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I t's Not UglY, I t's Art!

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*To
Kimberly Ann Zinszer,
the artist I married.*

I t's Not Ugly, I t's Art!

FARCE. A Manhattan art dealer, Reginald Broake, discovers a rare Picasso painting and jumps at the opportunity to purchase it. Broake invites two wealthy art enthusiasts to his gallery in hopes of creating a bidding war for the rare piece. But before his clients arrive, the gallery's security guard, Max, suffers a freak accident in which his face bursts through the center of the prized Picasso portrait and he is unable to remove his head from the painting. With the artwork ruined, Reginald thinks all is lost, including his gallery. However, when the art enthusiasts arrive, they are enthralled with what they think is an extremely rare three-dimensional Picasso. And with the portrait even more hideous than expected, these art collectors are convinced that it might be the most valuable Picasso ever discovered. But with a Picasso stuck on his head, Max finds it difficult to woo his secret love, Reginald's daughter, and it soon becomes apparent that art, like love, is truly most appreciated by the eye of the beholder!

Performance Time: Approximately 60 minutes.

Characters

(4 M, 5 F)

REGINALD BROAKE: Owner of a Manhattan art gallery; borderline hyperactive with a likeable dog-eat-dog mentality.

ABBY: Reginald's intelligent and affable daughter who works as his assistant at the gallery.

MAX: Art gallery security guard who is secretly in love with Abby; brawny, rugged hick from the Midwest.

MISS TALBOT: Con artist who poses as a sweet and naïve young woman.

MR. NIVEK: Con artist who poses as a modern art appraiser.

AGNES ALFRED-ANJOU: Wealthy art enthusiast; heavy-set.

BEATRICE BEAUMONT-BROWN: Wealthy art enthusiast with an overbearing personality.

BARTHOLOMEW BROWN: Beatrice's meek, timid husband.

VALENTINA PELLIGRINO: Undercover police investigator; wears a light trench coat, hat, and dark glasses.

Setting

Modern art section of a Manhattan art gallery.

Set

Modern art section of an art gallery. There are three freestanding art display walls: one large wall SR, one small wall CS, and one large wall SL. Each wall displays modern abstract art. The walls should give the impression that the art can be viewed from either side. Additional display walls can be positioned in the background. An exit USR leads to the gallery entrance and other gallery rooms and an exit SL leads to the gallery office and other staff rooms.

Pr ops

Sheet	2 Ladies handkerchiefs
2 Wallets	3 Purses
Handful of cash	Argyle socks, for Max
Handful of coins	Gun
Business cards	Photo of Mr. Nivek
Bizarre, ugly Picasso- looking portrait (See note below.)	Photo of Miss Talbot
Chair	Notepad
Glass of water	Pen
	Handcuffs

NOTE: The area of the Picasso painting should be an integral part of the flat and not independent of the wall. The painting can be constructed of canvass or heavy paper (depending on how often it is to be used). The painting should be securely attached to the wall. The face area of the painting (where Max's head bursts through) should be precut with slits that form a circle radiating to a center point like a cut pie. These "slices" of the face can be taped on the backside to hold them in place. The cut-lines should not be obvious to the audience.

Soun d E ffects

Police sirens

"Where I come from,
ugly is ugly.
Doesn't matter
what you call it."

—Max

I t's Not Ugly...I t's Art!

(AT RISE: Art gallery, modern art section, just before noon. Mr. Nivek is looking at the gallery paintings SR. In USR corner, Max stands "guarding." The center display wall has a single painting, which is hidden under a white cloth. Reginald and Miss Talbot enter SL.)

TALBOT: Thank you, Mr. Broake, for the glass of wine. You really do have a lovely gallery. *(She stops and looks at the shrouded painting on the center display wall.)* Oh! My picture! It's covered up!

REGINALD: Yes, I had Abby put a shroud over it.

TALBOT: Why?

REGINALD: Because...because art is very sensitive to lighting changes. You said your painting had been in an attic?

TALBOT: That's correct.

REGINALD: Well, sudden and prolonged exposure to incandescent lighting can be very detrimental to a painting that has been kept in the dark for a long period of time. You must ease it into its lighted environment in brief increments. Art...it's very delicate.

TALBOT: I had no idea. I hope I didn't harm it, bringing it here into the city.

REGINALD: No, no. I'm sure it's fine.

TALBOT: I don't know very much about art.

REGINALD: *(Aside.)* I had a feeling. *(Cautiously, he looks over his shoulder at the SL entrance.)* Now, Miss Talbot, again, I want to thank you for coming into my little gallery and giving me the opportunity to buy this little painting from you. *(He turns to admire the shrouded painting and sighs.)* Simply incredible!

