

## *Florals and Nudes*

a play by

**Albert Fried-Cassorla**

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### **SETTING:**

The studio, patio-garden and home of Craig Carson, a painter of florals and nudes.

### **CHARACTERS:**

**CRAIG CARSON** – a successful painter of floral scenes and of nudes, He lives in suburban Philadelphia. Mid-40's, a graduate of Columbia College, where he first met Gwynneth.

**GWYNNETH (GWYNNY) ELLSWORTH** – A woman in her mid-40's who chairs a city agency for public art. She is also a former high school girl-friend of Craig Carson. She had married Bunny Ellsworth, an investment banker who had died five years before the play begins.

**NAKIA WASHINGTON** – Late 30's, African-American. A part-time model for CRAIG and a part-time medical billing worker. She is a former high school girl-friend of Craig Carson. She models semi-nude on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Late 30's,

**MARTY SCHWARTZ / BERNARD**– Craig's best friend and a home-based investment counselor. He also becomes a lover of Gwynny. As BERNARD he appears in chauffeur's garb with a hat and sunglasses.

**ALBERT** - The playwright, an on-stage character.

**UNSEEN CHARACTERS:**

Bunny Ellsworth – Gwynneth's deceased husband.

Adrienne - Nakia's supervisor.

Rachel - Craig's mother

Adeline - One of Rachel's nursing aides

Natalie - Another of Rachel's nursing aides

Izzy Ranoff - An investment person whose work Marty is endorsing.

**PLOT SUMMARY:**

A painter of floral scenes and nudes, Craig Carson, has a model and mistress. She is a working class woman, Nakia, who is also a medical assistant. Nakia wants Craig to give up on floral painting and focus exclusively on nudes of her. He resists, though he is very fond of her on all levels. Nakia also wants Craig to help fund an arts education program for inner city youth, but Craig feels he is not able to do so. All of the action takes place in the studio and patio of Craig.

Craig's good friend and financial advisor, Marty, visits often and advises on finance and on romantic questions. Into the picture comes Gwynneth (Gwynny) Ellsworth, a wealthy widow and a former classmate of Craig's. They have been out of touch for years, but she has been observing his career from afar. She visits with a proposition: create model paintings for monumental sculptures to be placed atop Philadelphia landmark buildings as part of a new celebration of floral arts in the city. He will be compensated to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

But Gwynny demands a price be paid: he must work on floral paintings exclusively for the next two years. Craig strongly considers this fantastic offer, but he insists as a precondition that Gwynny's foundation pay for full funding for the city arts initiative for urban youth. She agrees, but he is still undecided.

The two women compete for the attention and love of Craig. Meanwhile, Gwynny, who is very rapacious, develops a romantic interest in Marty. Craig becomes jealous. The women force the issue -- and he must choose.

**AT RISE:** *CRAIG is painting and daubs a part of a petal. He stands back and considers.*

CRAIG

Nu-uh.....

*[He daubs again and is more pleased this time.]*

Hmmm.

*[MARTY enters on stage right, from a path to the patio. The double doors to the studio are open.]*

MARTY

Hey Monet – rollin' in the money yet?

CRAIG

Marty! Glad you could make it! Let me put away this stuff. Want a beer? A soda? Scotch?

MARTY

Just ice water, if you would.

CRAIG

Simple. I can do simple.

MARTY

With a dash of pomegranate juice and pear nectar.

CRAIG

I can even do complicated.

MARTY

So what's the urgency? Why the crazed tone in your voice on your phone call? It can't be the fading hibiscus.

CRAIG

Oh. No. But do you think it's faded?

MARTY

Nah. It looks fine. So what it is it? There was a tone in your voice I don't always hear.

CRAIG

Yeah, well, there's a reason for that.

MARTY

Arrright. Out with it. Is it your Mom? She okay?

CRAIG

Year, she's basically okay, Adeline is doing a great job with her in the mornings and evenings. And Natalie fine with the overnights.

MARTY

Okay, so is this twenty questions? Would you stop fussing with brushes and tell me?

CRAIG

It's Nakia.

MARTY

Oh, that thing about going with her to her sister's wedding? I already told you. Go, you'll hate it for awhile. Then hide for an hour and play with your i-phone on the veranda. Come back in and make nice. Do that twice, and Nakia'll be eternally indebted to you. Practically painless for you, too. Problem solved. Now watcha got for lunch?

CRAIG

That's not it at all. And we're having smoked turkey with sliced avocado on rye. Is that OK?

MARTY

Sounds de-lish... But if it's not the hibiscus, what is it?

CRAIG

Nakia. She's pushing me away from florals.

MARTY

But that's your bread and butter!

CRAIG

AND my marmalade. It's very distressing.

MARTY

So you push back. Like this..... Woman pushes. Man pushes back. It's happened throughout history. And sometimes vice versa. Here, I'll show you.

*[Improvised STAGE BUSINESS]*

Push me. Come on.

CRAIG [fleeing]

You're crazy! Get away from me. Did you have a martini before you came over?

MARTY

You'll survive. Totally absurd. And pardon my saying so, but you're very slow with these sandwiches.

CRAIG *(preparing and serving)*

But that's not even everything.

MARTY

What? *Another* problem? I'm gonna have to start charging you. Out with it!

CRAIG

She wants to have a serious talk this afternoon.

MARTY

Now you're in for it... I guess that's the talk you've been avoiding for a year and a half. What? Instead of semi-nude modeling, she wants a heart to heart? Not a good omen. What do you think it's about?

CRAIG

I dunno.

MARTY

But if you had to guess. Whether to use umber or burnt Siena when you're painting her nipples?

CRAIG

Noo!! And they're pinkish anyway. No. Probably about our relationship.

MARTY

I *hate* it when they want to talk about our relationship.

CRAIG

Well, I *loathe* it.

MARTY

I both loathe it and detest it. Not to mention I have an aversion to it.... Did I mention that?

CRAIG

No you didn't. But listen, I'm seriously up-tight about this. And you're not helping sitting there eating that sandwich!

MARTY

Ex-cuuuse me, You DID invite me over for lunch, didn't you?

CRAIG

Look, I don't need a ninth- grade attitude from you. You're my best friend, and you're supposed to be supportive.

*[PHONE RINGS. CRAIG reaches for the phone. Light dim as he freezes with outstretched hands toward receiver. Spotlight on MARTY, who faces the audience.]*

MARTY

Now you might wonder why I have a cavalier attitude towards Craig's dilemma. You ever have a friend who needs your help in some critical situation? Hmm? And you don't quite now what to do? Hm?

*[MARTY interacts with someone in the audience.]*

You know what I'm talking about then. I could see this coming... *(talks to a man in the audience)* Even you do, right, sir? NAKIA wants to move in with Craig. I mean, it's natural. Ya been with someone awhile, you know how they feel, you've kissed... and maybe more. But with Nakia and Craig, she

knows how the paint smells on his vest after a day's working, for Pete's sake. Now what did I just do? Told him to push her back, right? Is that the right advice? What the heck do I know? Maybe Nakia'll make him happy. Who am I to judge? I mean, right? But judge I did. But forgive me in advance. Will ya? I happened to think that a bigger commitment will shackle my free-spirited friend. He's a man on a precipice, and he needs to be pushed in some direction. I'm the pusher-man. I think I made a mistake. God, I hope he doesn't take my advice.... Oh my god, that's her now.

CRAIG

Hello?

*[GWYNNY is seen in a corner of the stage.]*

GWYNNY

Craig, it's me, Gwynneth! Gwynneth Ellsworth. Remember me from high school?

CRAIG

Oh my gosh! Gorgeous Gwynneth Ellsworth? Is that you?

