To BIZ) The only one that matters, in fact.

DODGE

(Worried)

Oh God.

BIZ

(Annoyed)

Oh God.

JORY

(*Deliberate*)

Do we tolerate the odious acts of a genius—a painter, a composer, or a...an inventor or a writer—just because of the brilliance of his or her achievements?

(DODGE sidles midway between BIZ and JORY.)

DODGE

To be honest, I don't really pay attention. Well sometimes I pay attention. Whether I pay attention depends.

JORY

Well, say, *Caravaggio*—a murderer, by all accounts.

BIZ

(*A warning*)

Context, context...

JORY

Well then *heLLLO*. PICASSO, statutory rapist? Picasso, who called women "machines for suffering" and said he should burn them when he was done with them? What do we do about his art?

DODGE

But what *can* we do? It's PICASSO. (*Beat*) Yeah, I dunno.

JORY

So I'm asking. *Caravaggio*, Picasso, Degas—any malefactor.

DODGE

Degas? With the ballerinas?

JORY

Degas? Degas was the *poster* child for anti-Semitism during the war. While France reckoned with its ethnic makeup, he used his celebrity to wildly condemn Jews. He was a pestilence all his own.

DODGE

Oh. ...I just like his work.

JORY

(*To BIZ*)

What about our ethics as an institution? As leaders *in* an institution with access to damning information about the artists we feature?

BIZ

But who are we (*waves around*), here in the white cube, to purify life for the whole of humanity? Our statutes only call for due diligence, Jory. Provenance, authenticity.

JORY

Then clearly we've missed something. The statutes should demand due *vigilance*—and not just for artists! For musicians, actors, scientists, architects....

(BIZ picks up her coat.)

BIZ

You know, none of this matters anyway.

JORY

You *can't* believe that.

BIZ

Look at my face. The only people reading about Gelding's diaries right now, and Gelding's perversion, are industry insiders like us. The article's going to be in Art News, not Vogue.

JORY

What does that matter? This new knowledge—whether it's between you, me, and the lamppost, or the insider art world, or every person in the city—this knowledge warrants action!

(BIZ throws her coat back down.)

BIZ

No, you know what? Hold on. Three problems with that. First: **credibility**. ...How do we KNOW? How do we really know, for sure, that what we're reading about Gelding is true? How reliable is any source in cases like this?

DODGE

But isn't Art News the gold standard? (Sorry.)

BIZ

No, you're fine, Dodge. And you're not wrong, about Art News. And no doubt Aesthetica will weigh in too. (*To JORY*) And okay—maybe even, by morning, The Guardian or the Times. They're all top-tier publications...but they're not infallible.

(DODGE grins.)

DODGE

Did you read where The Guardian swooned over "Canada's handsome

president”?

JORY

Well he is damn cute.

BIZ

Oh, he is...but Canada doesn't *have* a president. Justin Trudeau is prime minister.

JORY

(Defensively)

Well no source gets things right ALL the time.

DODGE

To Biz's point, I think.

BIZ

Thank you, Dodge. Just because it's in print doesn't make it gospel. *(To JORY)* And **second** point: If you're really going to brandish morality at me, then isn't it also our moral responsibility to give people a chance at grace, and the space to evolve?

(JORY indicates painting.)

JORY

An offender from 1870 can't be evolving *now*, in the twenty-first century.

DODGE

Oh *that* makes sense.

BIZ

Yes but the flip side is that today's concept of what's morally acceptable is a pretty blunt instrument by which to judge a nineteenth-century artist.

JORY

Gelding's behavior is actionable. Period!

DODGE

But back *then*?

JORY

So what, "back then."

BIZ

No, no, I hear you, Dodge. *(To Jory)* Retrospectively, "back then." Arthur Gelding was a creature of his time. You can't just **write people out of history**. You can only *contextualize* artists

like Gelding and see the world through the lens of their generation.

JORY

Are you saying an era is defined by what its people take for granted? Time isn't a *centrifuge*. It doesn't separate the moral poles by generation.

BIZ

You're reacting as if Gelding had inflicted his immorality on us. But he's not the time traveler...we are. We're the ones imposing present standards on the past.

JORY

Well YEAh, because we *live* in the present. And this work *hangs* here, in the present, and it represents a behavioral outrage. Isn't it our role to find alternatives to tainted goods, past or present?

BIZ

What, to judge and extinguish somebody's output in a show of "doing the right thing"? Our role in society, Jory, is to meet the definitions of "MUSEUM."

(She picks up her coat.)

JORY

(*Mocking*)

I thought you had a *third* problem to share.

(BIZ faces her.)

BIZ

And third: **We represent the ARTWORK, Jory, not the character of its makers.** Our job is to safeguard the exhibition of art for the public.

JORY

That's a mission statement, not a philosophy.

(BIZ waves her off and starts to leave.)

JORY

...Scared?

(BIZ stops and straightens.)

DODGE

Uh-oh.

BIZ

...What?

JORY

Are. You. Scared? To be the first?

(BIZ turns.)

BIZ

You can say that...to *me*?

(She walks back.)

BIZ (Cont.)

In case you hadn't noticed, there aren't a whole lot of our demographic in museum leadership in this country. Less than four percent of curators are people of color. And *women* of color? *Tsss*. So don't talk to *me* about courage. ...And you know what? That's not even the point, Jory.

JORY

What is the point, Biz?

(BIZ drops her coat on the bench.)

BIZ

You want the point? Let's spin out your theory for real.

JORY

Gee, Biz, do you really have the time to discuss a moral issue? I thought you—[didn't see...]

BIZ

Oh I'll stay a minute for *this*.

(DODGE opens his stepstool and sits.)

BIZ (Cont.)

Let's say we do as you say. We convict Gelding and all his... spawn.

(DODGE flinches.)

JORY

Well that was blissfully easy.

BIZ

So we take it down. And *then* what? What's next? Where does the prosecution stop? What about the degenerates hanging elsewhere

in the museum? Do we purify the whole collection based on character reference?

JORY

It'd be a hell of a start.

BIZ

Well let's take that Messiah complex through its paces, shall we? In *your* scenario, we declare our allegiance to the dirty truth rather than to the artwork—holistic collection be damned. We strip the galleries until only Mother Teresa's work can be displayed without fear of controversy and—[follow that...]

JORY

Now *there's* a person with a dark side. Medical neglect, media hound, fake—[orphanages...]

BIZ

Well then, substitute a blemish-free person of your choice.

(DODGE raises his hand.)

DODGE

How do you ever know, going in, who's without blemish?

JORY

It's our business to know.

DODGE

But can we run a background check on every artist?

