



Sample Pages from Epic Adventures in a Rinky-Dink Art Museum

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EPIC ADVENTURES IN A RINKY-DINK ART MUSEUM

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT BY
Ken Preuss



Epic Adventures in a Rinky-Dink Art Museum
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Casting

7W+5M

ABBY (Teen Female)

An energetic and creative student with a fervent desire to solve a legendary mystery.

KAITLIN (Teen Female)

A lover of literature with a hopeless crush on a silent and brooding classmate.

CALEB (Teen Male)

A silent and brooding classmate.

MONIQUE (Teen Female)

Free spirited and artistic and the only student truly embracing the trip.

IRENE (Teen Female)

The class comedian whose jokes, while certainly sarcastic, are never mean spirited.

JENNA (Teen Female)

A bored Queen Bee focused almost exclusively on her cell phone.

SETH (Teen Male)

A regular Joe with a good sense of humor and unexpected charm.

DUNCAN (Teen Male)

A slacker whose lack of ambition is exceeded only by his lack of brainpower.

MS. BELL (Female, 50-60 years old)

A creative writing teacher with a sly sense of humor and a love for her students.

MR. BRIGGS (Male, 50-60 years old)

The owner of the Museum. A well-bred man of wealth and wisdom.

HIGGINS (Male, 30-40 years old)

A loyal yet grumpy museum security guard with slightly peculiar behavior.

LADY (Female, 30-40 years old)

A mysterious patron of questionable sanity, wandering the rooms of the museum.

The Setting

The play takes place across three different rooms within a small town art museum.

The No-Set Approach

The play may be performed with nothing more than a bench and actors who can convincingly imagine artwork on imaginary walls.

The Simple-Set Approach

Three flats, each housing a blank picture frame, stand on the stage, representing the left, upper, and right walls of an art museum. A bench sits center, running perpendicular to the edge of the stage. During quick blackouts between scenes, the bench is rotated in a different direction to imply a new room.

The Still-Simple-but-Slightly-Fancier-Set Approach

For more interesting scene changes, consider filling the frames with artwork that can be changed quickly during the blackouts. This may be accomplished by several methods, including rapidly replacing frames or employing Velcro so that a painting may be swiftly added, removed, or placed directly in front of another. In this approach, each scene should adhere to a theme. Display portraits for scene one, landscapes for scene two, and abstracts for scene three.

Each of the three scenes features a prominent painting which hangs on the imaginary fourth wall. Though the characters discuss the paintings well enough for the audience to imagine them, a director might choose to have an artist create a slide of each painting so an image might be projected somewhere for the audience to view. Such paintings may be created based on details from the dialogue with the director/artist adding his or her own artistic flourishes.

Additional Notes

There are several moments when characters discuss a painting on the fourth wall while others enter, exit, or mill in the background. If desired, a lighting effect may be added to highlight the downstage action.

Stage directions have characters moving in and out of rooms through entrances right, left, and center. Feel free to adjust the timing and location to fit your set design or sense of pace. In other words, if you feel it works better to bring characters in slightly earlier and have them in the background, feel free to do so. The main goal is to choreograph movement to keep the scenes and story flowing.

Whenever possible, ABBY should be near the main dialogue, listening and writing in her notebook.

AT RISE: HIGGINS stands left. His security guard uniform is a little tattered and undersized as if he's worn it a few too many years. He glances right as the LADY enters. She wears a simple dress and glasses and sports a hairstyle that seems a little unkempt. The LADY stops suddenly as she sees HIGGINS, and they stare wordlessly. After a beat, they both smile tentatively. Just as HIGGINS resolves to approach her, there is noise off right. The LADY looks back nervously and crosses to view paintings on the upstage wall. HIGGINS sighs and crosses right. MS. BELL enters, stopping as her STUDENTS file past her and into the museum.

MS. BELL: This way, everyone. Please stick together until we review the assignment.

HIGGINS: *(as if he's said these words too many times)* Good morning. Welcome to the Briggs Gallery. I hope you're all looking forward to a rewarding visit.

CALEB, the closest to HIGGINS, flashes a look of disinterest, and crosses back toward the entrance.

SETH: *(to HIGGINS)* Caleb can hardly contain his excitement.

HIGGINS: *(Rolls his eyes. He is not looking forward to dealing with teens.)* If you could all wait here for just a moment, I'll let our curator, Mr. Briggs, know you've arrived.

DUNCAN: *(Looks around. Sighs.)* Is there anything worse than taking a field trip to an art museum?

SETH: *(points to HIGGINS who is exiting left)* Taking a job at an art museum?

DUNCAN: This is creative writing class. I don't know why we have to look at art.

MONIQUE: *(excited)* To get inspiration. I can't wait to look around!

DUNCAN: Why don't they have a place where they display things people wrote?

MS. BELL: *(crossing left of the class)* They do, dear. It's called the library.

IRENE: *(to all, with mock excitement)* Ooh! Maybe we can stop there on the way back. *(points to phone in JENNA's hand)* If Jenna can map us a route that swings by the post office and the dentist too, the day will be perfect!

JENNA: (*working the phone furiously*) Not now. I'm texting Derrick. I can't believe he didn't show up for the field trip.

MONIQUE: (*to JENNA*) I'm sure you can survive without a boyfriend for one day.

IRENE: (*to JENNA, a friendly jibe at MONIQUE*) Monique should know. She's survived without a boyfriend for sixteen years.

MONIQUE: (*smiles*) I'm just patient. The right guy will show up at the right time.

IRENE: Hey! Here he comes now!

IRENE points left as HIGGINS enters. He stops left and signals to MS. BELL, indicating that MR. BRIGGS will be down in one minute. MS. BELL turns back to her class.

MS. BELL: Mr. Briggs will be here any moment. Let's get into groups.

DUNCAN and SETH move together. JENNA, MONIQUE, and IRENE team up. ABBY joins KAITLIN who gives CALEB a brief glance to see if he might join their group. CALEB crosses away. KAITLIN sighs and watches him longingly.

ABBY: (*to KAITLIN*) Remember what we talked about last night?