GWYNNY

It's awfully nice of you to remember that nickname. Yes it's me. How've you been all these years?

CRAIG

Oh, a thousand different things! Hold on just a sec!

*[CRAIG cups the receiver and speaking in a harsh whisper to MARTY]*

I don't believe it's the prettiest girl in my class at Columbia! My god, Marty, I don't believe who I'm talking to. Pinch me.

MARTY

Hmm. I'll look her up.

*[MARTY researches her on a laptop. CRAIG returns to GWYNNY.]*

CRAIG (to GWYNNY)

Actually, I've been painting steadily now for about twenty years. Going back and forth between florals and nudes, you know. And I've been chosen to exhibit at the Venice Biennale this year!

GWYNNY

Yes, I just read about that in the Inquirer! Congratulations!

CRAIG

And what've you been up to all these years?

GWYNNY

Oh, nothing much, Swimming the English Channel. I'll be the first civilian woman in outer space early next year. And my real estate company just signed on to rehab twenty square blocks of Washington Heights in New York. We're bringing back affordable middle class housing to the city.

CRAIG

Wow! That sounds like about five minutes work for a superwoman like you!

GWYNNY

Oh, I'm just very fortunate, What can I say? But I didn't call out of the blue to prattle on about myself.

CRAIG

Hey you can prattle on from now till October.

MARTY (hissing, dismissive)

There is no such month as October!!

GWYNNY

What?

CRAIG

Oh that was just my garbage disposal. Uhm, acting up.

*[CRAIG turns on the disposal.]*

GWYNNY

So... you're in Elkins Park, right?

CRAIG

Yeah! Did it say that in the paper?

GWYNNY

Yes indeed.

CRAIG

And where do *you* live?

GWYNNY

Oh... It does depend upon the season. You know. Rittenhouse Square, the Plaza in New York, my flat in Montmartre. (slowing, speaking flirtatiously) But Craig.....

CRAIG

Gwynny..... If I might call you that after so short a chat.

GWYNNY

Certainly... I was wondering if I could stop by with... an idea.

CRAIG

What kind of an idea?

GWYNNY

Oh, I'd rather tell you in person.

CRAIG

Okay.... Sure.

GWYNNY

Then how about I stop by today at, say, 3?

CRAIG

Mmm. I'm afraid that won't work. I have someone over here posing for nudes till four.

GWYNNY

Nudes? I didn't know you do nudes!

CRAIG

Yes, just about as often as florals.

GWYNNY

Well, in my opinion, that's an awful waste of your considerable talents.... But how about four-thirty? You're in luck -- I'm extremely flexible today!

CRAIG

Four-thirty?

*[MARTY waves "no, bad idea," and makes a "too small" sign with his forefinger and thumb; he draws a cut-line across his throat.]*

CRAIG

Yeah, that'll be fine. I'm eager to hear about your idea... and to see if you're as lovely as I remember.

GWYNNY

Well, you can get your hopes up about the idea. But as to my looks – well, I'm afraid I've aged terribly. Expect a faded hag with billowy jowls and jodpur thighs.

CRAIG

That's a hoax and an insult to the reality, I'm sure, Gwynne.... Ah, Gwynny.

GWYNNY

Think what you will, Craig.... Mmm, Craigie!.... And can you have a projector ready? I want to show

you some delightful images.

CRAIG

I can do that.

GWYNNY

See you soon! Ta-ta!

CRAIG

Ta-ta!!!

*[CRAIG and GWYNNY hang up.]*

MARTY

Ta-ta to you and NAKIA. No, my friend you are making all the wrong bets. Though I must say, this Gwynneth Ellsworth is quite a knock-out. Look at this photo!

CRAIG

Whoa. I could win the Biennale just by painting her face.

MARTY

But you are cutting it way too close by having her here near the end of NAKIA's session. That girl has big jealousy bones.

CRAIG

I assure you she'll have vacated the premises by then. I can manage this. Trust me.

MARTY

Hmm! But I do trust you to make a wise financial decision now. Remember I've told you you're under-invested in domestic mid-cap funds?

CRAIG

That does ring a dim bell.

MARTY

Here, look at the BrightStar Renaissance Fund here on Morningstar. Great rating!

CRAIG

So what do you recommend?

MARTY

Five percent of your portfolio.

CRAIG

Do it.

MARTY

Done. And I... am soon gone. Gotta make this trade and about ten others, pronto. But I might stop back.

CRAIG

Oh? Why?

MARTY

I think I'd like to meet this Gwynneth Ellsworth. She's probably needing some investment advice.

CRAIG

No, don't be silly. With the two point four billion she inherited from old Ellsworth, I'm sure she's doing fine.

MARTY

I bet that point-four billion is exactly the problematic part of her portfolio. And a handsome man like me is just the one to fix it,

CRAIG

You forgot modest. Yes, you may visit. But I want some time alone with her first. And then hands off! She's mine.

MARTY

Aren't you being a bit greedy? One woman on her way, another in the wings. You have no right to monopolize all the female beauty on the planet!

CRAIG

I'll monopolize all I want in my own studio! In my own home! *(reaches for Macadamia nuts)*  
Beginning with these Macadamia nuts!

MARTY

Have it your way, Mister Bill Gates. But beware of us nimble little start-ups. Us Facebooks and Twitters. We're very fast on our feet.

*[MARTY does a little quick dance step to prove his point. Then he takes a bowl of nuts.]*

I'm taking these. I'll return the bowl.

CRAIG

Ta-ta. As if she'd have any interest in you.

MARTY *(joyfully)*

Ta-taaa!

*EXIT MARTY*

*[CRAIG paints the hibiscus plant quietly for awhile, fussing over apparently right and wrong brush-strokes. Doorbell rings.]*

CRAIG

Oh hi NAKIA! Come on in!

*[Enter NAKIA.]*

NAKIA

Hey, Craig. What's with Marty? He didn't even give me a hello on the street. And he had this scowl, like just ate a raw onion or something.

CRAIG

Oh, he just gets greedy sometimes. And I called him on it.

NAKIA

Greedy? Over what?

CRAIG

Macadamia nuts. He wanted all of mine. So he just took them.

NAKIA

Hmm. He isn't usually so ill-mannered. Anyhow, I have good news!

CRAIG

Hit me.

*[NAKIA punches CRAIG, who winces.]*

NAKIA

I brought the most wanton silk scarf! You're gonna love it.

CRAIG

I bet it'll make me happy!

NAKIA

Maybe too happy to paint! Ha!

*[NAKIA extracts a lovely diaphanous silk scarf from her purse and shows it to CRAIG. He is truly impressed.]*

CRAIG

I do love it... Let's see how it would drape on you.

*[CRAIG drapes the scarf and NAKIA admires herself in a mirror.]*

CRAIG

Definitely alluring... in a classical way. Yet classically Nubian... Maybe Egyptian, or Ethiopian. You know I love your Ethiopian bone structure, don't you?

NAKIA

I do have some Ethiopian blood in me, ya know!... Craig?

CRAIG

Yeah?

NAKIA

I was thinking.... Your ability to create something lovely from the world.... It's so dynamic.

CRAIG

Thank you.

NAKIA

And I was reading how the school district had to lay off art teachers this week because of the governor's cutbacks. Did you see that?

CRAIG

I did. Wasn't it right next to the article about slate miners not having to pay taxes?

NAKIA

Yeah! But it was *shale*, I think. Am I moving around too much?

CRAIG

A bit. Try to stay still while you're talking. And so?

NAKIA

And so, I was wondering if we could both contribute some money... or time.... To teaching inner city kids how to create beautiful art. Whattaya think?

CRAIG

Not a bad idea... on a small scale. I mean, I have to work hard to pay my bills, buy canvasses and paints, do marketing and all. But I can spare something.