JORY

Why not? We—[could...]

BIZ

No, we bloody well cannot. (*Beat*) Let's go with finger-painting chimpanzees, for the sake of a blemish-free artist.

DODGE

Chimps in captivity, bad optics.

BIZ

Not helping, Dodge. (*Thinks*) Okay, I'm calling it. Our blemish-free artist for today is Jane Seymour.

JORY

Third wife of Henry the eighth?

DODGE

Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman?

BIZ

What Dodge said. (Well...either way, actually. They both painted.)

(JORY and DODGE weigh this without objection.)

BIZ (Cont.)

Okay. So now we've culled all the bad guys from the walls, and the airwaves, and the laboratories, and we only give space to unprovocative artists—forever. We are now a world of moral BEIGE. ...Is this of value to anyone? Do our patrons continue to subscribe? Or do they feel frustrated and deprived, and stop coming?

JORY

They see us for the groundbreakers that—[we are!]

BIZ

They vote with their feet and reroute to the Met! Our attendance plummets, we flunk our mandate, the grants dry up...and then?

JORY

We rise from the ashes with a progressive new agenda!

BIZ

What, the Vice Squad agenda? What use is any progressive environment if it doesn't provide a range of experience? If we pre-sanitize music, art, science, fashion—you name it—based on the nasty reputation of the maker—on where he or she lands on the spectrum of noxiousness, we really ARE judge and jury.

JORY

If we shy away from censure because of the *celebrity* of the maker, or the *cachet* of the artist, we're buying into the cult of personality! Then we're just part of the human wave that kowtows to charm and power.

BIZ

But what good is righteousness when you're starving the public of stimulation? Either the museum presents the work of unsavory masters along with the virtuous, or we can't hold a *candle* to other museums. What, "Please visit. We guarantee a Renoir-free experience"? That'll bring 'em running.

JORY

Oh please. How many great artists could we choose from who

AREN'T burdened with a sordid past? Pissarro. Morisot. Da Vinci. ...Okay, maybe not da Vinci.

BIZ

Right? It's not so easy to pick and choose—not to mention, how do we pull off all those new acquisitions? The truth is that if we become the morality police, we alienate God-knows-how many visitors. And without visitation, we're not a museum. In which case we have no purpose, and we close. In which case the community sees NO art. And if *all* museums gamble with posterity and lose, NO ONE, anywhere, sees the art. So who are we punishing?

JORY

What about the public trust?

BIZ

If my role is to contribute to the survival of this museum, then we just have to leave the never-ending inventory of villains to someone else. Somebody with a different brief.

(She signals "end of story" and turns for her coat.)

JORY

WHAT? It's *high noon* in this country, Biz! Conversation is being confiscated left and right! **Think of your responsibility!** This museum has to *change* in order to survive.

(BIZ turns back.)

BIZ

That's an easy call from your particular hilltop, Jory, but we're not one unified mindset. We're not a...a *BORG* out of Star Trek.

DODGE

LOVE Star Trek!

BIZ

While the Bible Belt is exterminating Darwin, should we, on the "coasts," be judging and eliminating Aristotle?

JORY

Oh that reminds me. Wichita is de-accessioning a Junot. Do we want it?

BIZ

Painting or pastel?

JORY

Oil on canvas: "Woman Voting in Closet."

BIZ

Oooh, we might. Let's talk about that.

DODGE

"Woman voting in closet".... (*Knowingly*) Is Kansas changing polling stations again?

JORY

Maybe Kentucky wants a closeted woman for the Creation Museum.

(She registers what BIZ said a moment ago.)

JORY (Cont.)

What do you mean, *Aristotle*?

BIZ

See? We can't know the vices of every iconic figure. So how can we excommunicate one after the fact? Aristotle wrote repeatedly that women were of no value because they were too cold to produce seed. Semen.

DODGE

Okay, yeah, I'm just gonna...

(He turns and busies himself.)

JORY

He what now? ...Well that's HIM off the syllabus!

BIZ

But is twenty-first-century indignation the best gauge of an Aristotle? Wouldn't a better test be to look at his constraints? Aristotle was limited by the evidence and experience of his time...so isn't it likely he'd be persuaded differently today, under the influence of modern science?

JORY

You couldn't count on that. (*Sadly*) I think Aristotle has left the building.

BIZ

Oooh, you are ruthless! Look, Jory. Within an inch of your life in all directions there's a decision to be made. You can make each decision with condemnation, or you can show some latitude.

JORY

Well *that's* a sham, right, because latitude just postpones the tipping point forever. We end up paralyzed, wearing *fig* leaves in a stiff wind. (Beat) Actually, no, it's more than that. It's the drip, drip of ignored evil that accumulates over time until society reaches its breaking point.

BIZ

Ha, well, I'll see your drip-drip rule and raise you a whack-a-mole. Whack Arthur Gelding on the head?—up pops Pablo Picasso. Crack Charlie Rose on the head?—up pops Garrison Keillor. And on and on...

(DODGE is thoughtful.)

DODGE

Gelding can't defend himself.

JORY

Sorry, what?

DODGE

Well, Gelding died a century ago and isn't here to defend himself.

BIZ

Excellent point, Dodge.

JORY

(Sputtering)

Is *Caligula* here? If we excuse dead predators just for being absent, aren't we obliged to let living villains off the hook too? If we canonize, say, Thomas Aquinas—who condemned Jews from the pulpit, thank you very much—if we exonerate the great lions of history because of their body of work...then don't we have to let, I dunno, James Levine off too? Agatha Christie? There has to be a moral through-line here.

DODGE

(Scandalized)

Miss Marple was a predator?

JORY

No. But Agatha Christie was racist. And Then There Were None started life as Ten Little Niggers, then Ten Little Indians, til someone in Publicity thought it might be smart, hello, to revise the title. But that kind of revision isn't elimination—it's just a re-brand.

DODGE

...Who's James Levine?

JORY

James Levine, Charles Dutoit...legendary music conductors in thrall to their genitalia. *(To BIZ)* That's the thing, Biz. Bigots and sexual predators, dead or alive, who happen to be off-the-charts-talented—aren't they *all* a product of their times? Nobody gets a pass.

BIZ

And yet, if we condemn reflexively, we don't advance the conversation at all.

JORY

Bullshit. It takes courage to call out monstrosity.

BIZ

It takes courage to be UNSure, too, you know.

JORY

Sorry, uh-unh. Mel Gibson, Neil deGrasse Tyson...the record is what it is.

BIZ

Wow. You worship accountability without exception. One mistake and it's all over!

JORY

I have a mind, Biz. I just use my voice to speak my mind.