KAITLIN: (*sneaking glances at CALEB, barely registering the question*) Um... yeah.

ABBY: I'm going to find out if my theory's true. (*ABBY notices KAITLIN's gaze then waves a hand to get her attention*) Kaitlin? You with me?

KAITLIN: (*snaps out of it*) Sorry. (*gives an honest answer*) I don't know about the theory. I'm afraid it's a waste of time.

ABBY: (*a knowing smile*) Like having a crush on a guy who avoids all human contact?

KAITLIN: (*starts to deny it*) What? I don't have a... (*sighs and gives up*) I can't help it. (*sneaks another peek*) Caleb is so my type.

ABBY: Weird and unsociable?

KAITLIN: Dark and brooding. Like Mr. Rochester from *Jane Eyre*? Dally from *The Outsiders*? (*KAITLIN pauses, sensing ABBY's confusion*)

MS. BELL walks by, overhears, and tosses an offhanded comment to help out.

MS. BELL: Edward from *Twilight*.

ABBY: (*nods in understanding*) Ahhh.

MS. BELL: (*addresses all*) Has anyone thought of a question you might like to ask Mr. Briggs before we begin exploring?

ABBY: (*to KAITLIN*) Here goes. (*to MS. BELL*) May I ask him about the legend?

Her inquiry catches the attention of the others.

MS. BELL: What legend?

ABBY: It's something I've heard since I was a kid: That in the early days of this museum, a young girl came here then disappeared.

DUNCAN: She probably bailed because the field trip was boring.

ABBY: It wasn't a field trip. She just came here on her own and vanished.

JENNA: I don't believe it.

IRENE: Me either. A young person would *never* come to this museum on her own.

ABBY: I'm not making it up. You've all heard the legend, too.

MONIQUE: Where?

ABBY: Chanted on the playground. (*recites slowly, in a sing-song rhythm*) "Vanishing Valerie. Lost at the Gallery. Along with her beauty and youth..."

ABBY looks at KAITLIN who takes the hint and tentatively offers the next line.

KAITLIN: Though the art saw it all...

SETH: (*Jumps in suddenly. He remembers it, too.*) ...it remains on the wall...

MONIQUE: (*unexpectedly remembering the end*) Silently hiding the truth. (*to IRENE and JENNA*) We sang that as little kids, remember?

SETH: My little sister still sings it.

ABBY: The song started somewhere. I think it's based on fact and that it happened here!

IRENE: *(with mock excitement)* The legend must be true! Kids would never chant something that wasn't real! In fact... I heard that Cinderella, dressed in yella... *(points offstage left)* went up those stairs to kiss her fella.

JENNA: *(checks her phone)* There's nothing about Vanishing Valerie on Wikipedia.

DUNCAN: She disappeared from *there*, too?

JENNA: Some local nutcase probably made up that song to generate hype for the museum.

IRENE: It really worked, too. Just look at the crowd...

IRENE points left and everyone looks. The LADY does a double take as she sees the whole group glancing her way. She quickly exits left. As she does, MR. BRIGGS enters. He is a distinguished older man dressed in a suit jacket with a boutonniere. He looks back at the LADY, shrugs at HIGGINS then crosses toward the STUDENTS. HIGGINS takes a few steps left, peeking off at the LADY.

MS. BELL: Here comes Mr. Briggs now. Let's be on our best behavior. Abby, you are not to ask him about that legend. We needn't bother him with this nonsense.

SETH: I'm sure we can think of some other nonsense to bother him with.

MR. BRIGGS: Good morning, everyone. *(a slight bow)* Ms. Bell.

MS. BELL: It's nice to see you again. Thanks for allowing my students to visit.

MR. BRIGGS: The pleasure is all mine. This is the fifth year in a row, isn't it?

MS. BELL: Sixth.

MR. BRIGGS: *(a sigh and a smile)* Time flies, doesn't it?

IRENE: *(feigns a yawn)* Right now, it doesn't feel like it's moving at all.

MR. BRIGGS: *(turns his attention to the class)* Looks like a small group this year.

JENNA: *(still texting)* Some of the class blew off the field trip and stayed home.

MS. BELL: Yes, but the best and brightest are here. They have a love of the arts...

JENNA: And parents who wouldn't let us skip.

MR. BRIGGS: Well, I am happy to have you as my guests. I'm not sure how much Higgins told you, but the Briggs Museum has been in my family for generations, and, despite a few close calls, we've managed to keep its doors open. (*crosses right, handing out maps*) These guides will provide you with information about our paintings and a map of the building.

DUNCAN: (*glancing at the map as MR. BRIGGS moves past him*)
Awesome!

MONIQUE: You see something you like?

DUNCAN: A snack bar, a men's room, and a bench where I can catch a nap.

MR. BRIGGS: Are there any questions I may answer before Ms. Bell sets you free?

DUNCAN: Oh. (*with honest interest*) What do you know about Vanishing Valerie?

SETH: (*admonishing DUNCAN*) Ms. Bell told us not to ask about that.

DUNCAN: (*cluelessly*) She told Abby not to ask. You should really listen better.

MR. BRIGGS: I'm not sure I understand.

MS. BELL: (*reluctantly*) Abby here seems to believe that a young woman once came to The Briggs Museum and "disappeared forever." Would you care to dispel the rumor?

MR. BRIGGS: (*with a little laugh*) With pleasure. (*to the STUDENTS*) You are all perfectly safe. I can assure you that none of our patrons has ever "disappeared forever."

SETH: (*in a cartoonish creepy voice*) That means she haunts this place as a ghost.

IRENE: That's ridiculous, Seth. (*to all, after a beat*) She was dipped in cement, turned to a statue, and stashed in a corner by a lonely and demented security guard.

IRENE points left. Everyone looks at HIGGINS who responds with a confused and awkward wave.

The STUDENTS react with laughs and ad-libbed comments.

MS. BELL: That's enough, Irene. *(to all)* I love the imagination, but let's save a little for the assignment. Remember, each of you is to choose a work of art and be prepared to write creatively about what you think it means or what emotions you feel it evokes. I will be wandering about if you need me.