CRAIG

But we'll have to save that scarf for the next painting in our series. I'll just rest it here for now. (*rests the scarf on a chair*)... Now if you'll return to Monday's pose....

NAKIA (*beginning to move a plant*)

Let me move this stupid little plant....

CRAIG

Please let me move it. I have to keep the petals facing the right direction. And it's not stupid. It's an intrinsic part of the scene we're creating. The pink gently reflects your roseate skin tone.

NAKIA

Am I roseate today? That sounds so beautiful, the way you say it.... That's why working with you is such a pleasure. I know I'm appreciated.

*[CRAIG kisses her hand.]*

CRAIG

Always, and I mean that sincerely....

NAKIA

So should we resume exactly where we left off?

CRAIG

Please. Arms leaning on the cloth as they were on Monday ..... Be sure to hit the tape marks.

NAKIA

Is this right?

CRAIG

No. Your right toe isn't on the right toe mark. Here... *[He kneels and adjusts her foot.]*

NAKIA

Do you like my foot?

CRAIG

No, I love your foot.... This much.

*[CRAIG kisses her foot.]*

NAKIA

Oh, you're such a doll. So romantic.

CRAIG

It's how you make me feel. But you need to--

NAKIA

To what? Nothing bad, I hope.

CRAIG

No. I just need you to be better able to take redirection....without a frown.

NAKIA (*unconsciously frowning*)

I never frown when you redirect me.

CRAIG

And I need less bupkis when I ask for something different.

NAKIA

And I never give you bupkis either. I wouldn't dream of giving you bupkis. Even when you're a slave-driver. God, sometimes you're worse than Adrienne down at the billing office. But mostly she's worse, especially with filling out those darned HCVA forms. "wrong ID for that patient, NAKIA!" "Wrong box NAKIA!" She's crazy. As if it makes a damned bit of difference.

CRAIG

I'm sure Adrienne is a nut with all of those medical forms, but I'm a nut about some things too.

NAKIA

That you are!

CRAIG

I have to be!

NAKIA

Yes you do!

CRAIG

So bear with me when I say this pose has to be more languorous.

NAKIA

What?

CRAIG

Uhh... more bendable and relaxed.

NAKIA

Like a flexi-straw?

CRAIG

Yes, exactly. This is perfect. I'm just penciling in your knees and thighs.... So graceful.... Getting the shading right, with light flowing from my left. Oh the shadows, they are so tricky..... Damn, it's so hard to do justice to your beauty,

NAKIA

You're so flattering, Craig.

CRAIG

Every word of it is true.... and if I am lucky, every brush-stroke. What a goddess you are!

NAKIA

Ya know, this is so much more rewarding than medical billing.

CRAIG (*actively painting or penciling*)

Oh, there must be hidden delights you're choosing not to reveal to me....

NAKIA

Code 1043 is one of my faves.

CRAIG

What's that?

NAKIA

Priapism.

CRAIG

Priapism? A never-deflating penis? That's dangerous.

NAKIA

But fun to think about, dontcha think?

CRAIG

Hmm.

NAKIA

Admit it – you even like the sound of it.

CRAIG

Hmpf!

NAKIA (*coquettishly*)

Pri.....

CRAIG

Nakia.

NAKIA

ap.....

CRAIG

Nakia!

NAKIA

iZZZ-ummmm. It'd be endless....

CRAIG

You're altering your pose. And how'd we get on this subject, anyway?

NAKIA

It was your fault! Asking me all those sexy billing code questions. You've been naughty! Imagine! Talking ten-forty-threes and asking me to keep my composure!

CRAIG

If we keep going like this, I might lose my artistic concentration.

NAKIA

You can't! This is portrait number nine, and you said we had to finish number nine to complete the series. So I'll shut up for awhile.

CRAIG

No need to go to extremes... Let's... just... talk.... slower.

*(a beat)*

NAKIA

Craig.

CRAIG

Yesss.....

NAKIA

What are my nine moods of NAKIA again? I keep forgetting some.

CRAIG

Angry, amorous, boredom, contemptuous, defiant, ecstatic, indolent, slothful, and this one... langourous.

NAKIA

And how much were you promised for them all again?

CRAIG

Eighteen thousand dollars.

NAKIA

That's two thousand dollars a nude mood!

CRAIG

I think your moods should be worth at least five thousand dollars each, but what are ya gonna do?

NAKIA

And what's my share of the two thousand again?

CRAIG

I promised you ten percent! Of course, that's on top of your sitting fee. But you're so, so worth it!

NAKIA

I could pose for you for days on end.

CRAIG

In theory, you could.

NAKIA

But in reality... twenty minutes. That is all of my beauty that I can bestow on you today.

CRAIG

I am making the most of it.... I adore the contours of your forearm... if I could just capture it perfectly, what an artist I would be.

NAKIA

Craig?

CRAIG

Yes?

NAKIA

Have you thought about what my idea?

CRAIG

About telling Adrienne you want to work fewer hours? Mmmm.... It's hard for me to advise you... I mean I could use you for a few more hours here a week, to do billing and marketing. But my needs vary, so....

NAKIA

No, not that idea, silly. You know, about sticking to what you're great at – painting nudes!

CRAIG

My problem with that hasn't changed since on Monday... Why should I limit myself to one style?

NAKIA

Because it's so you! Craig Carson, Prince of Nudes! Isn't that what the *Art World* critic called you?

CRAIG

No, the Knight of Nakedness, but my dear, let's stay in the moment... I need you to raise your left leg a bit.... Thank you.

NAKIA

You know nudes are your best style, don't you?

CRAIG

Well, you *are* my best female model....

NAKIA

That won't do.

CRAIG (*enters the audience*)

It's not easy pleasing NAKIA.... I mean I love her to death. Why won't she simply accept a compliment and move on? I mean, I would! And wouldn't you? You, sir? You ma'm? She is sweet, lovely. Somebody give me a strategy...

CRAIG (*returns to stage and now to NAKIA*)

Well it *should* do.... it should please you no end.

NAKIA

You should see after all these years, that the naked form [*gestures gracefully towards parts of her own body*] is the loveliest, most beautiful... thing... in the world

CRAIG

That you are, my dear.

NAKIA

Stop! It's not about me. It's about the darned human form!

CRAIG

I'm still with you. Turn your head a bit to the left, sweetie.

NAKIA

And when you compare what a flower can offer, well...

CRAIG

Flowers can be stunning, too.

NAKIA

I mean, can a dahlia do this, darling? (*she extends her leg sexily*). Can a hibiscus heave like this, honey? (*heaves her breasts*)

CRAIG

Not that I've ever seen, and I've been painting a *looong* time.

NAKIA

I mean, can an orchid be... orgiastic? (*she makes gently orgiastic gestures and body movements*)  
... Well?

CRAIG

Never!

NAKIA

So... it makes sense to...

CRAIG (*insulted*)

To what!

NAKIA

To give it up. Switch to... you know

CRAIG

All Nakia, all the time?

NAKIA

You're making fun of me!

CRAIG

Oh, why would you say that? Nakia's twenty-four hour naked figure painting cable channel.

CRAIG

I mean Nakia and Craig's! Okay, you're getting the idea.

[CRAIG dramatically approaches NAKIA]

CRAIG

But sweetie! All of this is well and good, but why would I want to shut down my floral painting? Why deny something I love and that my public appreciates? I still don't understand. I mean, you know what I sold this hibiscus painting for? Five thousand dollars. That's significant. Not as much as for my nudes, but--

NAKIA

Don't you see, honey? It's not just about the subject matter. It's about *us*... and our new lifestyle. And do you know what would please me?

CRAIG

What?

NAKIA

If we were to...

CRAIG

To what?