BIZ

We can't outrun the news by removing the painting, Jory. As *you* said, Gelding's personal history is outed, now. So what would we accomplish?

JORY

We'd be taking a stand! If we do *nothing*, we're just capitalizing on the human habit of inattention to keep from rocking the boat!

DODGE

But...I'm not following. The painting is completely innocent in all this, right?

BIZ

And *voila!* *(To JORY)* The painting is an innocent in all this.

(She moves lovingly to the painting.)

BIZ (Cont.)

And this one, like all great paintings, has its own poetry to share. How it was conceived. Why he chose this particular palette. Whether that brushstroke...right there...was deliberate, or just a happy accident.

JORY

Oh very Bob Ross. But we're not doing Ode to a Painting, here. What's inescapable, Biz, is that we know something vile today that we didn't know yesterday. And the thing to do is ACT.

DODGE

I...maybe...I mean, we're not the Louvre. Don't we have a right to stay silent?

JORY

No, we don't.

(They fall silent.)

BIZ

(To JORY)

Well here's a happy little cloud for you. How about NOT making a thing of this? What about the soothing effect of the status quo? This is a safe space, after all.

JORY

We're a *museum*, not a *sanatorium*!

BIZ

But don't museums have a palliative goal too? To be that "refuge in a rainstorm"? To nurture the unfreighted visitor experience?
(JORY watches her incredulously.)

JORY

You're making it up as you go! Nothing in the field even *suggests* that!

(It dawns on her.)

JORY (Cont.)

You don't *want* an educator's opinion. You don't care about the pedagogy...you're just wrestling with your own conscience.

BIZ

If that were true I'd have started a *long* time ago.

JORY

Why didn't you? Or never mind *that*—why not take this

opportunity to start now, then?

BIZ

Who does that, though, Jory? Museums don't disavow their collections based on behavioral records. No more than bookstores do! Hang on a minute.

(She reaches into her bag and pulls out...)

BIZ (Cont.)

The Old Man and the Sea.

(She opens it at random and reads, melodically.)

BIZ (Cont.)

"The clouds were building up now for the trade wind, and he looked ahead and saw a flight of wild ducks etching themselves against the sky over the water, then blurring, then etching again, and he knew no man was ever alone on the sea."

(She gently closes the book.)

BIZ (Cont.)

I don't think Hemingway's goin' anywhere anytime soon.

JORY

Hemingway. Really? The guy who said, "If you leave a woman, you probably ought to shoot her because it would save enough trouble in the end even if they hanged you"? *That* Hemingway.

(She reaches for the book and checks the frontmatter.)

JORY (Cont.)

Oh, and loook. It's published by HarperCollins, winner of the Toxic Workplace Award.

(Checks the backmatter.)

JORY (Cont.)

Ohhh, and the font is gill sans! Font created by Eric Gill, brilliant typographer—and yet another pedophile!

BIZ

Now you're just being a little shit.

JORY

Start pulling back curtains and it's amazing how often you come up with a little shit.

(She walks over to BIZ and puts an arm around her.)

BIZ

What.

JORY

Have you ever fried bacon naked?

BIZ

Okay, didn't see that coming.

DODGE

(Unhappily)

No, me neither. I'm goin' for coffee.

(DODGE exits.)

JORY

Well I'm a person who fries bacon while naked.

BIZ

I'm quite sure there's help out there for that.

JORY

I risk a lot to gain a lot. I throw myself at the world and try to make cracks. Because flowers can bloom in those cracks, and enough poppies can make a meadow, and—[if we...]

BIZ

Are you poppy-splainin' the world to me? 'Cause you know what happens when you piss in the wind, Jory.

JORY

(Pointing OFF)

It comes back a Jackson Pollock?

(BIZ looks OFF, chuckling—then checks anxiously with JORY.)

JORY

Oh no, it's all good. Pollock once took a piss in Peggy Guggenheim's fireplace (maybe), but he's no predator.

(She returns the book to BIZ.)

BIZ

So. You'd boycott Hemingway altogether. And never again read... Bellóć—a Catholic zealot. Or...Ishmael Reed...Joseph Conrad. Alice Walker!

JORY

Jury's out on Reed and Walker, you know. But...yes. I'd like to think I'd avoid them all, now.

(Beat.)

BIZ

And then what?

JORY

And then what what.

BIZ

What *about* those books, the ones you wouldn't read? Should they still be sold? Stay on library shelves? On your *mother's* shelf?

JORY

That's different.

BIZ

No-no-no-no-no. *You're* the one who resurrected Hemingway for the firing squad, so that's bullshit. It's exactly the same moral argument as the Gelding. You can't widen your tightrope like that to avoid hypocrisy when it suits you.

(JORY's stung. BIZ sweeps up her coat, faces her.)

BIZ (Cont.)

It's fine to stand on principle, Jory, but you have to know when to relent. This painting's fate isn't to vanish. It stays on the wall. And I'm going home.

(She starts out.)

JORY

...So this is about *guts*.

BIZ

AGAIN with guts!

JORY

What are personal ethics if *not* about having the balls, Biz? ...The Gelding is my line in the sand.

BIZ

Why? Why are you putting so much effort into this? You're not just *intent* on persuading me—you're obsessed!

JORY

Why? Because...**NO MORE!** Because an hour ago, reading *this news*? One more revelation about an artistic monster? I—I **can't DO this anymore!** I can't shut my eyes—not one, minute, longer—to the sadists and bigots and misogynists on exhibit around us. I **won't be part of that anymore!**

(She holds up her hand as BIZ starts to respond.)

JORY (Cont.)

My heart...*hurts*, my stomach *hurts*, when I imagine the victims of ogres like Gelding. Children, who never stood a *chance* in their time. Were never, ever, shielded from the power brokers of society.

Why does this painting matter? Because we OWE them this one. ...Because it's crystal clear that this moment is *pivotal*. That it puts us at the vanguard of change in the arts. THE DIARIES ARE THE SMOKING GUN! They make *this* the moment—*our* moment, Biz!—to add starch to the social backbone and claim what we stand behind—and don't.

Why am I working on you? Well I hella didn't think I'd *have* to! You of all people! But now I *am* on you, because whether you're preaching to the choir or preaching to the willfully *deaf*, there's a molecule of reachable space in everyone.

(A hint of menace...)

JORY (Cont.)

And isn't it to everyone's advantage to start with *persuasion*, before...escalation sets in?

BIZ

What's that supposed to mean?

JORY

Before a matter of principle becomes a matter of personal leverage?

BIZ

What are you *talking* about, "leverage." There's an odor of threat about you right now, Jory.