MR. BRIGGS: And I will happily answer any questions that don't involve the disappearance of guests, the haunting of the premises, or the diabolical schemes of my employees.

MS. BELL: *(to her STUDENTS)* Behave and be creative.

*MS. BELL waves her hands and everyone disperses.
ABBY pulls KAITLIN down left.*

ABBY: We're not giving up on the Vanishing Valerie stuff.

KAITLIN: We?

ABBY: "Though the art saw it all, it remains on the wall, silently hiding the truth." I think the rhyme means that the paintings hold clues. I need your help to find them.

KAITLIN: Why don't you get Duncan and Seth to help? *(points to them nearby)*

ABBY: They couldn't find clues in a painting if eye holes opened and a *Scooby-Doo* villain looked right at them. Come on, Kaitlin. I need your help. You're the smartest person I know.

KAITLIN: Fine. It could be fun. *(sees CALEB)* I need something in return, though.

ABBY: Anything.

KAITLIN: I'll help you in your hopeless quest to solve an ancient mystery of a lost girl who may not have existed in the first place – and you help me talk to Caleb.

ABBY: Deal.

CALEB walks by. ABBY is about to stop him when KAITLIN panics and hides behind her. ABBY smiles as CALEB exits upstage. KAITLIN peeks out, sheepishly.

ABBY: *(laughing)* Which of our quests is the hopeless one again?

KAITLIN: It's hard to speak to someone you're completely obsessed with. Give me some time. I'll get up the nerve. I just need to find a way to start the conversation.

HIGGINS, who has begun circulating the room, overhears KAITLIN's comments, and inadvertently expresses his agreement aloud.

HIGGINS: I hear you.

KAITLIN: Pardon?

HIGGINS: *(covering for his comment, he awkwardly acts as though he is speaking into his wrist watch)* I hear you. Be right there, boss. Roger. *(exits left)*

ABBY: *(shrugs it off)* Anyway. I promise to help you with Caleb as soon as you're ready. In the meantime, let's look for some clues.

KAITLIN: Where do we start?

ABBY: *(opens her guide)* I'm not sure. This is my first time here. *(notices the LADY entering left)* Excuse me, ma'am. Have you been here before?

LADY: *(Surprised. Her voice cracks.)* Yes.

ABBY: Any advice on where we should start?

LADY: *(evasively)* I usually just look around until one of the paintings speaks to me.

DUNCAN and SETH cross down center, overhearing the last line. The LADY feels a little crowded and heads upstage.

SETH: *(to ABBY)* I have a hunch that when one of the paintings speaks to her, she actually answers back.

DUNCAN: That would be awesome.

SETH: What?

DUNCAN: *(moves downstage and points at Painting One as if it hangs on the fourth wall)* If the people in this painting could speak like in *Harry Potter*. Those movies rock.

KAITLIN: *(playfully)* The books are better.

MR. BRIGGS wanders nearby overhearing her statement. ABBY pulls KAITLIN to the bench where

they consult the map and look around the room.
DUNCAN gestures to Painting One as if trying to get
someone's attention.

DUNCAN: Yo, painting people. Hellooo? Hola? (to SETH) They're speechless.

SETH: (*stunned his friend actually tried it*) Me, too.

DUNCAN: I can't do this assignment. Art is the most boring thing in the world.

MR. BRIGGS: (*to BOYS as he gestures to KAITLIN*) Perhaps it will be more interesting if you consider the young woman's point. Books can become movies. Stories can become paintings. Cake decorating can become television. One form of art often begets another.

MR. BRIGGS nods as if he has imparted profound wisdom then wanders upstage.

DUNCAN: I stand corrected. Art is not the most boring thing in the world. (*points to MR. BRIGGS*) He is. (*to SETH*) Let's go look at the T-Rex.

SETH: This is an art museum, not a history museum.

DUNCAN: There are no dinosaurs?

SETH: Not unless you count the old, boring dude.

DUNCAN: Can we at least look at the famous paintings then? The Mona Lisa. The melting clocks. The creepy bald guy doing the impression of the kid from *Home Alone*. (*does an imitation of Edward Munch's "The Scream"*)

SETH: Those are in foreign countries. This is a rinky-dink museum in a dead end town. These paintings are all done by artists living in a 5-mile radius. (*checks his guide*) Maybe we'll get lucky though and find a painting imported from the next town over.

DUNCAN: This is like torture!

MS. BELL: (*overhearing the last few lines*) It could be worse, Duncan. You could be in school looking at pictures of paintings in a textbook.

MS. BELL moves upstage. DUNCAN calls after her, eventually protesting to anyone who will listen. MONIQUE, JENNA, and IRENE wander over.

DUNCAN: But it's a field trip! We shouldn't be stuck in a stuffy old building. It's right there in the name. *Field trip*. We should be outdoors. In the grass. Throwing a Frisbee.

SETH: (*points to map*) They've got a watercolor of a meadow in the other room. We'll grab some cookies from the snack bar, and you can toss them at the painting. (*to the GIRLS, playfully*) You ladies could join us for a picnic.

JENNA: (*glances up from her phone*) Then we'd be the ones tossing cookies.

SETH sighs. He and DUNCAN exit upstage.

MONIQUE: (*watches the BOYS go*) A picnic in the museum could be fun.

IRENE: Jenna's not into fun. That's why she dates Derrick.

MONIQUE: (*to JENNA*) It's too bad Derrick's not here. It's sort of romantic. (*consults map*) There are paintings of beaches... mountains... cities. You could have adventures together without even leaving town.

IRENE: Derrick stayed home to read comic books. He's having adventures without even leaving his couch.

JENNA: (*looks up from phone*) Actually, he finally texted back. He said he was sick. There's no reason for me to be upset.

IRENE: Unless he meant he was sick of you. Are you sure you read the whole message?

IRENE leans to check the phone. JENNA turns away to text some more. MONIQUE's eyes light up as she looks downstage and notices Painting One.