TALBOT: *(Innocently.)* What is?

REGINALD: The Picasso!

TALBOT: Is that the painting?

REGINALD: Yes! I mean, maybe. Who knows for certain!

TALBOT: Picasso? That was the name scribbled across the bottom, wasn't it? Is that the picture's name?

REGINALD: No, it doesn't have a name...that I know of. That's the artist's signature.

TALBOT: Oh, then a Mr. Picasso painted it?

REGINALD: Yes! Pablo Picasso is the artist! I mean, he could be. I'm not sure.

TALBOT: Is he famous?

REGINALD: Who?

TALBOT: Mr. Picasso.

REGINALD: Is he famous?!

TALBOT: I don't know. Do you know?

REGINALD: My dear, Miss Talbot, he's world renowww—. You've never heard of Pablo Picasso?

TALBOT: No.

REGINALD: Then, no. He's not at all famous.

TALBOT: *(Disappointed.)* Oh, then he's not too important.

REGINALD: *(Coughs.)* Important?! I should say so—not! *(Laughs.)* You really don't know what you have here, do you?

TALBOT: A picture.

REGINALD: A Picasso! I mean, yes, a simple little picture.

TALBOT: A picture painted by some man named Pablo Picasso who's not really very famous and certainly not important. Is that right?

REGINALD: That's...one way to describe it...yes.

TALBOT: So, you don't want to buy it from me, after all?

REGINALD: Yes! Of course I want to buy it!

TALBOT: But you said the artist is not very important.

REGINALD: Not...not really. But the painting is very...pretty.

TALBOT: So, you're serious? You'll buy it from me?

REGINALD: If it's legitimate, yes. Money is no object.

TALBOT: Oh, then it's not really worth very much?

REGINALD: I don't know. What do *you* think it's worth?

TALBOT: A couple hundred?

REGINALD: Darn! You do know its value. Yes, it *could* be worth \$200,000, *if* it were properly marketed.

TALBOT: Did you say...hundred thousand?

REGINALD: I don't know...didn't you?

TALBOT: No, I said two hundred...dollars.

REGINALD: Two hundred dollars?!

TALBOT: Yes. I was hoping I could get that much. You see, when dear auntie died, she left me her home—it's very modest—in upstate New York, but it's in dire need of a zillion repairs. I want to live there, but I don't have the money to fix it up. Most urgently is the bathroom—the toilet won't flush. Two hundred dollars would fix it. And like I said, I found several interesting things in her attic I hoped might be of value to someone—the picture, for instance. Is two hundred dollars too unrealistic?

(Reginald stares at her for a brief moment and then frantically begins to search his pockets.)

REGINALD: Surely, I have 200 dollars on me somewhere! *(He pulls out his wallet and opens it. He then takes Miss Talbot's hand and has her hold it out. He begins to count out the money into her palm.)* Twenty, 40, 60, 80, 85, 86, 87 dollars... *(He then pulls out a handful of coins from his pocket. Puts the coins into her palm.)* ...and 35 cents! *(He turns SL. Screams.)* Abby! Quick! Bring me the mad money!

TALBOT: Mr. Broake, I don't want to be a bother. I don't expect you to give me all your money...mad or otherwise.

REGINALD: Dear Miss Talbot, it's no bother. Trust me!

(Abby hurriedly enters SL, carrying a handful of bills. She quickly crosses to Reginald.)

ABBY: What is it, Mr. Broake? What is the urgency?

(Reginald snatches the money from her hand.)

REGINALD: No urgency, Abby! However, opportunity is banging at the door... *(Counts the money.)* Twelve dollars?! That's all you've got?!

ABBY: That's all there is in petty cash.

REGINALD: That's not very much.

ABBY: That's why we call it *petty* cash.

REGINALD: Where's your purse? Quick, go get your purse! I only have 99 dollars and 35 cents. I need more!

ABBY: How much more?

REGINALD: *(Quickly does his math in the air with his finger.)* Ffff...one, carry the nine, carry the nine, carry the nine, ten...mmmm minus fiiiive, minus three, gives me siiiix...100 dollars and 65 cents!

ABBY: I don't have that much cash in my purse. You don't pay me that well.

REGINALD: I'll give you a raise.

ABBY: May I ask why you need 200 dollars?

REGINALD: For her — *(Points to Miss Talbot. Pulls Abby aside.)* I'm trying to close the deal...quickly!

ABBY: Close the deal? For the painting?