(JORY is blank.)

BIZ (Cont.)

I get that you're standing on principle—I could hardly NOT see that—but seriously, this is all a little Wagnerian.

JORY

Oh, people chain themselves to *railroad* tracks for the sake of principle, Biz. It's been a noble tactic for a long time.

BIZ

Noble, huh. You might wanna think about that. Because if this is going to be about courage, Jory—and that seems to be what you're going for, somehow—who's going to have the bigger hammer?

JORY

Well I think there's actually a litmus test for that, Biz.

BIZ

Oh I think so too.

(They regard one another. BIZ holds up a hand, picks up her coat.)

BIZ (Cont.)

I strongly suggest we pull back before this gets out of hand. (Beat.) I'm gonna come at this from a different angle.

JORY

Knock yourself out.

BIZ

Let me ask you something. Don't you think we need to honor the sacrifice of people who risked everything to save great art throughout history? ...The Monuments Men, for example—

JORY

Oh I saw that movie. George Clooney. Talk about a cultural idol.

BIZ

No but *listen*. What about...oh my God, the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad, during the siege! Their staff was eating *melted curator's glue* just to survive! And yet those men and women stayed in the building, *with* the collection.

(She pauses reverently.)

BIZ (Cont.)

They protected the museum with their lives.

JORY

Well then go ahead and fight for *those* artworks, 'cause nobody risked death for *this* one. ...Look, I know. All the art heroes. And all the librarians who saved books from burning...*all* the

great protectors over time.

BIZ

I'm just trying to be a good protector, Jory.

JORY

And you are! You guard the collection like Cerberus! (*Sadly*) Except every other head is barking up the wrong tree. To curate is to take sides, Biz—you can't just *ration* your ethical decisions. "Protection" is passive. *Action* is what moves the needle! It's like the saying, "Go out on a limb! That's where the fruit is."

BIZ

(*Wearily*)

Oh now who? Heracles?

JORY

Jamba Juice...but still. (*Beat*) Biz. It only takes one free choice to ignite our better angels.

BIZ

But we're not *Vikings*. We don't offer human sacrifice to atone for miscalculation. There's no dress code for how to respond to something like Gelding!

JORY

That's right, we aren't born knowing how to atone. We learn by *example*.

BIZ

What do **we** have to atone **for**? Bill Cosby's litany of sexual assaults, Dostoevsky's venom against Jews, Gelding's pedophilia—they're not your fault. They're certainly not mine.

JORY

You miss the point. We don't make restitution as a form of contrition, or out of guilt...

BIZ

And we're not pondering a legal obligation here.

JORY

...or to stay within the *law*. We make amends to **acknowledge and honor the people who've been harmed**. We do it...we do it to show *respect*.

As to obligations, maybe not to jurisprudence, but to justice?

We rise and fall on the index of the justice around us—the Biz I know understands that!

BIZ

You do realize, justice aside, that you're talking about eradicating the great masters? About a world without Picasso or Degas?!

JORY

But *would* it, honestly, create a vacuum if Picasso rotated out, if new artists "came up," rotated in? The truth, God knows, is that there are thousands of other, groundbreaking artists for whom we should be making room. They're making their own cultural breakthroughs!

BIZ

On the backs of the great masters!

JORY

That's totally Old School.

BIZ

Well, yyeah!

JORY

That kind of thinking diminishes artists who might be on the brink of completely *original* creative discovery.

BIZ

Not to mention *female* artists. *(Beat)* Wait. I need that back.

JORY

Yeah you do. I think you just souped up my point.

(BIZ is flustered, regroup.)

BIZ

Well the remedy's just going to have to lie elsewhere. So what else would do it for you, Jory...maybe signage?

JORY

I don't follow—oh, the *exhibit* labels? An explanatory note under the Gelding?

BIZ

Suppose we did put an asterisk next to the name of every creep in the museum.

JORY

Relegate the nasty to a note on a three-inch label?

BIZ

Or a QR code? "*For breaking revelations, scan here!*" You think the public would go for that?

JORY

Oh, they'd *swarm* in for that. Like flies to the moisture of a dead dog's eyes. They'd get their art *and* the titillation. The work *and* the monster behind it.

BIZ

Would that appease your sense of honor? I'm actually willing to consider something like that.

JORY

Asterisks to diffuse the tension? Come on.

BIZ

It'd be *something*. It would show we're...*aware*.

JORY

That we're aware we're exhibiting *monsters*—and bringing their work even *more* celebrity while we're at it.

BIZ

So that's a no, then. Leaving the painting up but furthering the public's understanding wouldn't cut it for you.

JORY

There's no valor in lip service, Biz.

BIZ

Valor! So what *would* be valorous—a Victorian Compromise? Siphon the bad-person artists into a side room, a "rogues' gallery" where the public can seek them out or not, like prostitution in Dickens's day?

(She softens.)

BIZ (Cont.)

Listen, Jory. There are indefensible human beings. There are *unspeakable* human beings who make gorgeous art, or build a Getty Center, or discover alternating current...

(DODGE approaches, OFF, singing "*La dona è mobile*" from *Rigoletto*. BIZ points in that direction.)

BIZ (Cont.)

...or elevate the world with a voice like an angel's...

JORY

(*Looking off*)

You've got to be kidding me.

BIZ

No, I meant Plácido Domingo.

JORY

Well I'm heartbroken to say, Domingo's sexual power plays are a perfect example. We can't act as if we don't know about the offense, once we know. We can't un-ring that bell.

(DODGE enters with three takeout coffees from Peet's.)

BIZ

A beautiful soul isn't necessary to the creation of a beautiful thing, Jory. We have to be able to *live*.

JORY

But to be able to live with *ourselves*, don't we have to choose conscience—soul, for lack of a better word—over anything else?

BIZ

(*To DODGE*)

Abandon hope all ye who enter here.

(DODGE pauses, confused, then resumes his approach.)

DODGE

Did you know—you were talking about soul, right? Did you know that, a hundred years ago, an American doctor hypothesized that the human soul could be *weighed*? He tried to measure the loss of body mass at the moment of death. And from a single, *infinitesimal* difference, he surmised that the human soul weighed just less than an ounce.

JORY

I love that. The human ounce. Maybe every soul-searching decision comes down to that.

(Dodge hands BIZ a cup.)

DODGE

Thought you might be flagging about now, intense decisions and all that.

Angel!

BIZ

(She reaches for it. JORY accepts the other cup reluctantly.)

What.

DODGE

Jory, don't.

BIZ

What?

DODGE

I have to.

JORY

Whaat.

DODGE

It's Peet's coffee.

JORY

Yyaaa.