MONIQUE: Whoa. I call dibs on this one. (*points downstage*) I'm definitely using this painting for the assignment. (*starts sketching in a notebook*) What's it called?

IRENE: (*looks right of Painting One to check the sign*) *Until Next Time, My Sweet.* (*looks at the painting*) It's two kids in a yard. I don't get it.

MONIQUE: (*still sketching*) They're in different yards. And they're in love.

IRENE: They're like ten years old and barely looking at each other.

MONIQUE: They're being kept apart.

IRENE: By what? (*points*) That little wall? They could just step over it.

MONIQUE: The wall is symbolic. It's an allegory. Something's keeping them separated. A family feud. Social status.

JENNA: (*turning back*) Mononucleosis.

MONIQUE: I don't think so. Neither one looks sick.

JENNA: I'm talking about Derrick. What are you talking about?

MONIQUE: The kids in this painting. They're not supposed to be together, but they're finding a way to share their feelings.

JENNA: How do you know this?

MONIQUE: The wall is keeping them apart, but she's subtly reaching for that flower lying on top. He's obviously put it there for her because they're only growing on his side. The whole thing's about wanting to be with the one you love. It's beautiful. It's hopeful.

JENNA: (*stepping away*) It's depressing.

MONIQUE: (*to IRENE*) Why would she say that?

IRENE: The little girl has a better love life than she does.

JENNA: (*with resolve*) I need something to cheer me up.

IRENE: (*starts left*) We'll find you a painting of a clown.

JENNA: I'm afraid of clowns. I'd scream and freak out.

IRENE: Then it'll cheer me up. (*to MONIQUE*) You coming?

MONIQUE: I'm making a quick sketch in case I decide to write a poem about it.

JENNA: You're going to write a *poem* from a *drawing* you made of a *painting*? Could you be any artsier?

IRENE: Give her a minute. She'll sing the poem and do an interpretive dance.

MONIQUE: (*laughs*) I just want to get all the details so I don't forget anything.

JENNA lifts her phone, snaps a photo of Painting One then punches a button.

JENNA: I texted it to you. Let's move.

JENNA turns to exit left. HIGGINS steps in front of her.

HIGGINS: I'm sorry, miss. The artist has not authorized reproductions of this painting.

JENNA: (*peeks at the sign*) So, Sam Winters is going to track me down and sue me?

HIGGINS: No. But if you don't delete it, I *will* escort you to the security office.

IRENE: (*to JENNA with mock seriousness*) Don't go with him. Remember what he did to Vanishing Valerie. (*poses comically, as if she's been turned into a statue*)

JENNA: Fine. I'll delete it. (*she presses a button*)

HIGGINS: Now, empty the trash.

JENNA: You forced me to delete the photo, but you *are not* making me do manual labor.

IRENE: He means delete the trash so the photo is gone.

JENNA: Oh. (*she does so*) There.

HIGGINS: Thank...

JENNA and IRENE start left. HIGGINS is suddenly standing near and looking right at the LADY, who has worked her way over to peek at MONIQUE's sketch.

HIGGINS: (*Continued. To LADY.*) ...you.

HIGGINS and the LADY stare for a beat before HIGGINS grows nervous and exits left. The LADY turns right but is blocked as ABBY and KAITLIN come downstage to see what is going on. The LADY turns left, coming face to face with JENNA.

JENNA: (*curiously but not kindly*) Who are you?

LADY: (*nervously*) I'm nobody. Who are you?

Not waiting for an answer, the LADY bows her head and moves upstage, passing MS. BELL, who comes downstage to check on the commotion.

KAITLIN: What do you know? It was Emily Dickinson!

KAITLIN looks for a reaction to her joke, but sees that ABBY has moved center to speak with MONIQUE. JENNA and IRENE stare blankly.

KAITLIN: (*explaining her joke*) Emily Dickinson? “I’m Nobody. Who Are You?” It’s one of her famous poems. (*gives up*) It’s a literary joke.

JENNA: Must have been. Cause it was “literally” not funny.

MS. BELL: (*to KAITLIN*) I thought it was funny, dear.

IRENE: (*to KAITLIN*) You’d knock ’em dead at the retirement home for librarians. (*to MONIQUE*) We’re headed out. Catch up with us when you’re done.

IRENE and JENNA exit left. ABBY pulls KAITLIN center. MS. BELL joins them.

ABBY: Monique has some interesting thoughts about this painting. (*points to Painting One*) Do you think two kids can really fall in love?

KAITLIN: (*considers the painting*) Sure. There are dozens of stories about couples who fall in love at an early age. Katherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. Pip and Estella in *Great Expectations*. (*searches for a reference ABBY will understand*)

MS. BELL: (*with a sly smile as she exits left*) Simba and Nala in *The Lion King*.

ABBY: (*notices MONIQUE’s notebook*) Wow. Your sketch is really good.

MONIQUE: Thanks. I can’t seem to get the girl’s eyes right, though. There’s something different about them. (*points to the painting*) Do you see what I mean?

ABBY: You’re right. I wish we could get a closer look.

MONIQUE: Wait. We can! Jenna texted me a photo. (*Takes out a phone. Pauses, suddenly hesitant.*) I think I’m supposed to delete it, though.

ABBY: There’s no reason we can’t zoom in on it first.

MONIQUE: (*looks around*) Fine. A quick peek. But if someone comes by, it’s gone.

The GIRLS lean in to look. As they do, MR. BRIGGS enters left and notices.

MONIQUE: Here are her eyes.

ABBY: (*excitedly*) It’s her pupils! She has strange pupils.

MR. BRIGGS: (*crossing over*) Who has strange pupils?

The GIRLS react, startled. MONIQUE deletes the photo. KAITLIN covers nervously.

KAITLIN: Ms. Bell does. Twenty of them, five periods a day. It's no wonder she escapes from school once a year and brings a handful of us normal ones along.

DUNCAN and SETH enter upstage, rushing across the room holding cookies.

DUNCAN: Frisbees!

KAITLIN: *(after they exit left)* Some of us are more normal than others.