REGINALD: For the Picasso! For the Picasso!

TALBOT: I told Mr. Broake, it was no bother.

REGINALD: It's no bother! It's no bother!

ABBY: Mr. Broake, you've not even had the painting authenticated, much less appraised. And Mr. Osterhagen, your appraiser, isn't available until Thursday.

REGINALD: There's no time to wait for Mr. Osterhagen. Besides, I know a Picasso when I see one! *(Makes a Picasso "face.")*

ABBY: I think you're making a big mistake. You should have it appraised.

REGINALD: There's no need. *(To Abby, stage whisper.)* I'm only paying 200 dollars for it. The canvass and the wire with which it's hung is worth that much!

NIVEK: (*Overhearing.*) Pardon me for interrupting. And please forgive me, I didn't intend to eavesdrop. But did I hear that you are in need an appraisal?

REGINALD: Who are you?

NIVEK: Mr. Kevin Nivek. (*Offers his hand.*) I own a fine arts appraisal service...Nivek Appraisals.

REGINALD: Never heard of you.

NIVEK: Here's my card. (*Hands business card to Reginald.*) Again, I don't mean to intrude, but I would be glad to be of assistance. My fees are very reasonable.

TALBOT: Hello, Mr. Nivek. You remind me of a movie star!

NIVEK: Oh, really? Funny, I hear that often. And you are—?

TALBOT: Miss Talbot. I'm the one selling the Picasso.

REGINALD: (*Nervous.*) The painting! Ha, ha, ha. We don't know that it's a Picasso.

NIVEK: Picasso? Interesting...modern abstract portraiture is my specialty.

REGINALD: Actually, Mr. Nivek, Miss Talbot and I have already negotiated a sale price—

ABBY: Mr. Broake!

REGINALD: What?!

ABBY: You know what!

TALBOT: Actually, Mr. Broake, if you don't mind, I think I'd like an appraisal. I would feel simply awful if the painting turned out not to be what you thought it was. I would be sick to my stomach if I inadvertently took advantage of you.

ABBY: As would Mr. Broake.

REGINALD: "As would Mr. Broake" what?

ABBY: (*Glaring scornfully.*) Be sick to his stomach if *he* took advantage of Miss Talbot's naivety.

REGINALD: Of course. Thank you, Abby, for being so very concerned for my stomach.

ABBY: I'm also concerned for legitimacy. You know very well there are a lot of fakes in the art world. You must protect yourself. Your business can't afford a scandal involving a fraudulent piece of art.

REGINALD: Thank you, Abby, for updating us *all* in regard to my financial status. *(To Nivek.)* Might you have any references?

NIVEK: Of course— *(He takes out his wallet.)*

TALBOT: Excuse me, do you have a powder room?

ABBY: Yes, through that doorway, down the hall to the very end, last door on your right.

TALBOT: Thank you. Please excuse me. *(She exits SL.)*

NIVEK: Here are the business cards of a few of my clients. Please feel free to call them.

(Reginald takes the cards, glances at them, and then hands them to Abby.)

REGINALD: Abby, please call these people.

ABBY: Yes, Mr. Broake. *(She exits SL.)*

NIVEK: In the meantime, might I look at the subject?

REGINALD: *(Apprehensive.)* Okaaay...I don't suppose there would be any harm in that.

NIVEK: I'm a collector myself.

REGINALD: Really? An appraiser and a collector?

NIVEK: Yes, but interestingly enough, I personally don't collect abstract of any form.

REGINALD: You don't like abstract, yet you appraise it?

NIVEK: It's not that I don't like it...I just don't *feel* anything for it, positively or negatively. After all, art is all about emotion. Actually, I think it makes me a better appraiser. I'm not biased either way.

REGINALD: I see.

NIVEK: In fact, I was admiring the K.A. Zinszer over there. She is becoming quite popular of late. I own one of her earlier works. I wouldn't mind adding another K.A.Z. to my collection.

REGINALD: Oh...well...feel free to write me a check! *(Smiles broadly.)*

NIVEK: I might just do that. Now, about the alleged Picasso—

REGINALD: Of course! (*Looks for Max.*) Max, come here, please.
(*Max saunters over and joins them.*) Max, would you please help me un-shroud the Picasso?

MAX: Huh?

REGINALD: The painting...over there...can you help me unveil it?

MAX: Unveil?

REGINALD: Yes, as in take the sheet off of it!

MAX: Oh...sure thing. (*Reginald and Max cross to CS. Max removes the sheet, revealing a very bizarre "Picasso" portrait. Pause. The three stare at it.*) That's ugly! No wonder you had it covered up.