DODGE

She means it's tainted.

BIZ
(*Hopelessly*)

There's a fly in it, what?

DODGE

J.A.B.

JORY

Nazis.

BIZ

What do you mean, Nazis.

DODGE

Nazi ancestors. Peet's is owned by J.A.B. Holdings. The owners—well the *parents* of the owners, the previous generation, mind you—were Nazi sympathizers. Ergo, boycott Peet's.

BIZ

Fuck them, then.

DODGE

JORY

Also Krispy Kreme.

DODGE

Noooo.

JORY

I know. The temptation to despair is very great.

BIZ

Joryyyy. Doesn't the *significance* of the product—donuts versus, say, Guernica—doesn't that come into it, even in your world of *recreation*?

JORY

What, so it's okay to boycott Krispy Kreme donuts but give Picasso a pass for a very large painting?

BIZ

(To JORY)

Why, on Earth, did you become a museum educator?

JORY

Why did you join the curation staff?

BIZ

...To be part of selecting and caring for what the public sees...for what comes in, what rotates, what—[goes out...]

JORY

The Stasi curated too, you know. Who lives, who dies... "Curating" has a lot of sloppy meanings.

BIZ

(Hotly)

And to "educate" means...?

JORY

To facilitate understanding.

BIZ

(Pouncing)

Then use the Gelding, Jory! Don't insist on taking it down—*educate* the public about the man and start a discussion! If we just eliminate pernicious things, what lessons and conversations are lost in the process?

JORY

But if we allow them to stay, we normalize their presence!

DODGE

(To JORY)

I see Biz's point, about the teachable moment.

JORY

But do we *talk*, or do we ACT? Do we *explain* or do we MODEL?

BIZ

(Exasperated)

Here we go. It's all down to the *moral deed* with you, isn't it. Some kind of...universal code of indictment.

(JORY spies and pounces on the Art News and brandishes the cover spread: a Paul Gauguin landscape.)

JORY

Universal code? Touché! Right here! Do I really need to bring Paul Gauguin into this conversation? Does his history *alone* not pave the way for a moral decision about the Gelding?

(BIZ tosses this off.)

JORY (Cont.)

You get it, right, Dodge?

DODGE

(Uneasily)

Oh, well, I...

JORY

This...this **person**, Gauguin, infected three Tahitian child-brides with syphilis and lived in a hut called the House of Orgasm. (To BIZ) He was a contemporary of Gelding's—is his debauchery explained by the mores of 1888?

BIZ

Tahiti is in the past.

JORY

The Bataan Death March is in the past.

BIZ

But still in living memory.

JORY

Oh, what IS the statute of limitations on atrocity?

BIZ

So you what, want to expunge Gauguin too?

JORY

How else do we make it clear?

(BIZ points to the cover.)

BIZ

And anyway, this isn't one of Gauguin's "Polynesian babe" paintings. It's a *pastoral*. A naïve, bucolic landscape. With a cow and everything.

(JORY and DODGE look at the cover.)

DODGE

Ah. Yes. The cow. Livestock is so comforting.

JORY

Just a minute. Are we now assessing an artist's morality by his subject matter? Where does that leave...Goya? Rubens, for God's sake—?

BIZ

Seriously? If we go down that road, what about...*Rape of the Sabine Women*?

JORY

Yes, obviously, *horrible* image—but was Rubens a predator? If he wasn't a predator, or a camp informant, or a bomb maker, and if the physical painting does no harm, where's his moral failure? Our discussion is about a painter's moral *fiber*, not what's on his canvas.

BIZ

Well I don't know what *YOU* deduce about an artist's moral fiber when he chooses to paint mass rape...

JORY

But rectitude *can't* be about a painter's subject matter. We can't know the painter's intention. *Was* it to exploit, or was it to throw light on exploitation? To leer, or to express anguish?

(BIZ moves to the Gelding.)

BIZ

I honest-to-God don't understand how you can look at this gorgeous painting and think of banishing it to the vault. Doesn't it deserve to hang for its beauty *alone*, for heaven's sake?

(Beat.)

JORY

Did you say...beauty?

(DODGE appreciates the painting. BIZ squirms.)

JORY (Cont.)

Because that's very interesting.

(She starts circling.)

BIZ

(Nervously)

Oh do stop orbiting.

JORY

Really, very, interesting. So is beauty the standard for acceptability? Because I can list any number of hideous paintings whose artists have impeccable character. *(Beat.)* Hey Dodge?

DODGE

(Small, wary voice)

Yya?

JORY

You know the little Mackenzie next door?

BIZ

Ah c'mon, Jory.

DODGE

(Small voice)

Yyaaa?

BIZ

(To JORY)

Okay, okay. It's not about beauty. I chose the wrong attribute.

JORY

That's convenient.

BIZ

You're very well schooled in contempt, aren't you. Tilting at everybody's missteps.

JORY

Now just a minute.

BIZ

I'm sorry, but it's just...the Social Justice Warrior, the sanctimony, wears on me sometimes.

JORY

Being trapped in the *amber of indecision* weighs on me. Are we at the limits of cultural imagination?

BIZ

A museum isn't a delivery system for morality, Jory.

JORY

What's your thinking, Dodge?

DODGE

Oh, you know...nothing.

JORY

The question is style versus character, Dodge. You can do this.

DODGE

(Hesitatingly)

Well, then, to me...the Mackenzie looks like heirloom tomatoes on acid, so no, I think it's ugly as sin—but I *totally* understand that it can't be about what I *like*. What I like. It's obviously great art or it wouldn't be here. *(Beat)* Right? *(Worried)* Oh God. Is it...was she...

(JORY signals thumbs-up.)

DODGE

Oh good, then there's nothing to worry about.

JORY

That's right. Can't condemn her good character for want of good taste.

DODGE

No, I mean...it's just a painting.

JORY

(To BIZ)

So if curating isn't about what we think is beautiful, or ugly, or risqué, or provocative...If subjective opinion about a product *isn't* an acceptable criterion for deciding its fate...

BIZ

Which it isn't.

JORY

Which it isn't, then what are we left with but conscience? What do we do, in the end, but choose—*every time*—between daylight and complicity? Sometimes we're just obliged to nullify the enemy—that's just the way it is. Oh, and I include *everyone* in that, by the way. Michelle Shocked's music, for her raving homophobia... R. Kelly, singer and sadist, need we comment... Eric Clapton, after his tirade in seventy-six...Led Zeppelin, for—[locking girls...]

DODGE

But Eric Clapton expressed remorse for his outburst at that concert, right? He said he *regretted* being a racist.