MR. BRIGGS: Normality, like art, may be interpreted in multiple ways.
(he nods as if imparting great wisdom, heads left, then looks back) But those two are a bit odd. *(exits)*

MONIQUE: *(sighs)* That was close. I deleted it just in time. *(puts phone away)* I'm going to catch up with Jenna and Irene. I'll see you guys later. *(exits left)*

ABBY: *(calling after MONIQUE)* Thanks for the help. *(to KAITLIN)* Did you see it?

KAITLIN: See what?

ABBY: The girl's right eye. Her pupil isn't round. *(points to Painting One)* Look closely. What do you see?

KAITLIN: *(squints)* A poorly rendered circle and a black smudge.

ABBY: It's a heart with an arrow in it. The arrow is telling us where to go next.

KAITLIN: Okay. If that's an arrow – which I am not convinced it is – it's stuck in the heart and not really pointing anywhere.

ABBY: Yes. But where did the arrow come from?

KAITLIN: Your imagination?

ABBY: It came from a bow. Which means it was shot from this direction. *(points upstage)* It's the first clue! We need to find out who shot it. To the next room!

The GIRLS exit upstage. Lights dim for a beat. In the darkness, CALEB enters and rotates the bench to indicate a new room. When the lights come up, he is sitting and staring at a painting on the left wall. ABBY and KAITLIN enter upstage. CALEB notices and

crosses left to the painting. KAITLIN pulls ABBY to the bench. They sit.

KAITLIN: Look. There's Caleb. *(she stares just as he had stared at the painting)*

ABBY: But, we're... *(remembers her promise)* Okay. Are you ready to talk to him?

KAITLIN: I think so. The "kids in love" painting gave me hope. *(she smiles for a beat then turns to ABBY, desperately)* You just need to give me something to say.

ABBY: He's looking at a painting of a desert. Strike up a conversation about *that*.

KAITLIN: Right. It'll be kind of romantic... like we're riding off in the sunset together.

ABBY: Actually, I thought there might be an Indian on horseback and we'd know where the arrow came from. But your idea works, too. *(a kind smile)* Good luck.

KAITLIN crosses left and stands by CALEB. They stare at the painting for a few beats.

KAITLIN: Isn't that the most beautiful thing you have ever seen?

CALEB turns slowly from the painting and looks at KAITLIN. He shakes his head then exits left. KAITLIN crosses back to bench and sits with a stunned look.

ABBY: Sorry. I was hoping that would go a little better.

KAITLIN: *(coming to)* Sorry? Did you see what happened?

ABBY: You asked if he thought the painting was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen, and he shook his head, "no."

KAITLIN: *(a faint smile)* He shook his head, "no." As in, "No. The painting's not the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. You are."

ABBY: You got all that from a head shake?

KAITLIN: It was the way he shook it.

ABBY: *(concerned)* You're my best friend. And I want you to be happy. But you're seeing things that aren't there.

KAITLIN: *(smiles)* Like arrows inside of hearts inside of eyeballs? *(a beat, then playfully)* You believe my interpretation, and I'll believe yours.

ABBY: Deal.

KAITLIN: *(points to painting)* No Indian.

ABBY: *(opens her notebook)* We need a list of people who shoot arrows.

KAITLIN: William Tell. Robin Hood.

MS. BELL enters right and hears the last two lines. She crosses the room without stopping, offering a suggestion before she exits left.

MS. BELL: Katniss Everdeen.

JENNA, IRENE, and MONIQUE enter left as MS. BELL exits.

JENNA: *(overhearing)* *The Hunger Games!* I love that movie!

KAITLIN: *(playfully from bench)* The book was better.

JENNA shoots her a look. ABBY pulls KAITLIN upstage to examine paintings. JENNA, IRENE, and MONIQUE settle downstage.

JENNA: *(to IRENE)* Think I could survive alone in the wilderness like Katniss?

IRENE: You can't function without a boyfriend for five minutes and sprained a finger playing Angry Birds. I don't think you're ready for a post-apocalyptic death match.

MONIQUE: Okay guys, focus. You still have to find paintings for your assignments.

JENNA: *(consults phone)* I'm shopping for shoes. Looking at all this art is going to drive me crazy.

MONIQUE: That's not true.

IRENE: It could be. Look what it did to her.

IRENE points right as the LADY enters. The LADY sees the GIRLS, turns nervously, and begins looking at paintings on the right wall.

MONIQUE: Try the assignment. It's actually kind of fun. (*points downstage center to Painting Two as if it hangs on the fourth wall*) What do guys think of this one?

IRENE: It's a painting of a building. Nothing's happening.

JENNA: Actually, it's a church. And there's going to be wedding.

MONIQUE: (*excited*) See. I knew you guys could do this. (*to IRENE, pointing*) Jenna spotted the guy with a tux in that window and the girl with the white dress in that one.

JENNA: I didn't even look at the painting. I just read that sign that says, *Wedding in a Church*. (*looks at painting*) Hmm. I wonder if Derrick and I will ever end up like this.

IRENE: Do you mean married? Or in the same building at the same time? Cause I don't see either one happening.

DUNCAN and SETH enter left, crossing down center to the trio of GIRLS.

JENNA: That's it. I'm logging into Facebook.

IRENE: To change your relationship status?

JENNA: To unfriend you.

MONIQUE: (*peeks at phone*) You have one thousand Facebook friends?

JENNA: At the moment.

SETH: (*to JENNA*) You can add the two of us.

IRENE: (*to JENNA*) Then you'll have one *hundred* thousand. (*looks pointedly to BOYS*) Because you'll be adding two big zeros.

HIGGINS enters left, moving directly to the BOYS.

HIGGINS: Excuse me, gentlemen. Were you two eating cookies in the other room?

DUNCAN: *Eating* cookies? No.

HIGGINS: (*holds out his hand*) Why were these little pieces all over the floor?

DUNCAN: Maybe the paintings were crummy.

HIGGINS is not amused. MONIQUE laughs loudly. HIGGINS looks at the GIRLS.

HIGGINS: Were you girls involved with this, too?

JENNA: Us? Involved with *them*? Never.