NAKIA

To kinda move in together....

*[CRAIG paints more furiously.]*

What do you think of that idea?

CRAIG

I feel I'm enjoying painting and being with you, and singing a veritable love song in acrylics! And you, you just want to change the subject, change the mood and, and – and trash the lovely moment we've been creating here!!

NAKIA

No need to get all huffy about it!

CRAIG

Look, I know what you're thinking..... that I'm commitment-phobic. Right?

*[NAKIA raises an eyebrow and shrugs, as if to agree.]*

Well, didn't I invite you to be here more often, to work longer hours and take on new responsibilities? Doesn't that mean I want you more in my life?

NAKIA

I guess, but it would move us up to such a higher level in our relationship if I moved in....*(flirtatiously)* I'd make it cozy for you....

CRAIG

Honey, I'll think about it.... but I might not be ready. You have to be prepared for that. Ya know what? I think it's a good time for you to take a break.

*(She looks at CRAIG with effront.)*

I mean for today. What do you think?

NAKIA

Yeah, I think I'll take a walk around the block. Maybe take some photos of Caryl Levin's clematis.

God, they're incredible!

CRAIG

Yes, they are, Tom Steigerwald used to say they were sublime. Remember?

NAKIA

I do. He taught us to notice, didn't he?

CRAIG

Mh-hm. And see? You do love flowers.

NAKIA

Sorry I said that! I'm also stopping by my house. I might come back with my pink bikini!

CRAIG

Oooh! That'd be great – but let's save it for Friday. This afternoon, I'll paint you from that photo I took.

NAKIA (*turning, wounded*)

But you always say a photo can't capture my soul the way you can when I'm here in person!

CRAIG

That's true – but this little photo? All it does sometimes is it captures the outline... of the bare trace... of the border of your body... and then I just paint in your indefinable soul later!

NAKIA

Yeah.

CRAIG

I fill it with the quintessential... Na-KEE-ahh!

*[NAKIA is reassured.]*

NAKIA

Aw Craig, you make it sound so sweet!

CRAIG

See ya Friday.

NAKIA

Ta-ta!

*[EXIT NAKIA]*

*[CRAIG paints from a photo. He turns on classical music, such as Vivaldi's The Four Seasons.]*

*He takes delight in what he is creating. After a moment, the phone rings. ]*

CRAIG

Hello.

GWYNNETH

Craig?

CRAIG

Yeah! Gwynny?

GWYNNY *(seen in a tight spotlight on the edge of the stage )*

Yeah. I'm in the neighborhood. My GPS says I'm right in front of your house and gallery.

CRAIG

I'll come out.

GWYNNY *(waving)*

Hi, Craigie!

CRAIG

Well, hello. And welcome to my little Giverny in Elkins Park!

GWYNNY

Delighted to be here. (a beat) And let me look at you..... Hmm, dapper as ever.

CRAIG

And you are still quite lovely.

GWYNNY

you've hardly aged.

CRAIG

Well, let me show you around.... and then we'll sit down and catch up. Is that okay?

GWYNNY

A splendid plan.

CRAIG

As you can see, this is the garden.

GWYNNY

So this is the source of your inspiration for the series of peony paintings!

CRAIG

So you know them! I'm very flattered.

GWYNNY

Oh, I'm a longtime admirer. I've told you that, silly. And those are the sunflowers you painted last year, the ones featured in Art World, aren't they?

CRAIG

Well, not exactly. This is the this years crop. But they're just as imposing, don;t you think? Not everyone's idea of what is beautiful.

GWYNNY

Everyone's? Ha! Lord no. But I should stop myself.

CRAIG

It's worth thinking about. Others might see them as ugly, domineering disks, like they want to take over. But I enjoy their strength.

GWYNNY

Craig, do you want to know what distinguishes your floral work?

CRAIG

Tell me.

GWYNNY

What raises it high above the common rut of floral daubers, of those paint-by-number amateurs – is your extraordinary sensibility.

CRAIG

Oh yes. I can listen to this.

GWYNNY

I mean, it's your talent for drawing the deep structure that yields beauty. It's not just some pedestrian interplay of shadow and light.

CRAIG

Well, I wouldn't call all shadow and light play pedestrian, but.... Anyhow, would you like to see my studio and gallery?

GWYNNY

Lead the way, my dear.

CRAIG

This is where I stretch my canvasses and paint, and back there is my gallery,

*[GWYNNY takes it all in and is deeply impressed. Her awe increases throughout this scene.]*

GWYNNY

Oh, Craig!

CRAIG

Hm?

GWYNNY

Craig! I knew I loved your floral work from the few gallery pieces I've seen... But O, Craig!

CRAIG

Yah.

GWYNNY

...and I was impressed with what I saw in the magazines and on the web sites, but this! But THIS!!

CRAIG (*rocking back and forth with pride*)

So, you're a fan! Ha-ha-ha!... It's so rare to meet someone like you who is so well-educated esthetically and who likes everything I've done.

GWYNNY

Oh, I didn't say I liked everything.

CRAIG

What don't you care for?

GWYNNY

Oh, I don't want to diminish this serendipitous moment... But that overweight African-American trollop is really beneath you. Really, you should exercise your libido in healthier ways.

CRAIG

Overweight? Trollop? As in whore? That's my top model, we're talking about – Nakia Washington!

GWYNNY

Top model? Ha! Oh, let's avoid this nonsense, shall we? I'm suddenly hot! Do you have a glass of water? Can you afford a moment to just talk before we get down to business?

CRAIG

Oh Sure! I have more work to do, but I always have more.... And what a terrible host I've been. Why don't you go take a seat in the garden and I'll bring you something pronto.

*[GWYNNY finds a seat on a bench, stage right. She fans herself.  
CRAIG returns with a tray of drinks and snacks.]*

GWYNNY

Oh you needn't have gone to all that trouble.

CRAIG

Nothing but the best for you... I just have to stop and think again... I'm picturing you in college... sitting on the steps next to the statue of Alma Mater.

GWYNNY

You remember that day too?

CRAIG

I could paint it from memory! You were sitting below it on its left, near the spray of wehat with the crown on top. You were writing something in a notebook.

GWYNNY

Probably my diary. I was always scribbling.

CRAIG

I remember thinking; "How can I meet this beautiful girl? That creature with the extravagant hair, pretty nose, gorgeous eyes, and long graceful legs?"

GWYNNY

And you found a way, you devil.

CRAIG

You remember about the owl?

GWYNNY

Of course! How did you find it?

CRAIG

Well, I knew the old saying about anyone who finds the owl will marry a Barnard girl. So I made it my business to find it – especially with you there.

GWYNNY

I had looked for it myself – without luck. And I was amazed by how fast you found it,

CRAIG

Hey, I was determined – you were so darned pretty!

GWYNNY

Were? Have I lost that much?

CRAIG

No, not at all! ... And then I found the owl... and I found the courage to ask you out.

GWYNNY

I remember. We saw A Chorus Line and then went out to...

CRAIG

The Russian Tea Room!

GWYNNY

It comes back to me now – I remember I loved the blini. We had two or three good dates like that, didn't we? So why did we stop?

*[Here there is a pregnant pause. They look at each other and wonder.]*

CRAIG

I guess we just got distracted by....

GWYNNY

By life, I suppose. So then, only a few months later, I met Kent.

CRAIG

Wasn't he that little hunch-backed fellow with the thick glasses? And when did you start calling him bunny?

GWYNNY

Oh, that was nasty! Don't be so nasty ... I might just leave if you talk that way.

CRAIG

No, don't.

GWYNNY

What got into you?

CRAIG

I think I just got a flash-back on my jealousy. I was quite green back then. I don't suppose you knew.