REGINALD: It's not ugly...it's art. (*Spells.*) A-R-T.

MAX: If it looks like duck, it must be a duck. (*Spells.*) D-U-C-K.

REGINALD: What does that mean?!

MAX: Where I come from, ugly is ugly. Doesn't matter what you call it.

REGINALD: Max, from now on, just keep your opinions to yourself. You're a security guard, not an art critic.

MAX: Yes, sir.

(*Max returns to his post. Mr. Nivek starts to examine the painting.*)

REGINALD: So, Mr. Nivek, what do you think?

NIVEK: I'm speechless. Please, give me a moment.

(*Nivek continues to thoroughly examine the painting. Abby enters SL. Reginald crosses to her and meets her DSL.*)

REGINALD: (*To Abby.*) So, what did you find out? Were his references acceptable?

(*Abby hands Reginald a card.*)

ABBY: I was able to speak with this Anne Webster. She spoke very highly of him. (*Shows him the other cards.*) There was no

answer at this one, and an incessant busy signal at this number.

REGINALD: Okay. Sounds good enough, I suppose. What do you think?

ABBY: I think you should wait on the availability of your normal appraiser Mr. Osterhagen.

REGINALD: That idiot is on holiday in Germany somewhere! There's no time to wait. Besides, what's in it for Mr. Nivek to impersonate a fine art appraiser?

ABBY: An appraisal fee.

REGINALD: Phooey! A few hundred dollars would hardly be worth going to jail for. I'm sure he's fine. He has a business card!

ABBY: (*Sarcastic.*) Oh, yes. That authenticates everything. If you have a business card, you must be legitimate. Not that it matters that anyone can get a business card printed with whatever they want on it!

REGINALD: I detect sarcasm, Abby. Besides, it was your big mouth that raised the issue of an appraisal in the first place.

ABBY: My *big* mouth?

REGINALD: Sorry, not big. Loud. (*Reginald crosses to Nivek. Miss Talbot enters SL.*) So, Mr. Nivek, have you come to a conclusion, yet?

NIVEK: As a matter of fact, I have.

REGINALD: So, what have you decided? Is it a genuine Picasso? And, if so, what would you estimate its value to be?

NIVEK: I'm sorry, we haven't even discussed my fee.

REGINALD: Yeeesss... (*Aside to Abby.*) ...and the green-eyed monster rears its ugly head.

ABBY: (*Aside to Reginald.*) Takes one to know one.

REGINALD: Actually, Mr. Nivek, you'll have to take your fee up with Miss Talbot. It's her painting. She's the owner. She's the one who should be responsible for the appraisal fee.

ABBY: (*Aside to Reginald.*) Meet Mr. Cheap.

(*Reginald glares at Abby. Miss Talbot crosses to the group.*)

TALBOT: Of course, I should be the one to bear that expense.
(With hesitation.) How much is your fee, Mr. Nivek?

NIVEK: Well, I can provide my services one of two ways. You can either pay me a flat fee of a thousand dollars –

REGINALD: A thousand dollars?! That's robbery!

NIVEK: It's the standard rate for authenticating a painting of substantial value. There's paperwork involved, you know.

REGINALD: *(Aside, to Abby.)* He's going to pull a number out of the air and scribble it on a piece of paper that looks like a cheap diploma! How can that be worth ten cents, not to mention a thousand dollars!

ABBY: It is not an unusual rate, Mr. Broake. You've paid that yourself many times.

REGINALD: I have? To whom?

ABBY: To Mr. Osterhagen.

REGINALD: Reeaaaaally? I will expect a box of chocolates from Mr. Osterhagen for Christmas.

TALBOT: *(To Nivek.)* A thousand dollars? I'm sorry, I can't afford that. Besides, it wouldn't make sense to pay a thousand dollars for something that may end up being worth only 20.

NIVEK: You're very keen, Miss Talbot, which is why I also offer my appraisal services for a percentage of its estimated value.

TALBOT: A percentage?

NIVEK: Yes, a mere two percent. Therefore, if the value of your painting is say 50,000 dollars, then my fee would be a thousand dollars.

REGINALD: Convenient mathematics.

NIVEK: On the other hand, if the value is only 20 dollars, then you would only owe me 40 cents.

TALBOT: Oh! Well... *(To Reginald.)* ... that sounds reasonable, Mr. Broake. Don't you think?

REGINALD: Possibly. *(He does some quick math in the air with his finger and then turns to Abby.)* What do you think, Abby?