JORY

Regretted being a "HALF-racist" actually. (Who SAYS that?) And does an apology actually *exonerate* him? I mean, one question...just wondering...the "wogs" and the "coons" and the "fucking Jamaicans" he unleashed on, decades ago—do you think people who remember that are listening to him now?

DODGE

(*Tentatively*)

Well, I am. I mean, when I listen to music, I'm not condoning the artist's behavior. I'm just...listening to music.

BIZ

Precisely. *And*, if the offender shows some measure of remorse, if we can put the bad behavior behind us, then—[all the more...]

JORY

But surely we can agree that contrition only succeeds in the eye of the beholder. So did Clapton's apology erase the harm he caused?

BIZ

(*Triumphant*)

NO! Because you can't erase history! You can't erase a Gauguin, or a white-supremacist Wagner, or a Gelding.

DODGE

Wait a minute. Are we erasing the remorse or are we erasing the person or are—[we erasing...]

JORY

We're erasing the *product*. Tonight, the product is this painting.

BIZ

We're not erasing ANYTHING! (To JORY) Were you not bouncin' to Clapton's "I Shot the Sheriff" in the cafeteria two days ago?

(JORY's eyes widen. She looks away and reaches for her coffee cup. BIZ watches and waits. JORY takes a sip.)

BIZ

Unh-hunh. And there goes your high horse, off into the sunset without you.

(JORY quickly sets the cup down.)

BIZ

See what you did there? Why do you get to do that, Jory? Preach about Peet's and then partake? Where actually IS your virtuous threshold? Because that line in the sand keeps shifting.

DODGE

(Dreamily)

I get that with Escher sometimes.

JORY

(To BIZ, nervously)

Well I wasn't paying attention, just now.

BIZ

Oh, you mean lapses are permissible? We can be human?

(JORY is silent. DODGE discreetly pulls out his phone and consults it. BIZ pounces.)

BIZ

And who—by which I mean, what child labor in Sierra Leone—extracted the conflict minerals for that cellphone? (To JORY) Or yours? Or mine? We HAVE to be able to be human. And righteous capitalism isn't so easy.

(DODGE eases the phone back into his pocket.)

JORY

But it isn't just about retail, is it. You keep raking the pond to muddy the waters, but the fact remains that anything we benefit from, in life, has a backstory. I mean—Dodge, you got a polio shot, right?

(DODGE nods in surprise.)

JORY (Cont.)

Well, the venerated Jonas Salk invented that vaccine. And Jonas Salk *experimented on his own children*. Science comes with its backstories too.

BIZ

Are you actually directly Bluetoothed to Wikipedia?

DODGE

I know, she makes me very nervous.

BIZ

And what about you, Jory? Would you have been good with a delay of who-knows-how-long before another Jonas Salk put an end to polio? Would you have refused that vaccine for your child?

DODGE

Well *science* shows that—[without...]

BIZ

Nope, not an anti-vax discussion.

DODGE

Ah.

JORY

(To BIZ)

Well I wouldn't have *had* kids, so it's moot.

BIZ

Then how can you sermonize about things like this?

(JORY is silent.)

BIZ (Cont.)

And if you *can't* explain yourself, here's a shocker: (*Softly*) *I get it*. ...My point all along has been that it's simply not possible to rise to the indignation of the day ALL the TIME. Sometimes we catch the machete by the blade, that's all.

DODGE

That would end it all right.

BIZ

Precisely. Mourn, address, move on. That's the message in this room tonight, Jory. We deplore the news about Gelding, we address it in discussion, and we move on.

JORY

Are you equating conversation with addressing the problem?

BIZ

I know you'd prefer to cut straight to the Grand Gesture, but think of the consequences before you advocate for drama, Jory.

JORY

...Look. All I can do is go back—imperfectly, I understand that—to the people behind what we consume—*whatever* “consume” means. First and foremost comes the maker. And his or her *product*—the music or the play or whatever—is a direct descendant of the person. It's all indictable.

BIZ

But that's just wrong on so many levels! Henry the Second forced two children under six to marry. He incited the death of Thomas Beckett. *Egregious* acts. But he also seeded the—[judiciary...]

DODGE

You're not going to talk about semen again are you?

BIZ

(Ignoring him)

He seeded the judiciary of the world with habeas corpus. Would you give up the legal right of habeas corpus because of the man behind it?

JORY

He incited *murder*! How can we ignore that association?

BIZ

How can we *condemn* by association? What about Harvey Weinstein's grandchildren? Or xenophobic Renoir's art dealer, or racist Rudyard Kipling's...I don't know, third cousin insufficiently removed? And damn it, you just condemned Peet's for something that happened two generations ago! Let's at least stick to the original culprits, here.

DODGE

Yup, yup. It's the Punishing Bell of the Volga.

(Pause.)

JORY

You mean...what do you mean.

(DODGE leans in dramatically.)

DODGE

It's the Old Kremlin, 1581. Czar Ivan the Terrible murders his adult son in a fit of rage. Cracks his head with a scepter. (They really shouldn't give toys to royalty.) But that's not the story.

After *that* son dies, and the *czar* dies, Ivan's *youngest* son is banished to another village...and is soon discovered with his throat cut. The village church bell tolls a terrible dirge. Days later, as punishment for having sounded the news, the bell's clapper is yanked out—and now the bell is mute. And on top of *that*, the bell is sent into exile. (*Thinks*) And damn...if that's what they did to the bell, what the hell did they do to the bell ringer?

(Beat. BIZ and JORY pick right back up.)

BIZ

(*To JORY*)

So basically you're saying that every seed (*changes that*)—every fruit dropped from a bad tree bears the guilt of the parent?

(JORY's flustered.)

JORY

Anyway, we're going off-piste.

BIZ

Nice try. But doesn't the piste—the trail—we walk depend on what we're willing to live without? I have *my* non-negotiables, you have *yours*...

DODGE

Oh, now *that* seems right.

JORY

Well how efficient! Shall we test the global impact? ...Dodge! Would you, mmm...give up your shiny new Ford Explorer? Because Henry Ford was a flaming anti-Semite.

DODGE

I have really large dogs, so...

JORY

And how do you listen to Van Halen in your shiny Ford?

(DODGE opens his mouth—)

JORY (Cont.)

Because you should know that your radio...your Bluetooth...your "Hey Alexa!"—every microchip—operates on transistor technology.

DODGE

Get out. Transistors went out with the Korean War.

JORY

Nope. Transistors are still with us, everywhere.

BIZ

Totally lost.

JORY

Well, who invented the transistor?

DODGE

(Searching)

Hang on...

BIZ

William Shockley. ...Damn it.