GWYNNY

No.... And no more insulting behavior, are we clear? I mean, my husband did everything for me, and all of the creative, interesting things I am able to do are possible because of his foresight.

CRAIG *(straight-faced)*

I'm sure he was a great guy,

GWYNNY

You're not being sarcastic are you?

CRAIG

No. That was rude of me before.

GWYNNY

I guess we awaked something there that maybe was better left dormant.

CRAIG

I'm not so sure about that...

GWYNNY

Well...Hmm... I think we should get to what I came here for.... You know how I absolutely adore your floral paintings.... Well, I have another passion. I think the world should have a much greater appreciation of our amazing city... Don't you?

CRAIG

Sure!

GWYNNY

And we are a marvelous city of flowers, aren't we?

CRAIG

More than any other city! I mean we have the Philadelphia Flower show. Who has that?

GWYNNY

Nobody!

CRAIG

And we have Longwood Gardens!

GWYNNY

Only the world's most elaborate and splendid gardens, and less than an hour outside of town.

CRAIG

A worldwide treasure!... And so?

GWYNNY

And so? And so, we have a unique opportunity.

CRAIG

Those are my favorite kind.

GWYNNY

Don't be arch with me.

CRAIG

Me? Arch? I've never been arch in my life.... Maybe wry, a little.... And occasionally pumpernickel.

GWYNNY

Which reminds me, do you have a projector?

CRAIG

Yes, pumpernickel and projectors, Two great P words. In fact, I do. Would you like me to set it up?

GWYNNY

Yes, please. I have some images on a Powerpoint I want to show you.

*[CRAIG busies himself setting up the computer and projector and screen.  
As he does, GWYNNY monopolizes the set in this next scene,  
where she turns much more dramatic,  
because she is in her mind selling an idea.]*

GWYNNY

While you are accommodating me, I'd like to speak to you about my vision,

CRAIG

Wow!

*[GWYNNY paces about, then stops abruptly and  
holds her temples and closes her eyes.]*

GWYNNY

A gateway.... an amazing gateway to our fair city... symbolizing what gives life and beauty to the planet... Flowers! Radiant, splendid flowers standing majestically atop our most famous monuments and public structures!

CRAIG

Exciting!

GWYNNY

And now I will show you, based on the most rudimentary artist's renderings.... let's not even call them artistic, but here is the first... Like a crimson flame atop the Ben Franklin Bridge, as drivers from New Jersey enter our town, they see... a Gigantic 40 foot high Craig Carson Rose, done in enameled structural steel, based on...

CRAIG

My paintings?

*[GWYNNY clicks on the first slide.]*

GWYNNY

Precisely. What do you think?

CRAIG

I think I'd have more convoluted petals, different shades of pink alternating with the yellow stamens and--

GWYNNY

But you grasp the idea of it, don't you?

CRAIG

Yeah! The idea of it,

GWYNNY

And you like the idea don't you?

CRAIG

So far!

GWYNNY

And at ground level, we have powerful spray misters. Do you know what they spray?

CRAIG

Pretzyl aroma? I'd love that. That'd make me hungry.

GWYNNY

Nooooo!! Rose scent! Can you sort of smell it right now? Here, this'll help!

*[GWYNNY sprays the air with rose perfume.]*

CRAIG

I like it. Show me more!

GWYNNY

Then, on top of the Philadelphia Museum of Arts steps... not that boxer goon people associate with our city!

CRAIG

What? You're gonna banish the Rocky statue?

GWYNNY

No, we can't do that. The morons want him there But he's now at the foot of the steps, and we'll keep him there. But at the top of the pediment of the Art Museum, you'll create a gorgeous....

CRAIG

Don't tell me you want a dandelion!

GWYNNY

No, nothing so vulgar. An orchid! As sweet and feminine as femininity itself!!

CRAIG

I like it. You know, I paint the most splendid and sensuous orchids!

GWYNNY

Of course I know!

CRAIG

How many feet high?

GWYNNY

At least eighty!

CRAIG

Wow! I'm into it! Show me more!

*[GWYNNY plays with CRAIG's ear a bit, becoming more flirtatious as her presentation continues.]*

GWYNNY

You know what's on top of City Hall now, don't you?

CRAIG

Alexander Calder's statue of Billy Penn.... No, you're not going to replace Bill Penn. That'd be a sacrilege!

GWYNNY

No, no!

CRAIG

I may be egotistical, but this is *so* not happening!!

GWYNNY

I must admit – I'd originally planned on dumping Billy Penn. But I do have a fallback position... and a little surprise for you.

*[GWYNNY opens her cell phone and calls.]*

GWYNNY

Bernard, hi..... Yes, bring it in now, would you?.... Thank you.

CRAIG

Who was that?

GWYNNY

My driver, Bernard. A very sweet gentleman. He's bringing in the model right now.

CRAIG

What model?

*[GWYNNY just smiles. After a beat, BERNARD brings in a very large version of Independence Hall's upper stories. It is topped by a relatively large blow-up of one of CRAIG's floral paintings. This prop can be made of foam-core supported by sticks or lath. It should be about 8 to 12 feet long-high. It should be carried sideways, with the flower at the top, as a dagger. CRAIG is standing in the way of this painting and is being backed up as it is pointed to his chest by BERNARD. ]*

BERNARD

Where ya want it?

*[BERNARD turns and accidentally pokes CRAIG in the chest with the painting.]*

CRAIG

Hey! Watch out!

GWYNNY

Now won't that be impressive?

CRAIG

I-I-

GWYNNY

Think of what it will do to your career!!

BERNARD

Shall I wait in the limousine?

GWYNNY

Yes. Thank you so much, Bernard.

*[EXIT BERNARD]*

CRAIG

Tell me, Gwynny, how could city officials possibly allow all this?

GWYNNY

What can I say?

CRAIG

I guess it's your charm.

*[GWYNNY circles around the seated CRAIG. She sits in his lap.]*

GWYNNY

You don't mind that I'm getting so close, do you?

CRAIG

I suppose I should say I'm shocked...

*[GWYNNY kisses CRAIG gently.]*

but I'm enjoying all of this too...

*[GWYNNY kisses CRAIG gently.]*

...darned...

*[Again, GWYNNY kisses CRAIG gently.]*

...much.

GWYNNY

Am I being a but too forward this... early in our re-acquaintance?

CRAIG

I don't know what to say! You're like a hurricane!...

GWYNNY

Too intense?

CRAIG

This is the kind of extreme weather I can really enjoy!

*[CRAIG's cell phone rings. He answers it.]*

CRAIG

Hello?

*[GWYNNY continues the slide show with Citizens Bank Park and the new Barnes Foundation building, Independence Hall*

*and other Philly landmarks, all with giant flower sculptures appended.]*

*Now we see MARTY in a spotlight  
shown in an inset on the side of the stage]  
He is in his own home on the phone.,*

MARTY

Hi, Craig. I noticed Gwynny's car is still parked outside your studio. May I come over?

CRAIG

Must you?!

MARTY

I have replacement nuts.

CRAIG

Well, that is just SO important to me right now.

MARTY

AND, I have particular recommendations on Renaissance Holdings, plus a very intriguing spreadsheet to show you.....

CRAIG

Hmm.

MARTY

I promise I will be unobtrusive.

CRAIG

I should hope so.... Well, I can't bar you from my doorstep.

MARTY

See you in a flash.

*[CRAIG hangs up and now speaks to GWYNNY.]*

CRAIG

That was my friend, Marty. He wants to come over and show me a new investment pick. I love the guy, but he's very persistent. Annoyingly so.

GWYNNY

That's sometimes how to get what you want out of this life... But...I could leave, and we can resume another time?

CRAIG

No. Please stay.