ABBY: I think you need to get a tiny bit more involved in the financial aspects of your gallery. Again, Mr. Nivek's fee structure is not necessarily abnormal.

REGINALD: I *am* involved in the financial aspects of my gallery! I do the selling! I'm all about income! Expenses are boring. That's what I pay *you* for.

ABBY: No wonder I keep waiting for a raise in my salary.

TALBOT: I accept your percentage arrangement, Mr. Nivek.

NIVEK: Good. I'm sure you will be very pleased with my findings.

REGINALD: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So is it a genuine Picasso or not?

NIVEK: It is.

REGINALD: (*Shouts.*) I knew it! What did I tell you, Abby? Didn't I tell you it was a Picasso? I told you so, didn't I?!

ABBY: You may have mentioned it. (*Rolls her eyes.*) Mr. Nivek, are you sure? I couldn't find anything about it in any catalogue raisonné or on the Internet.

REGINALD: That's because you looked too quickly. Besides, I've told you before that that computer of yours is entirely too unreliable.

NIVEK: Actually, Mr. Broake, this piece, I am sure, is a work from his late period. At the end of his life, Picasso was very prolific. There are quite a number of lost Picassos discovered every year. I doubt that this one has ever been moved through the market. Therefore, it wouldn't be found in any catalogue raisonné...or the Internet.

REGINALD/ABBY: Lost Picassos?

NIVEK: Well, not *lost* necessarily. *Unknown* would be a better description. Not many people know this, but Picasso gave many of his works away as gifts, particularly to a variety of ladies of whom he was very fond.

TALBOT: Like my auntie?

NIVEK: Yes. Apparently.

REGINALD: Okay, okay, okay. So Auntie was a lover of Picasso. The big question is...what's it worth?

NIVEK: I beg your pardon, I didn't say anyone was a lover of Picasso.

REGINALD: Potato, patatoo. What's this lost Picasso's value?

NIVEK: I would estimate that if publicly auctioned—through Sotheby's, for example—it could bring as much as a million dollars...perhaps more.

REGINALD: One million dollars?!

NIVEK: Well, obviously it's not a Picasso masterpiece. But works of his from this period, regardless of their detail and subject matter, are still highly desirable to many collectors of Picasso's works.

REGINALD: It's worth more than I imagined! *(A flash of guilt suddenly crosses his face, but he quickly turns to look at Miss Talbot with a feigned apologetic innocence.)* Miss Talbot!

(All look at Miss Talbot, who is stunned.)

NIVEK: Miss Talbot, are you all right?

ABBY: She looks pale. I think she needs to sit down!

REGINALD: Max! Get a chair! Quickly!

NIVEK: I think she's a bit stunned by the value of her painting.

ABBY: She's in shock. I'll get her a glass of water. *(Exits SL.)*

REGINALD: Unfortunately, from the look in her eyes, I'd say she's doing some arithmetic regarding the sum of money that will be left over after repairing a toilet.

NIVEK: Much to your chagrin, I'm sure. Did I understand that you had only offered her 200 dollars for the painting?

REGINALD: Picasso! And, yes! I mean, no! I mean, I did, *but* I didn't know that it was a genuine Picasso. Naturally, if I were sure, I wouldn't begin to take advantage of Miss Talbot or anyone else. You wouldn't believe the fakes that come through my door. It's a crap shoot!

NIVEK: *(Unconvinced.)* Uh-huh.

(Max brings over a chair.)

MAX: Here you go, Mr. Broake.

REGINALD: The chair is not for me, you idiot! It's for Miss

Talbot! Do I look like I need a chair?!

MAX: No. You look like you need a priest.

REGINALD: Shut up!

(Max takes the chair to Miss Talbot and the men ease her down on it. Abby enters carrying a glass of water.)

ABBY: Here you go, Miss Talbot.

(Miss Talbot numbly takes the glass from her and takes a sip.)

TALBOT: A million dollars?

NIVEK: Yes.

TALBOT: I-I can't believe it!

REGINALD: Neither can I! I'm shocked! I-I had no idea! Swear to God!

MAX: So you do need a priest.

REGINALD: For what?!

MAX: Confession.

REGINALD: Shut up! Go back... *(Waves Max away.)* ... over there and be quiet and just do whatever it is you do.

MAX: I'm in charge of security, sir. *(He returns to his post.)*

REGINALD: I know that!

ABBY: Miss Talbot, would you like to lie down?

TALBOT: No. No, I'm fine. I'm sorry. I'm so embarrassed.

ABBY: That's all right. It's a lot of money.