The GIRLS head right. MONIQUE looks back and smiles sweetly at SETH. The LADY, seeing the GIRLS approach, crosses left.

SETH: (*watching the GIRLS exit right*) Women. I'll never understand them.

HIGGINS: (*watching the LADY exit left*) I'm right there with you.

Hearing the comment, the BOYS turn and look at HIGGINS. HIGGINS covers quickly.

HIGGINS: I mean, "I'm right there. (*points to a spot upstage left*) With you... in my sight."

HIGGINS points to his eyes to indicate he's watching them then moves upstage left. He stands as if keeping guard, peeks off left looking for the LADY, then exits.

DUNCAN: What is with that Higgins dude?

SETH: He's probably gone crazy from boredom. Can you imagine staring at these same paintings every day?

DUNCAN: I could if they were TVs. I'd just change the channels or hook up an Xbox. (*points to Painting Two*) If they had a controller on this one, I'd blast the gargoyle guarding the building. (*mimics using a controller and makes laser noises*)

SETH: It's not a gargoyle. It's a Cupid.

DUNCAN: Well, he's armed. It only seems fair that I should be, too.

ABBY and KAITLIN overhear and cross downstage. MS. BELL enters left, exploring the room, gradually working her way downstage to listen.

ABBY: Is the Cupid using arrows?

SETH: (*laughs at her silly question*) No. A bazooka and hand grenades.

DUNCAN: That'd be awesome! (*points to painting*) I'd still rescue that dude, though.

KAITLIN: It's his wedding. Why would he need to be rescued?

DUNCAN: Well. I admit the girl's kind of hot... in a stuck up, old fashioned, repressed, older-woman-who-could-secretly-be-wild

sort of way. But that dude needs help. Look at his face. He wants no part of being there.

SETH: *(to GIRLS)* If anyone knows the “I want to get out of here” face, it’s Duncan.

ABBY: Why would he want out?

KAITLIN: *(considers)* There are dozens of examples of people who wind up together only to find they are incompatible. Think of Anna Karenina... Madame Bovary...

MS. BELL: *(offers a suggestion)* The final couple in any season of *The Bachelor*.

DUNCAN: Trust me. These two are not right for each other. She’s uptight and high maintenance. He’s looking out the window, clearly thinking about something else.

MS. BELL: I must say, Duncan, it’s refreshing to see you taking an assignment so seriously. *(she smiles and exits upstage)*

DUNCAN: *(eyes widen)* Argh! *(starts right)* I’m out of here.

KAITLIN: What’s wrong?

DUNCAN: I haven’t taken an assignment seriously all year. I’ve got a rep to protect.

ABBY: Wait! What do you think the guy in the painting is thinking?

DUNCAN: *(Looks back. Stares for a beat.)* I want a sandwich.

KAITLIN: You can tell that by looking at him?

*ABBY and KAITLIN lean in to look at the painting.
DUNCAN exits right.*

SETH: No. He really wants a sandwich. See ya. *(exits after DUNCAN)*

*MR. BRIGGS enters right in time to overhear. As the
BOYS exit, he crosses downstage.*

MR. BRIGGS: It’s inspiring to see a young man so focused on what he wants.

KAITLIN: Even if it’s only a sandwich?

MR. BRIGGS: Art is the result of passion pursued. *(a beat)* Besides, sandwiches are seven bucks. Gotta make money somehow.

MR. BRIGGS exits upstage. As KAITLIN watches him go, ABBY turns her back to Painting Two and stands on the tips of her toes.

KAITLIN: What are you doing?

ABBY: Trying to see where the groom in the painting is looking.

KAITLIN: *(Tries to follow the gaze. Looks right.)* I think he's glancing toward the snack bar. Maybe he *does* want a sandwich.

ABBY: Help me out here. I think I'm piecing this together. *(points to Painting Two)* This cupid obviously shot the arrow we saw in the other painting.

KAITLIN: *(playfully)* Obviously.

ABBY: That means this is the second clue. The kids fell in love in *Until Next Time, My Sweet* and now there's a *Wedding in a Church*.

KAITLIN: But the guy's unhappy. Possibly *hungry*. And the girl doesn't look remotely like the girl in the other painting. I don't see the connection.

ABBY: I do. *(points to the sign)* Look who painted this.

KAITLIN: *(Reads. A little surprised.)* Sam Winters.

ABBY: The same guy who painted the first one. He's leading us to the truth. If we figure out where the groom's looking, we'll know where to go next.

KAITLIN: If you ask me, he's not looking anywhere. He's just... reflecting.

ABBY: Reflecting. That's it! *(points through the right exit)* There's a little round security mirror on that back wall. If I can get my eyes on the same level as his, I'll see what he's reflecting on.

ABBY turns her back to the painting and begins jumping. The LADY enters left, flashes a huge smile then exits up. ABBY bounces to KAITLIN then stops.

ABBY: *(looking toward LADY)* That was weird.

KAITLIN: *(laughs)* Says the girl on the invisible pogo stick.

ABBY: She saw me jumping by the painting and smiled so big she nearly burst.

KAITLIN: You made her happy. For the first time in her life, she wasn't the strangest person in a room. Did you see anything in the mirror?

ABBY: Another mirror. It may take a while, but if we follow them correctly, they'll lead us to the truth about Vanishing Valerie.

ABBY heads right. HIGGINS enters left in an urgent manner.

HIGGINS: I heard noises. Was someone jumping in here?

KAITLIN: *(as she exits after ABBY)* Only to conclusions.

HIGGINS watches the GIRLS exit right. He glances through the right exit as if searching for something. Disappointed, he peeks through the upstage exit. His eyes widen and a smile flashes across his face. He takes a deep breath, looks to see if anyone is watching, fixes his hair, and exits up. As he goes, the lights dim for a beat. DUNCAN and SETH enter and rotate the center bench to indicate a new room. As the lights rise, DUNCAN sits on the bench holding his stomach. SETH stands next to him.

SETH: Why would you try to eat the apple?

DUNCAN: The sandwich was seven bucks.