GWYNNY

All right...I am so enjoying our little moment. Aren't you?

CRAIG

Oh Yeah!

*[CRAIG moves around, sorting her thoughts.  
GWYNNY keeps a respectful distance.]*

CRAIG

But you know, I feel there's so much we haven't said.... I mean..... why me? Why now? You're gorgeous, just like your nick-name says. I'm just... surprised! This is all kind of a lot to take in. On many levels. I mean, it's so different from my average day. Do you know how boring my average day is?

GWYNNY

Yes, tell me about the average day in the life of a genius. Regale me!!

CRAIG

Well, there's nothing genius-like about it. Picture the excitement!... (*CRAIG demonstrates with his hands.*) ME staring at a blank canvas when I'm in the middle of a project. ME arranging my model or subject matter. Hardly exciting. ME lost in thought, listening to all kinds of music for inspiration. And ME taking Cocky, my cockatoo, on a walk or two.

GWYNNY

Cockatoo on a walk or two! (*now sing-songy*) Cockatoo on a walk or two! I love it! See? You're remarkable even when you're not trying to be.

CRAIG

Oh please.

GWYNNY

I've been following you, you know.

CRAIG (*alarmed*)

What!!

GWYNNY

Not like a stalker -- Is that what you're thinking?

CRAIG

Well, I--

GWYNNY

I'm more of an extreme fan... a total devotee. You have to understand that I feel you deserve a special place in the art world.

CRAIG

I'm lucky to have you on my side!

GWYNNY

Oh, you don't know how lucky – yet.

*[GWYNNY approaches CRAIG and embraces him. They kiss.  
CRAIG responds positively but tentatively.]*

GWYNNY

Kiss me, genius....

*[DOOR BUZZER rings. CRAIG slowly breaks off the embrace.]*

CRAIG

To be continued?

GWYNNY *(with a coy smile)*

Hm!

*[GWYNNY adjusts her hair with a coy smile.  
CRAIG exits stage left to allow MARTY in.  
Enter MART and CRAIG.]*

MARTY *[Talking boisterously, as if he does not know GWYNNY is inside.]*

And with the five percent coupon, this little muni bond'll pay off handsomely and finance your retirement.

CRAIG

But I don't want to retire anytime soon. I love my work!

MARTY

Then leave it to your kids.

CRAIG

But I don't --

MARTY

Ah-hah! Future... *possible* kids. *(pauses as if about to deliver a superb joke)* One never knows. Do

one? Ah-ha-ha-ha!

CRAIG

Marty, let me introduce you to an old friend of mine .... Gwynneth Ellsworth. I knew her in college but we've only recently become reacquainted.

*[GWYNNY and MARTY step over to one another.  
MARTY reaches for her hand and kisses it continental-style.]*

MARTY

Enchante!

GWYNNY

Pleased to meet you.

CRAIG

Marty is my investment adviser. And he's also a friend, a neighbor, and an art-buyer. At least of *my* work! Ha-ha.

GWYNNY

Oh! And what particular style or subject matter of Craig's work do you collect?

MARTY

Oh, uh... Why...

*[CRAIG makes gestures indicating a flower, which GWYNNY does not notice.]*

Flower paintings, of course!

GWYNNY

Excellent! I too so adore them! Doesn't Craig have an incredible sense... of the *ensemble* effect of floral beauty?

MARTY

Absolutely! I was just saying that to him the other day!

GWYNNY

And the intriguing way he delineates the finest features of pistils and stamens! I mean with such precision and artistry, it just gets me so....

MARTY

What a marvelous skill set he has!

CRAIG

Oh folks, please! You're embarrassing me. I'm going to clean my brushes until this fan club meeting is

over.

MARTY

Craig's florals just alter my state of mind. In fact, whenever I'm in the middle of a bear market, I just glance over at his painting in my dining room called Orchids Orgy – and it's almost as if the market is up again!! Or, on my office wall, the unbelievable Reclining Nude is so--

*[CRAIG frowns and gestures with his arms "Don't go there."]*

GWYNNY

Reclining Nude?!! Not those trite things!

CRAIG

Ouch!!

MARTY

Uh-- no. I said reclining DUDE. Uh, it's a guy buried in peonies, lilies and lilacs. Fantastic! The great thing is, you hardly can see the guy!

MARTY

He's practically invisible under all that....petallage.

GWYNNY

Hm. Very interesting. Petallage. I'd like to see that someday. But don't let me interrupt you. I understand you were visiting to tell Craig about some stock market thing or other. I'll just be over here.

*[GWYNNY retreats to a seat in the garden, a few feet away, and busies herself with her smart phone. She is within earshot of the men.]*

MARTY

That Renaissance Fund I was telling you about? Forget it.

CRAIG

So soon?

MARTY

Are you ready for my big reveal?

CRAIG

Come on now! What are you becoming, man?! The Bachelorette??

MARTY

No. This is going to take all of your contrarian instincts and bring them to the max.

CRAIG

You've got that right. I AM a contrarian. So don't tell me.

*[CRAIG looks anywhere but at MARTY. MARTY is keening, dying to tell CRAIG. This scene should be played well and experimented with to milk CRAIG's building desire to spill his advice and CRAIG's lack of interest. After a long stretch, during which MARTY gets more agitated, he ventures:]*

I- MARTY

No. CRAIG

Don'tcha want to know? MARTY

Mm... no. CRAIG

Just wait'll you hear-- MARTY

Nope. CRAIG

Tell him! GWYNNY

Thank you. Now as I said, it's very counter-cyclical but it's a sure thing. Are you ready? MARTY

You've worn both of us down. Hit me. CRAIG

The Izzy Ranoff counter-Cyclical Fund!!! MARTY

*[CRAIG drops a glass holding his brushes. GWYNNY drops a plate.]*

Tell me you're not doing business with that creep! CRAIG

It's not what you're thinking. Look at this prospectus.... This fund is actually managed by senior MARTY

executives at Goldman-Sachs. They just license Izzy's name and call him for his advice.

CRAIG

The advice of a felon?!!

MARTY

Ranoff has a bum rap. I mean, his name is unfortunate.

GWYNNY

I thought he ran off with other people's money!

CRAIG

I mean, sure he's a criminal. But his record on picking stocks is actually superb! He tells us what investments are under-appreciated and going against the general tide. He beat the last downturn. So the fund just taps into his wisdom, and you and I take the rest to the bank!

CRAIG

No thanks, Marty. I think I'll stick to hog bellies, Maybe painting them.

GWYNNY

Is that all you've got?

CRAIG

I didn't know you were interested in investing.

GWYNNY

Certainly I'm interested in investing. That's one reason I'm here today. Oh, pardon me for barging in on your conversation.

CRAIG

Oh, that's all right. Marty doesn't mind and I don't either.

MARTY

And are you interested in investing?

GWYNNY

Interested? My good man, I've been managing and jockeying my portfolio ever since my dear Bunny passed away. What do you take me for?

MARTY

From where I stand? I take you for a ravishing beauty – who also happens to be quite intelligent.

GWYNNY

Sweetly stated. (*She jots down something.*) You've made my diary.... But you two finish up. I have more business to do with Craig when you're done. I hope you have something more reasonable to offer

Craig than that ridiculous fund. I can use some assistance managing my nine hundred million, and so far, you're not proving your worth.

MARTY

Assistance? Well, that's my strength. Here, I'll show both of you... Triple A rated bonds endorsed by the leading financial advisers of our time. They pay four percent annually. That's two percent better than what anyone else is delivering. It's a shame I didn't bring a second set for you.

GWYNNY

That's all right, Here is my card. Call me.... And yours? Did you say you live nearby?