DODGE

You're twelve. How do you even know that?

JORY

William Shockley, that's right. Fervent eugenicist. Homophobe. Racist. And still we use the spinoffs of his mind-palace every day. The vomit just grips you.

(DODGE eyes the floor.)

DODGE

Well grip back, please.

JORY

No, but see? That moment, that "oh nooo, not that too"—it's like a starter's pistol for critical thinking!

(JORY moves near BIZ and sniffs.)

JORY

Chanel Number Five, am I right?

BIZ

I like the classics.

JORY

Sooo as you may know, Coco Chanel was a Nazi collaborator. Just sayin'.

BIZ

And I'll wear that stain of shame forever, but I'm wearing my Chanel til I die.

JORY

Okay then. A swing and a miss with that one. *(Thinks)* Biz! Where do you stay in L.A. when the museum pays? / Beverly Hills Hotel, right?

BIZ

(Surprised)

/Beverly Hills Hotel. *(Busted)* Oh hell. Beverly Hills Hotel.

DODGE

Oh I know this one! Kingdom of Brunei owns posh hotels around the world? And Brunei...

BIZ

(Soberly)

And the sentence in Brunei for being gay or adulterous is death. By stoning.

(A moment.)

JORY

And the Hyatt can't help you. They hosted the national conference of an anti-Muslim hate group.

(A moment.)

JORY *(Cont.)*

So, Biz? Where's *your* line in the sand? You have your own demons to deal with, no?

BIZ

What's that supposed to mean? ...Jory?

JORY

Oh, nothing.

(BIZ again senses threat. JORY moves on.)

JORY *(Cont.)*

So, how hard is it to boycott a hotel?

(BIZ decides to let the moment pass.)

BIZ

But boycott is a tool. If it's just down to personal feelings and doesn't effect change, it's meaningless.

JORY

Noo, a boycott is a declaration of intent to *create* change! So why not boycott—take down—the Gelding!

BIZ

And then what?

JORY

NOW what what.

BIZ

What do you *do* with a banished Gelding or Degas? What about the Cézanne in the vault, product of another, virulent, denouncer of Jews? Do you...*re-donate* it and let it hang somewhere else? *DO* you, actually, hide it in the museum basement?

DODGE

I have a question.

BIZ

(*Relieved*)

Yes, Dodge. *Anything!*

DODGE

What about the napkins?

BIZ

I'm sorry, what?

DODGE

Say we do get rid of the painting. What about the napkins, and the postcards, and the refrigerator magnets? I mean, what about all the products that *come down* from that painting over time? You couldn't possibly find and and delete them all. (Not to mention loss of revenue, right?)

(JORY idly retreats.)

BIZ

What a great point. What good does it do to remove an original painting if "Picasso coasters" and "Gelding bobbleheads" are still doing a brisk business in shops all over the world, with

or without the original art on the walls? You can't cancel *everything*.

DODGE

Aftermarket is forever.

BIZ

It really is. In the end, is there any point in evicting a Whistler from the gallery if his mom is on a tea cozy in the gift shop?

JORY

That would be James McNeil Whistler, lifelong racist? Oh I think *SO*. Maybe it means goodbye to Whistler's Mother, or the Peacock Room at the Smithsonian, **but that's why it takes courage to take a stand!**

BIZ

Just let me ask you, Jory. What's more sacred? The maker, or the masterpiece?

JORY

That's my very question, Biz. Which end of the seesaw do we hold more sacred? The product, or the character?

(DODGE sneaks a look at his watch.)

DODGE

So anyway.

BIZ

Overlooking an artist's bad behavior is what sustains museums all over the world, Jory.

JORY

What kind of a measure is that? We don't *have* to follow the drumbeat of habit, you know. We can *choose*.

BIZ

Except it gets pricklier and pricklier to make the right choice.

JORY

And easier and easier to rationalize the wrong one. *(To DODGE)* Or decide not to decide—just abdicate. Is our moral compass actually broken?

(DODGE nervously draws himself up.)

DODGE

Jory! I... This is awkward... Probably not the most strategic interruption of my career...

BIZ

Au *contraire*, Dodge. Save us from the moral compass, please!

DODGE

Well... (To JORY) Well, I don't like the sound of that. The "moral compass" thing.

JORY

Oh, Dodge, I just meant—[that it's...]

DODGE

Most of us just do our best, Jory. Maybe some of us *don't* care one way or the other, but most of us draw the line where we can. At wearing fur, maybe, or watching a Cosby rerun, or eating at homophobic Chick-Fil-A.

BIZ

(*Soothingly*)

I understand.

DODGE

(*Not soothed*)

I'm not sure you do, Biz. I need...I just need to be able to—I dunno, pull on a pair of leather boots in the morning without agonizing about the cow. This discussion's not an intellectual exercise for me—although I've participated, I don't deny that. It's good to step outside myself sometimes. But it's starting to feel...personal.

BIZ

Oh, Dodge—

DODGE

(*To BIZ*)

I don't doubt that a hundred calculations go into museum decisions. And I don't disagree, about the limits of due diligence, or the need to stay legit and keep the grants coming. But—all due respect—when I experience something, I really don't care what went into it behind the scenes.

BIZ

(*Gently*)

But those kinds of calculations affect you, Dodge—affect everyone who works in or visits the museum. Without the practicalities—a curator's, a record producer's, anyone who

makes it possible for the public to share in something meaningful—all this would just...rot, in anonymity.

DODGE

But I don't need, or want, to see behind the curtain! I just want...the OZ. *(To JORY)* And what you call the "drumbeat of habit"? That's my *life* you're describing. The pictures I like. The actors I enjoy. The writers I admire. The coffee I buy...the gas that powers the mayonnaise factory that makes a sandwich filling I like, or that gases up my truck to visit my old man, who lives in a facility where electricity blazes day and night. ...I just don't want to be hyper-conscious. *(To JORY)* I don't want to be looking over my shoulder all the time.

JORY

And our job is to make the moral decisions so you don't have to!

DODGE

But I don't want you to do my thinking for me! While you adjudicate right and wrong, what does it say about ME, that I just *like* what I *like*? *Without* thinking about *(to BIZ)* the business end of it. *(To JORY)* Or the moral backstory. I just want to live on the same conscious plane as the painting. I mean, art knows nothing of itself. It just...IS.

JORY

(Gently)

I'm sorry, Dodge. It's not meant to be a reprimand. It's more that...art doesn't materialize out of the ether. *Someone*, with some kind of character, creates it. I mean, somebody created that toolbox!

DODGE

My dad.

JORY

Good guy?

DODGE

Damn good guy, yeah.