SETH: The apple was *clay*!

DUNCAN: Who puts sculptures by a snack bar?

SETH: Who puts gray food in their mouths?

DUNCAN: *(points downstage to Painting Three)* Ahhhh!

SETH: What?

DUNCAN: That's the ugliest painting I've ever seen in my life. *(spins his hands)* The twisty blue things are making me nauseous.

SETH: You don't think it has anything to do with swallowing a large chunk of art?

DUNCAN: I could be dying here. *(looks up, wobbling)* I see an angel and a bright light.

SETH: *(follows his gaze)* That's an airplane flying past a window.

DUNCAN groans and falls forward. SETH catches him, trying to get him back to the bench. They are in a ridiculous position when the GIRLS enter right.

IRENE: Now, that's the first interesting thing I've seen all day.

MONIQUE: I think I should help.

JENNA: *(shooting video)* Then stay out of the way. This is so going on YouTube.

SETH gets DUNCAN to the bench. MR. BRIGGS enters left. SETH quickly sits and props DUNCAN into a sitting position. MR. BRIGGS doesn't notice as his attention is drawn to the GIRLS who move down center to stare at Painting Three.

IRENE: *(pointing to Painting Three on the downstage wall)* What the heck is this?

JENNA: *(looks up from her phone)* I'll tell you what it is. It's hideous.

MONIQUE: Why would you say that?

IRENE: It's a bunch of paint smeared on a canvas.

MR. BRIGGS: Perhaps it deserves more than a cursory glance. Things aren't always what they seem.

MR. BRIGGS nods as if he has provided great wisdom. He exits right, glancing at the BOYS, not noticing that SETH is completely supporting DUNCAN.

IRENE: He's right. This seems like art, but it's not.

SETH stands and helps DUNCAN recline. He tries to set DUNCAN's head down lightly, but it clunks the bench. SETH cringes and moves down to join the GIRLS.

MONIQUE: It is art. It's just abstract. Don't you remember studying this in tenth grade?

IRENE: No, but I think I remember painting this in kindergarten. The only thing missing are the magnets that used to hold it to the refrigerator.

SETH: If they were fruit shaped magnets, I think I might know where they went. *(Looks back at DUNCAN. The GIRLS stare at him. He points to the painting, quickly changing the subject.)* I remember studying this. It's expressionism, isn't it?

MONIQUE: (*pleased*) It is! The artist chose these patterns and colors to create a mood.

JENNA: Well, it worked. 'Cause I'm in the mood to leave. (*checks phone*) My Food-Finder App says they have good espressos at the snack bar.

MONIQUE: We're going already?

IRENE: None of us gets abstract art. It's too random.

MONIQUE: It's not random at all. (*points to Painting Three*) The top strokes are going this way. (*moves her hands right to left*) The bottom strokes go like that. (*moves hands left to right*) It's mostly blue swirls but there are faint circles scattered about. (*points upper left*) You can see a tilted green triangle up here being pushed toward the edge (*points lower right*) and a golden one down here nestled on a swatch of brown.

JENNA: And all this means something?

MONIQUE: Definitely.

JENNA: What does it mean?

MONIQUE: (*flatly*) I have no idea. I don't get it either.

IRENE: Beverage time! (*crosses right with JENNA, pointing to stage right wall*) I'm going to spill random drops on my napkin, so they can hang it up in this empty spot. (*as they exit right*) I'll call it "Espresso-nism."

MONIQUE lingers a moment, smiles at SETH, and points to Painting Three.

MONIQUE: What do you think. Seth?

SETH: I think somebody squashed a bunch of blue stuff and called it art.

MONIQUE: (*laughs*) Yes, but what was he trying to say?

SETH: "I hate Smurfs?"

MONIQUE: Be serious.

SETH: I am. Check the sign. I bet it's a "Gargamel."

ABBY and KAITLIN enter up center. They stop near the bench as DUNCAN groans. SETH and MONIQUE cross up to them.

ABBY: Is he okay?

SETH: He's just sleeping. He took a bite of an apple.

KAITLIN: *(laughs)* It wasn't poisoned and given to him by a spooky old witch, was it?

The LADY enters from right. KAITLIN turns and sees her and lets out a startled scream. The LADY quickly crosses left and exits.

KAITLIN: *(laughing)* I almost made a joke about a prince coming in to kiss him.

HIGGINS enters right, squirting breath spray into his mouth. He sees the others, hides the spray, quickly crosses left, and exits. Everyone laughs.

SETH: Impressive. *(points to KAITLIN)* If you mention the seven dwarves next, this room is going to get really crowded.

ABBY: Actually, we're going to go. *(to KAITLIN, pointing to the artwork)* This can't be the right room. Let's try again.

ABBY and KAITLIN exit up center. DUNCAN groans and starts to sit up.

SETH: I better help him.

MONIQUE: I better get to the snack bar. Will you be okay?

SETH: *(guiding DUNCAN toward a sitting position)* I'll be fine.

MONIQUE: I'll see you later.

SETH: Then I'll be even better.

MONIQUE waves and exits right. SETH waves goodbye, dropping DUNCAN's head against the bench. MS. BELL enters left.

DUNCAN: Ouch!

SETH: *(helps him up again)* Sorry.

DUNCAN: *(still groggy)* What happened?

SETH: You fell asleep. And I think a girl might like me.

DUNCAN: Jeeze. How long was I out?

SETH: Just long enough.

MS. BELL: *(crossing to them)* Is everything okay, Seth?

SETH: (*a little flustered*) Yes. Duncan's... just a little tired.

MS. BELL: You know what might make him feel better?

DUNCAN: A friend who doesn't drop me on my skull?

MS. BELL: Yes. But I was thinking about caffeine. Always does the trick for me.

SETH: That's a great idea. I'll take him to the snack bar right now.
(*to DUNCAN as he leads him right*) We're headed through the sculpture room. We're walking. Not snacking. (*looks back at MS. BELL*) Thanks, Ms. Bell.

MS. BELL: Happy to help. (*looks left as CALEB enters*) Hello, Caleb.