*[MARTY takes her card and gives her his.]*

MARTY

Yes. Just down the block. 918. Seven houses down that way, on the other side of the street. It's a huge Queen Anne Victorian, blue and white with huge pink and blue hydrangeas.

GWYNNY

I might like to stop by in, say, five or ten minutes, to see those paintings you mentioned...and perhaps, to do some business. Might that be convenient for you?

MARTY

Oh! Oh!! Definitely.

GWYNNY

Good, But now if you don't mind, I'd like to speak with Craig privately.

MARTY

Sure. I'll leave you two alone. Craig, look over the documents. Be good now, you two!

*[Exit MARTY.]*

GWYNNY

Craig, as I was saying before, I am totally enamored of your floral work. That's why I showed you all of those ideas.

CRAIG

Of course.

GWYNNY

So to make this happen, I would like you to commit to nothing but this project for at least two years.

CRAIG

Nothing else?

GWYNNY

Nothing. I want your full attention. And I will make it worth your while. You'll receive a stipend of five hundred thousand dollars a year, plus one hundred-thousand per each major work you complete.

CRAIG

Wow!

GWYNNY

And...

CRAIG

But wait, there's more?

GWYNNY

Should you need art assistants... carpenters, mold-makers and so forth, my foundation will take care of it. Do you find my offer attractive?

CRAIG

Very.

GWYNNY

But?

CRAIG

But the no other projects part.... that's very limiting.

GWYNNY

But darling, you don't need those other time-wasters. If you were on the art map before, this will plaster you all over it, This will *make* you.

CRAIG

Whoa!.....It's mighty appealing.

GWYNNY

And yet, you hesitate?

CRAIG

Well, I--

GWYNNY

WHY!!!! .... Is it because you want to make more of these banal nudes? These pieces of crap? I'll show you what should be done with them!

*[GWYNNY grabs a can of dark spray paint and starts spraying the air as she approaches a nude showing Nakia, CRAIG rushes and holds her hand.]*

GWYNNY

Oh, you care so much about them? I wish you did about me.

*[CRAIG embraces GWYNNY, who is unsure how she feels and semi-responds.]*

CRAIG

Gwynny, of course I care about you. I mean, even if you weren't the perfect vision of loveliness that you are - I'd, I'd be bowled over by your intellect, your –

GWYNNY

Stop talking!

*[CRAIG kisses GWYNNY. They kiss passionately. They recline on a sofa.]*

CRAIG

You are amazing!.... But I'm not sure I understand you. You're like... a tornado.

GWYNNY

And are tornadoes really understood? Don't scientists die every year flying into their whirlwinds, taking measurements and getting consumed? Ha! Swallowed up! There's no way of measuring!

*CRAIG (still in an embrace, he points at her nose)*

You want....

*[GWYNNY pushes herself out of their embrace, and then counter-attacks by poking CRAIG in the chest and chasing him across the room.]*

GWYNNY

I want... *(chases and pokes)* I want... *(chases and pokes)* I want... *(chases and pokes)*

CRAIG

Well, I want something too.

GWYNNY

You do.

CRAIG

Yes, I do. It's a condition. In fact.

GWYNNY

In fact.

CRAIG

Yes.

GWYNNY

Okay, out with it.

CRAIG (*aggressively*)

I would like there to be specially funded art training for inner city kids. With all the cutbacks on arts education, that's what they need! To help their inner spirits grow. What do you think of that!!

GWYNNY

From your build-up. I thought you were going to propose fixing the federal deficit. That's one's easy. Consider it done. I'm jotting a note. (Jots in her i-phone) Two million for arts for children.

CRAIG (*outraged*)

What!! It's that easy?!!

GWYNNY

Hmpf! You'd like it to be hard?

CRAIG (*sputtering*)

But how can you get an arts project past your Horticultural Society?

GWYNNY

Oh, I can see YOU are going to be a major re-education project. Where to begin? Craig, darling – if we're going to work together – or more – you're just going to have to stop thinking like a peon.

CRAIG

No need to insult me, Gwynny!

GWYNNY

This idea of yours is not going to any arts council for approval. My private foundation will fund it. I know your arts education idea is worthwhile, just from the sound of it.

*[CRAIG seems non-plussed. GWYNNY caresses CRAIG's cheek.]*

Sweetie, don't be so disappointed by your good fortune.

CRAIG

I'm having a hard time understanding the way your world works.... Mine is very simply. I hold this paint brush. I paint what I believe is beautiful. Then I try to sell it.

GWYNNY

My world is a bit different. I hold your humble paintbrush.

*(Gwynny takes Craig's brush from his hand.)*

I make a decision.

*(GWYNNY picks up a can of gold spray paint and sprays the brush.)*

Voila! **Golden** paintbrush!!

CRAIG

But—

GWYNNY

I want – what I want.... And I get what I want. That's all you need to know.... So you ponder my offer. My *sweetened* offer. I'll give you till later this afternoon.

CRAIG

Gee, what a huge time window.

GWYNNY

Make your decision. Then I must go and visit Marty.

CRAIG

Wait..... *Why* are you choosing me again? Tell me once more. Is it because you...

*[GWYNNY leaves.]*

**Scene 2 - Outside and inside MARTY's house.**

Note to the Director:

This new scene can be performed at a side of the apron the side of the stage, or in front of the main set with the main set darkened. The props required are two chairs, one for MARTY and one for his expected guest, GWYNNY. MARTY has a little work table with a laptop to his left. A second table is positioned to his right between him and his expected guest. That guest's table has brochures on it.

***AT RISE: MARTY is working at his laptop.***

*[Enter GWYNNY. She presses an imaginary doorbell.]*

*SFX: Doorbell sound.*

*[MARTY rises to answer the door. He freezes.]*

*[GWYNNY walks into the audience or is at least speaking directly to the audience.]*

GWYNNY

Excuse me. Before I go inside, I'd like a word with you.

Do I seem like a horrible person? Hmm? Tell me. Do you feel superior to someone like me, to a woman who knows what she wants? Chances are, you know what you want out of life. Don't you, sir? You might not know how to get it. Ha! What do you want? A sexy girlfriend? A million or two in the bank? Ha! Just a couple of million would make you happy, you think. Hm? Or maybe you'd like, hmm, a little more shall we say... vigor. Want to think about that?

*[GWYNNY steps over to a woman in the audience.]*

And ladies, don't think you're off the hook. What do you really want?... *And* do you go out and get it? Do you grab it? If you see a beautiful curly-haired young man at the beach, do you go for a walk with him, or do you just eat a doughnut instead. Hm. So what's the difference between you and me? Hm? I just have more resources than you. And I *grab* what I want. Think about that when you see what's coming next!

*[GWYNNY turns her back on the audience and begins heading back to the stage. Then she abruptly turns and faces the audience for a moment, glares and barks: ]*

***And for heaven's sake -- stop judging me!***

*[GWYNNY gets back into the play and  
re-enters the scene with MARTY, who unfreezes.]*

Oh hi, Gwynny!  
MARTY

Hello, Marty!  
GWYNNY

Come on in!  
MARTY

*[GWYNNY steps in.]*

Did you have trouble finding the place?  
MARTY

None at all. You described it perfectly.  
GWYNNY

Well, won't you have a seat?  
MARTY

Sure. *(GWYNNY sits. CRAIG holds up brochures.)*  
GWYNNY

I don't know how much you know about me and what I do.  
MARTY

Not much. Just that you do good work for Craig.  
GWYNNY

Thank you.... So what I do, and I'm sure you're familiar with this type of service, is provide investment advice and sometimes investment management. I do this for middle class folks and also for people of means. I believe you're in the latter category.  
MARTY

Quite likely.  
GWYNNY

And so, I have a long list of happy clients like yourself.  
MARTY

GWYNNY

Oh, I doubt they're like me.