TALBOT: *(Emotional.)* It is a lot of money. I'm sorry — *(She takes a hanky from her purse.)* I'm feeling so overwhelmed right now. It's just a lot more than I ever imagined! A lot more than two hundred dollars.

ABBY: Yes... *(She gives Reginald a look.)* ...a lot more than two hundred dollars.

REGINALD: I share your tears, Miss Talbot. *(He shakes off the pain of his shrinking bank account and prepares to pay the piper.)*

Miss Talbot, based upon Mr. Nivek's appraisal, I would like to make you a new offer. A fair offer. Granted, as Mr. Nivek said, your painting—

TALBOT: My Picasso.

REGINALD: Yes...your Picasso, pardon me. As I was saying, your Picasso *might* be worth a lot of money, but I doubt that you have the resources or the connections to find a buyer—at least not very quickly. If you place it at auction, you will have to pay an exorbitant percentage of the auction price as a commission to the auction house, and everybody knows they can be a bunch of crooks! And even then there's no guarantee that it would sell for a million dollars. Isn't that right, Mr. Nivek?

NIVEK: Yes, there are no guarantees.

TALBOT: So what are you saying, Mr. Broake?

REGINALD: I'm saying I would be willing to buy this painting—

NIVEK: Picasso.

REGINALD: Yes...Picasso...thank you, Mr. Nivek. And absorb the cost of finding a buyer...not to mention the risk.

TALBOT: Yes?

REGINALD: I up my offer to \$500.

ABBY: Mr. Broake!

TALBOT: Five *hundred* dollars?

REGINALD: No, 500,000 dollars.

ABBY: Mr. Broake!

REGINALD: What is it?!

ABBY: May I speak to you for a moment...privately!

REGINALD: Excuse us.

(Abby and Reginald go DSL. Mr. Nivek and Miss Talbot pantomime a conversation.)

ABBY: You don't have 500,000 dollars in your account!

REGINALD: So?

ABBY: So?! Where are you going to get that kind of money?

REGINALD: Well, first, I'm going to cut some expenses.

ABBY: Like what?

REGINALD: Like downsizing my office staff.

ABBY: I'm your only office staff as it is.

REGINALD: And you're fired. Sorry.

ABBY: What?

REGINALD: Due to my immediate financial status quo, I can no longer afford your services.

ABBY: You can't afford *not* to have my services.

REGINALD: Okay, okay. You're right. The truth is, I know of people who have scads of money lying around.

ABBY: What are you saying?

REGINALD: I'm saying I'm sure I can find a buyer for Miss Talbot's Picasso for a million dollars, *and* be able to do so this afternoon!

ABBY: Seriously? Who?

REGINALD: Mrs. Agnes Alfred-Anjou, for one.

ABBY: Ah...you're right. She is loaded. And she adores Picasso.

REGINALD: Exactly. Now, let's not keep Miss Talbot waiting!

ABBY: But—

REGINALD: (*Holds up his hand.*) Speak to the hand. We have no time to waste! (*Abby and Reginald cross to Nivek and Talbot.*) I've been discussing our liquid assets as of today, and my assistant, Abby, assures me we can indeed offer you \$500,000, if, of course, you are willing to accept my offer.

TALBOT: I've been chatting with Mr. Nivek, and he feels that under the circumstances of the uncertain, that 500,000 dollars would be a fair price. I accept your offer, Mr. Broake.

(*Miss Talbot offers her hand to Reginald.*)

REGINALD: Done.

(*They shake.*)

TALBOT: Wonderful!

REGINALD: I'll have a check ready for you late this afternoon!

TALBOT: Late...this afternoon?

(She glances at Mr. Nivek.)

REGINALD: Yes, is that a problem?

TALBOT: Well, no, but—

REGINALD: I'm sure your plumbing can wait another five or six hours. Besides, it's a holiday and the banks are closed, and I don't have that kind of money just lying around, you know.

TALBOT: Of-of course not. Later would be fine. Oh, and I would prefer cash, if you don't mind.

REGINALD: Cash?

TALBOT: Like you said, it's a holiday and the banks are closed, and I need to pay Mr. Nivek for his services. But, if that's not convenient, I could see if another gallery would be interested in the Picasso for a cash purchase.

REGINALD: *(Shouts.)* Nooo! You don't want to do that! Cash it is! This evening! Come by around 6 o'clock?

TALBOT: Okay. Mr. Nivek, would that be all right with you if I wait until this evening to pay you?

NIVEK: Of course. Besides, that will give us the afternoon to negotiate my fee. Are you doing anything for lunch?

TALBOT: Oh, well, no I'm not.