CALEB waves politely, though without much enthusiasm.

MS. BELL: Find anything you like?

CALEB shrugs.

MS. BELL: Well, keep looking. You never know when something may strike your fancy. (*pleasantly, without sarcasm*) Always a pleasure conversing with you.

MS. BELL exits left. CALEB waves and moves upstage to view the paintings. ABBY and KAITLIN enter from upstage, crossing down to examine Painting Three. CALEB, upstage and unnoticed, turns and listens.

ABBY: This can't be it.

KAITLIN: We followed the path twice. If the guy in the church is looking through those mirrors like you say, *this* is what he sees.

ABBY: (*sighs*) I was hoping for something clearer.

KAITLIN: Like a window with Valerie waving from the other side?

ABBY: This just isn't the kind of painting I expected. (*Looks at the sign. Perks up a bit.*) Maybe, we're still on the right track though. This one was painted by Sam Winters, too.

KAITLIN: I'm starting to think he painted everything. (*Consults her guide. Crosses to the bench and sits.*)

ABBY: It's called *Nobody*. (*looks at the painting*) Why do you think he called it that? Because there's *nobody* in the painting? Because a girl vanished and left *no body*?

KAITLIN: Because nobody will ever figure it out. *(stares from bench)* It's a mystery.

CALEB, staring up at the painting, steps directly behind KAITLIN.

CALEB: It's a poem.

KAITLIN does a double take. She scrambles to ABBY and drags her right. She points to CALEB who moves down to look at the painting.

KAITLIN: *(pointing)* Caleb's here. He just spoke to me!

ABBY: What did he say?

KAITLIN: *(totally flustered)* Something about the painting. I think. I'm not sure. I was a little shocked at hearing his voice. It may not have even been English.

ABBY: Well, don't just stand here. Go talk to him! See if you can figure out the clue. *(a beat as she senses KAITLIN's nervousness)* I mean, see if you can find something in common. *(a whisper as KAITLIN moves away)* But work on the clue thing, too.

KAITLIN moves next to CALEB, fighting the impulse to flee. She stares at the painting, finally finding the courage to speak.

KAITLIN: So. You said something about the painting?

CALEB looks at KAITLIN then around the room to see if anyone is watching. ABBY crosses quickly to the bench and busies herself writing into her notebook.

CALEB: It's a poem.

KAITLIN: May I ask why you think that?

CALEB: You wouldn't understand.

KAITLIN: Oh.

There is an awkward pause. Dejected, KAITLIN looks toward ABBY who encourages her to try again. The LADY enters left, crossing upstage, observing unseen. CALEB senses KAITLIN's uneasiness and reluctantly offers more information.

CALEB: The title is *Nobody*. It made me think of a poem.

KAITLIN: (*perks up*) “I’m Nobody! Who are you?”

CALEB: (*calmly*) Emily Dickinson.

KAITLIN: (*with mounting excitement*) You know the poem?

CALEB: I do. (*flatly*) That’s not the one I mean, though.

KAITLIN: (*her excitement vanishes*) Oh.

CALEB: (*A beat. Then he gives her another chance.*) Dickinson’s cool. I just think this painting relates to something more epic.

KAITLIN concentrates on the painting, almost willing herself to see something.

KAITLIN: (*her eyes light up as she suddenly gets it*) It’s *The Odyssey*!

CALEB: (*with a trace of a smile*) That’s what I see, anyway. The blue is obviously the sea with all its perils. (*points upper left*) This triangle is Odysseus’ ship in the midst of the journey, and this one (*points lower right*) is his ship returning home. “Nobody”...

KAITLIN: ...refers to the pseudonym Odysseus uses to trick the Cyclops Polyphemus.

CALEB: (*Nods. Points center.*) This circle represents his eye.

KAITLIN: (*points*) Then these six circles must be Scylla and this big swirl of blue...

CALEB: Charybdis.

ABBY, unable to maintain her patience, crosses down right and clears her throat.

KAITLIN: (*to CALEB*) I’m being called.

CALEB: (*a full smile*) A siren beckons.

KAITLIN: I’ll be right back. (*turns and hurries to ABBY*)

ABBY: What’s going on?

KAITLIN: The painting is *The Odyssey*. We’re having a discussion about it right now.

ABBY: Is it romantic?

KAITLIN: It’s hard to tell. We’ve only been talking a minute, but there’s certainly some chemistry.

ABBY: I mean *The Odyssey*. I need to know if it fits my theory. Is the story romantic?

CALEB: (*overhearing ABBY's question, calls right*) Odysseus battles a Cyclops, a witch goddess, cannibals, and sea monsters. He loses eleven of twelve ships and sees his entire crew suffer barbaric deaths.

ABBY: (*disappointed*) So, that would be a "no."

KAITLIN: (*with a sly smile, guides ABBY toward the painting*) Technically, the whole adventure is a quest to get back to the one he loves. He arrives home after ten years, wins an archery contest, and reunites with his wife.

ABBY: So it ends happily?

CALEB: Well, he goes into a jealous rage and uses his bow to viciously slaughter all one hundred and eight of his wife's suitors— but the reunion is sort of sweet.

ABBY: (*writes in her notebook*) So he travels the world then just returns home?

CALEB: He actually comes back in a disguise so no one recognizes him. That's why the painting shows his ship as a different color.

KAITLIN: Literature is full of stories of heroes returning with new identities. Odysseus becomes a beggar in *The Odyssey*.

CALEB: Edmond Dantès adopts multiple aliases in *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

KAITLIN: The farm boy Westley pretends to be the Dread Pirate Roberts in *The Princess Bride*.

ABBY: (*looking up from her notes*) I love that movie.

CALEB: The book is better.

KAITLIN blushes at CALEB's words. She looks to ABBY who gives her a smile.

KAITLIN: (*to ABBY, honestly unsure*) What now?

CALEB: (*looks up from his map*) They've got a tapestry based on *The Canterbury Tales*. I think I'm going to check that out. (*starts right. Pauses*) Want to come?

KAITLIN: (*to ABBY*) Would you be mad if I go?



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