(He heads for the toolbox.)

JORY

Good. character matters. It's maybe the most important thing.

*(DODGE gives her a look and exits with his tools.
Beat.)*

JORY (Cont.)

Don't you think character matters, Biz?

BIZ

There's that whiff of threat again, Jory. Third time tonight. Are you? Threatening me?

JORY

We're all freighted with responsibility for change, of course...but sometimes someone has to maneuver to make it happen.

JORY (Cont.)

So how 'bout it, Biz? What are *your* latitudes worth?

BIZ

(Exasperated)

Y'know, Jory, enough with the oblique theatrics. This is where I just hold up a mirror and say it: You've been skating up the museum ranks thanks to the oldest "latitude" in the book.

JORY

What, competence?

BIZ

References. A long line of unquestioned references from your first job on. The unwitting perpetuation of a single falsehood from one employer to the next.

JORY

Excuse me?

BIZ

I was thinking, you know, about your expertise...when you brought up your pedagogical opinion a while ago? About those fancy degrees and *cum laudes*?

(JORY stiffens.)

BIZ (Cont.)

Because, well, you and I both know that Carnegie Mellon never heard of you. You falsified those credentials long before you landed this job. *(Smiling)* You're here under false pretenses, Jory. I'd say that means *no one* along the way has proven very... vigilant, wouldn't you?

You know, I was thrilled for your promotion last year. Genuinely. But even advancement from within can trigger a...an *itch*, I guess. So I did a little "curiosity review."

JORY

You *fact-checked* me?

BIZ

Not just you, of course. All the candidates. But lo and behold.

(Tense pause.)

JORY

That was a long time ago, Biz. I've proven myself many times since then.

BIZ

That's absolutely true. I've had no reason to call you out.

JORY

(*Pensively*)

...Right, no...that's good...I mean, that's good. (*Beat*) Because I haven't had reason to call you out, either.

(BIZ stiffens.)

JORY (Cont.)

Because you know, and I know, that there's something you might have wanted to show a little more fortitude about—I mean, while you worked "clean and hard" for this curatorship?

BIZ

(*Quietly*)

What are you doing, Jory.

JORY

Because I tell you, that is one gorgeous house you've got. I love that house. ...And I adore that Kandinsky. (*Beat.*) Ah, I see it's coming to you. ...And you have to admit, if we're going to pit my past transgression against yours, mine amounts to...nothing, really.

BIZ

I don't know what you're getting at.

JORY

Oh yes you do. So let's try again: Are you really—*really*?—prepared to fight removal of the Gelding...at any price?

Please don't make me do this.

If I say more now—we can't walk this back, Biz. ...All right, then....

JORY (Cont.)

Two years ago you accepted a personal gift from a donor without clearing it with the board. (*Beat*) You accepted a painting—a very fine little Kandinsky—and it's hanging in your home right now.

BIZ

You don't know that I accepted any such thing.

JORY

She doesn't *know* it was wrong of you to accept the piece, of course. (*Breezily*) We were just *talking*, you know, and she was *sharing*, and well, this *gift* came up.... She *also* shared...well, shall we look at **whose personal collection has been calendared for exhibit this summer?**

Oh, now, Biz. Do I really need to say the words? *Quid...*?

(She lets it hang.)

BIZ

You'd really go there? You'd do that to me? (*A thought*) **Expose me and you expose the donor, Jory!** Surely—even for you, even for *principle*—that's a bridge too far.

(JORY, unspoken: "Is it?")

BIZ (Cont.)

And let's be real about gifts to museum staff, Jory. It happens all the time.

JORY

And how does that serve the public trust? ...Aw, Biz.

I know that Anna Modesto gave you the painting. I know that she most certainly has a record of that gift, for tax purposes. And I know that Anna's, uhm, "*pro quo*" will be hanging in this museum come June.

(DODGE enters to retrieve the ladder.)

JORY

The *inevitable conclusion*, Biz, is that Kandinsky's Blue Mountain is hanging on a wall in your home.

DODGE

Oh, I love that painting.

(Pause.)

JORY

You *know* that painting, Dodge?

DODGE

Oh yeah. Biz—

(BIZ stops him with a look; stares at JORY.)

BIZ

(To JORY)

You won't survive the backlash if I expose your resume, Jory. You'll be out of here for misrepresentation—in fact you'll never work *anywhere* in the arts again. You realize that?

JORY

My destiny isn't tied to a job, Biz—or even this vocation, really. My calling is...*illumination*. *Your* destiny, however...your destiny is—a *brilliant* career. To be...magnificent! You can take a step tonight, with one brave gesture—the Gelding.

DODGE

(To BIZ)

Am I in trouble?

BIZ

No, Dodge. You're not in trouble. ...Take the Gelding down, please.

(DODGE hesitates, then takes it down.)

JORY

(To BIZ)

You really are my North Star. ...I'll leave you to it, then. *[more]*

JORY (Cont.)

Night Dodge.

DODGE

Night, Jory.

(JORY exits. BIZ and DODGE regard one another.)

BIZ

Shall we?

(Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(Lights up: Sunrise in the gallery. DODGE and BIZ enter with a new painting: an Henri Rousseau. They hang it. DODGE exits. JORY enters, wearing a new, more upscale outfit than in previous scene.)

BIZ

Good morning.

JORY

Oh it is, it really *is*. What a great choice, Biz.

BIZ

So glad you approve.

JORY

I'm gratified. Very gratified. The world is cleaner today.

BIZ

Over one painting, huh?

(She collects her things.)

JORY

Going home?

BIZ

Getting coffee. *PEET'S* coffee, with no apologies.

JORY

I am *happy* to grant dispensation for a Peet's coffee this morning.

(She sighs happily at the painting.)

JORY (Cont.)

What matters is that Henri Rousseau is no Arthur Gelding.

(No response. She turns.)

JORY (Cont.)

...Biz?

BIZ

Gosh, I dunno, Jory. Hard to say. I mean, twenty-four hours ago we didn't know about Gelding, so...

Thing is, Jory, creative output is one long, untamable rodeo.

BIZ (Cont.)

You'll never get a rope around the last piece of suspect art. ...But the *Gelding's* gone, so *that's* good, right? All leverage folded and put away?

Jory?

We're square, right?

(JORY gazes around the gallery.)

JORY

"Gosh. Hard to say." ...You know, I never tire of how vast this museum is. How *rich*, in its cross-section of artists.

I just love this place, don't you? There's almost...no end to it.

(Pause, as BIZ takes in the meaning of this. She turns and exits. JORY's eyes follow her out, then turn to the painting. Fade to black.)

End of play