NIVEK: Good. Then, shall we go?

REGINALD: Very good. Then we shall see you at 6 o'clock!

TALBOT: Bye.

NIVEK: Good day, Mr. Broake. Oh, and about that K.A. Zinszer I was interested in...might you hold that for me until this evening?

REGINALD: Of course!

NIVEK: Thank you.

(Mr. Nivek and Miss Talbot exit USR.)

ABBY: *(To Reginald.)* Well, that worked out splendidly, don't you think?

REGINALD: Splendidly? I was this close... *(Holds up his fingers indicating a very narrow gap.)* ...to buying a million-dollar Picasso for a mere 200 dollars! *That* would have been splendid!

ABBY: I rescued your conscience. You will be able to sleep at night knowing you didn't take advantage of that young woman.

REGINALD: You *cost* me... *(Does quick math in the air with his finger.)* ...499,800 dollars! And look! *(Points in the direction of the SR exit.)* Did you see that?

ABBY: *(Looks.)* See what?

REGINALD: Miss Talbot...she just walked out that door with your raise in salary. So sorry! Now, I have a phone call to make to Mrs. Agnes Alfred-Anjou. I'm positive she will want this Picasso! Her wallet does typically runneth over for neo-expressionism.

ABBY: If not, you're a half million further in debt.

REGINALD: Thanks to you!

ABBY: Too bad there's not another Mrs. Agnes Alfred-Anjou.

REGINALD: What do you mean?

ABBY: I'm just saying if there were someone else we knew of who would want the Picasso, we could have a sort of impromptu private auction and get them to bid against one another.

REGINALD: And thus increase our profit!

ABBY: Exactly.

REGINALD: How devious of you. And you're worried about *my* conscience? What about yours?

ABBY: My conscience is fine. I'm not taking advantage of someone's financial duress or artistic naïveté. I'm simply suggesting we give equal opportunity to others who do have money and are only more than happy to spend it on pretty things to look at.

REGINALD: Tomato, tamatoe. We're two peas in a pod. Now that we've cabbaged on to this Picasso, there are things to be

done and no time to waste. *(Pause.)* I'm suddenly craving a salad. *(Pause.)* Abby, I'm going to go call Agnes. You think of someone to bid against her!

ABBY: Yes, sir.

(Reginald exits. Abby crosses to the Picasso and looks at it. After a moment, Max saunters up and joins her.)

MAX: Beautiful!

ABBY: *(Startled.)* Oh, Max, you startled me.

MAX: *(Smiles warmly.)* Sorry. *(He takes her hands.)* Abby, I've been wanting to talk to you all morning.

ABBY: I've been busy. *(She takes her hand away.)* I'm busy now! I should go.

MAX: Why? Do I make you nervous?

ABBY: Yes! I mean, no. Well, maybe a little. Did you say you think this painting is beautiful? Actually, I think it's rather ugly...reminds me of you.

MAX: Ouch!

ABBY: I'm sorry.

MAX: No, you're not. And it's not ugly...it's art. *(Spells.)* A-R-T. Or so I've been informed. Besides, I wasn't talking about the picture.

(Abby blushes and steps away from Max.)

ABBY: Oh! Really? Well, don't think your flattery is going to get you anywhere with me.

MAX: It got me somewhere last night.

ABBY: How dare you! I-I-I don't want to talk about it!

MAX: Then let's not talk.

(Max takes Abby in his arms.)

ABBY: Max! Let go of me this instant! I'm at work!

MAX: So am I! That's what I call convenience!

ABBY: Mr. Broake could walk in any minute! Now, unhand me!
(*She pulls out from his embrace.*)

MAX: Oh, come on...just a little kiss?

ABBY: A kiss?! I don't think so. You *know* I don't like you!

MAX: You liked me last night!

(*Max takes a step closer to her. Abby backs away.*)

ABBY: I did not!

MAX: Did too.

ABBY: I was...just pretending. I didn't want to hurt your feelings.

MAX: No, you weren't pretending.

ABBY: Then I was intoxicated.

MAX: No you weren't.

ABBY: Then I must have lost my mind because there is no way I would normally be attracted to someone like you.

MAX: But you are.

ABBY: I are...am...what?

MAX: Attracted to me.

ABBY: Don't be absurd! I'm more interested in the intellectual type—you know, East Coast men—not some brawny, rugged hick from the Midwest. I prefer someone who enjoys theatre and knows what argyle socks look like.

MAX: You think I'm not smart?

(*Max pursues her. Abby backs away.*)

ABBY: No, not particularly.

MAX: You think I'm a hick?

ABBY: Calling it like I see it.

MAX: (*Smiles.*) You think I'm brawny and ruggedly handsome, huh?

ABBY: I didn't say "handsome."

(Max has backed her against the wall with the Picasso.)

MAX: But better looking than Pie-case-o there?

ABBY: Heavens, yes!

MAX: Look— *(He lifts his pant leg to reveal argyle socks.)*

ABBY/MAX: Argyle socks!

ABBY: Oh...my! *(Max tenderly kisses her on the lips for a long moment. Abby pulls away, breathless.)* My...father...will never approve.

MAX: Who cares about daddy? Kiss me again.

(Max leans in for another kiss. Abby slips away from him.)

ABBY: No, not here. *(She glances around.)* Wait! Over here!

(Abby takes Max by the hand and steps SR of the Picasso wall.)

MAX: Where are we going?

ABBY: Not far. I don't want you to get fired for straying too far from your post. Quick, behind this wall. There's a curtain.

MAX: Ah...privacy! I like how you're thinking, my little minx.

(She turns to him.)

ABBY: Don't call me that!

(Abby grabs Max by the shirt and pulls him behind the wall. Valentina enters SR. She wears a light trench coat, hat, and dark glasses. She has the appearance of being undercover. She begins to case the room while appearing to look at the paintings at SR. After a few moments of silence, soft giggling is heard. Valentina reacts.)

MAX: *(Offstage.)* This is kinda fun!

ABBY: *(Offstage.)* Be quiet and kiss me again!

(Valentina looks over the edge of her glasses, seeking the source of the sound. Pause. More amorous sounds and giggling are heard offstage.)

Alarmed, Valentina hurries over and stands before the Picasso. She draws a gun from inside her coat. With her gun ready, Valentina stealthily moves to the left of the Picasso wall and quickly steps around the edge. Cautiously, Valentina moves forward and peers behind the curtain. Valentina lowers her glasses to get a better look. She shakes her head, re-holsters her gun, and glances around the room. With a shrug, she crosses USR and exits. More giggling is heard.)

MAX: *(Offstage.)* Hey, quit it, that tickles... *(Giggling.)* I'm about to lose my balance! *(Giggles.)* Stop tickling! Whoa...whoa...whoaaa! I'm about to... *(Suddenly Max's head busts through the display wall as well as through the painting. His face has now replaced the "face" on the Picasso painting.)* ...fall.

ABBY: *(Offstage.)* Max! Are you all right?

MAX: Fine. *(He looks curiously around him.)* But I don't think this painting is.

ABBY: *(Offstage.)* Is what?

MAX: All right.

ABBY: *(Offstage.)* What do you mean?

MAX: Come around and look!

(Abby appears from around the wall and sees Max's head thrust through the Picasso.)

ABBY: *(Shouts.)* Oh, good grief!

MAX: I told you I'm fine. But I think my head is stuck.

ABBY: Ohhh, good grief! The Picasso! It's-it's ruined! Look what you've done!

MAX: Look what I've done?! I wasn't the one who suggested we sneak back behind there. It wasn't me who began tickling me!

ABBY: But it was you who fell through the wall!

MAX: Yes! Because of you!

ABBY: What are we going to do?!

MAX: First, we need to get my head out—

(Reginald enters SL.)

REGINALD: Abby?

(Startled, Abby turns and stands between Reginald and Max.)

ABBY: Yes, Mr. Broake!?

REGINALD: I've talked with Mrs. Agnes Alfred-Anjou on her cell phone. She was just about to have lunch with friends just a few blocks away. She's quite excited! They'll be here any minute!

ABBY: They?

REGINALD: Yes, she's bringing her friends with her.

ABBY: That's nice.

REGINALD: I want to cover the Picasso for the grand reveal! You know how Agnes enjoys the dramatic.

ABBY: There won't be any shortage of drama, I'm sure of that.

REGINALD: Where's that shroud? Oh, I remember. Max took it. *(He looks toward Max's post.)* Where is Max?

ABBY: I imagine he's around here...somewhere.

REGINALD: Then go find him.

ABBY: I'd rather not.

REGINALD: Why not? Oh, never mind. I'll get another shroud. I've got a red velvet one in my office. I'll use it. Abby, go chill some champagne. I have a feeling we will soon be celebrating with a toast of some kind.

ABBY: I could use a drink right now.

(Reginald starts to exit SL.)

REGINALD: Chop, chop. They will be here any minute! *(He exits.)*

ABBY: Max! Mr. Broake is going to kill us!

MAX: I know!

[END OF FREEVIEW]