MARTY

Please forget about that Izzy Ranoff fund I was talking about earlier. I don't know what I was thinking.

GWYNNY

Forgotten.

*[MARTY holds up a brochure.]*

MARTY

This is about the Brightstar Renaissance Fund, a very balanced and recession-resistant fund.

*[GWYNNY smashes the brochure out of his hands.]*

GWYNNY

Do you Honestly! Do you think I want your brochures?!

MARTY *(taken aback)*

....Well, I do think they're worth your while.

*[GWYNNY approaches MARTY in a flirtatious way. He seems transfixed.]*

GWYNNY

Is it being very... forward of me to say... that I hope you find me attractive?

MARTY

Yes.... But I like it. I like it very much.

*[GWYNNY kisses MARTY]*

GWYNNY

You're so... self-assured and masculine.... yet impish.

*[They kiss again.]*

MARTY

Hmpf! Impish! And you're so feminine and im – imperious.

*[GWYNNY throws another brochure on the floor. They kiss again.]*

GWYNNY

Do you know what I'd like to do?

No. MARTY

Guess. GWYNNY

Trash all of my investment literature? MARTY

No. Guess again. GWYNNY

Jump my bones? MARTY

Not out the question.... later. But guess again. GWYNNY

Burn all of the paintings of nudes in the world? MARTY

Marty, you're mocking me. GWYNNY

Do ya think? MARTY

I think. But you're not far off the mark. I need your help convincing Craig to... reinvent himself. GWYNNY

As? MARTY

As the Claude Monet of monumental floral sculptures. GWYNNY

I'd like to help you... and I think you have a noble vision for Craig's success. But.... MARTY

But what? GWYNNY

MARTY

These nudes are... very close to his heart.

GWYNNY

You mean to his--

MARTY

Maybe there too. But definitely to his heart.

GWYNNY

Tell me – how attached is he to this... this trollop he consorts with.

MARTY

You mean her?

*[MARTY points to a nude panting, ostensibly by Craig of Nakia,]*

GWYNNY *(screams)*

Yah!... what is it with this woman? Does she have to follow me wherever I go?... Jesus!!!!... Do you have anything to drink?

MARTY

Sure. Wine? Pinot grigio? Pinot noir? Merlot?

GWYNNY

Pinot noir.

*[MARTY busies himself with pouring wine and does not see what GWYNNY is doing. GWYNNY comes close to the kitchen area of the set, where there are utensils, a mixer and a food processor.]*

GWYNNY

Nice little bachelor kitchen you've got here. Mixer, food processor....

*[GWYNNY takes a steak knife and cuts the nude painting out from its frame. She puts it in the food processor and returns on the button, destroying it.]*

MARTY

What are you doing?

GWYNNY

Sorry, I couldn't possibly relax here with that woman looking down at me. She had to go.

MARTY

If I give you this wine will you promise not to destroy anything else?

GWYNNY (*accepting the wine*)

Yes. Probably. I'll compensate you for it. What did you pay for it?

MARTY

It was a gift. I had admired it.

GWYNNY

Sorry again. Listen, I'd like you to manage a small account for me. Just one and a half million. And if you will allow me, I'd like you to consult with my principal financial adviser, James Richey. Here is his card. (*GWYNNY hands MARTY a card.*) I will pay you a hundred thousand for a one-year consultation. Is that acceptable?

MARTY

I'm happy to do it for you.

GWYNNY

Now can you show me that floral painting by Craig you said you had?

MARTY

There is none. Sorry.

GWYNNY

Damn!... I expected more of you.

*[MARTY approaches GWYNNY holding his own wine glass.  
He intertwines her wine-holding arm with his and they sip together.]*

MARTY

You shouldn't have. Expectations are so... dangerous.

*[MARTY and GWYNNY kiss and embrace. Fade to black.]*

### Scene 3

SETTING: Craig's Studio and Patio-garden

AT RISE: CRAIG is positioning a miniature manikin. In a corner of the studio is the mock-up of Independence Hall with Craig's floral sculpture atop it. NAKIA will not notice this object at first. Vivaldi's music is playing in the background. CRAIG quick-sketches the contours of the manikin, with more curvature, as an exercise. Then he repositions the manikin and does another quick-sketch, tearing off sheets of easel paper. CRAIG hums as he works. The doorbell rings. CRAIG goes to the door at Stage Left and opens it. Enter NAKIA, who wears a full-length light raincoat, and who carries a candy-box.

Oh Hi, Nakia!

CRAIG

Hi sweetie!

NAKIA

How was work?

CRAIG

Horrible. As if dealing all those different insurance forms weren't enough, then they all have to argue about approvals and billing codes.

NAKIA

Well, you expect arguments about approvals, don't you?

CRAIG

Yeah, but I must have had three major arguments today with insurers. Sometimes I think that if I were retired, I'd become a health care activist. Then I re-think and I know I couldn't stand the aggravation.... But I go something to change my mood.... and maybe yours... Can I interest you in a chocolate truffle?

NAKIA

Oh sinful. Let me have one..... Mmmm!

CRAIG

*(CRAIG takes a bite but leaves a bit in his hand.)*

Aren't they just.... What's the word?

NAKIA

Sublime. I've swallowed it, and it's still alive in my mouth.... like a wave of dark, deep sensuality. If it were an animal, it'd be a bear cub with a glistening coat that's just lying down for a nap, its brown

CRAIG

fur glistening and soft.

NAKIA

Mmmm - May I taste that bear?

*[CRAIG places the remainder of the candy in NAKIA's mouth.  
NAKIA shows intense pleasure. CRAIG embraces her.]*

NAKIA

Craig,! So quickly? How are we going to get any work done?

CRAIG

I don't know.... With you, that's always my dilemma.

*[NAKIA gently breaks away from the embrace.]*

NAKIA

Why don't we work on a pose that's not too sexy today, so you can focus?

CRAIG

I thought we'd continue working on Languorous. And even though it's a dangerous mood, I promise you I *will* focus.

NAKIA

I'm fine with that.... Hey, I have a surprise for youuuuu....

CRAIG

More treats?

NAKIA

In a sense...

*[NAKIA unties her raincoat's waist-cinch and drops her raincoat to the floor.  
She smiles with pride and CRAIG is impressed.]*

CRAIG

Whoa! I adore you in pink!

NAKIA

I'll assume the position before you get other ideas.

*[CRAIG helps her get back in the proper modeling position.]*

CRAIG

If you can move your elbow a bit over here.... And this toe....Mmmm... this toe.

NAKIA

Craig!

CRAIG

You must think I was like this with all my models.

NAKIA

Were you?

CRAIG

I wouldn't have lasted. I'd've been drummed out of the profession like Thomas Eakins.

NAKIA

Or you could have lusted undercover for years, like Andrew Wyeth and Olga.

CRAIG

Your acting like an Inquisitor is not very becoming, Nakia. How about I just paint you?

NAKIA

Hmpf!

*[CRAIG returns to his easel. He tries to begin painting,  
but becomes dissatisfied with NAKIA's pose and position.]*

CRAIG

Come on now, no long face. Languor is a pleasant emotion... lazy and happy. Remember?

NAKIA

Why don't you start a new painting?

CRAIG

Called what?

NAKIA

Called Jealous Girlfriend.

CRAIG

I'm not going to get into this. I'll just paint from memory until you decide to cooperate. A very good client is waiting for Languorous.

NAKIA

Let 'em go to the zoo and watch a langour. It's a marsupial from Madagascar. It's a very entertaining

creature.

CRAIG

Now Nakia, you're obsessing about nothing!... (*puts down paintbrush*) Ya know, I really don't want to paint from memory. I'm gonna give you an attitude adjustment.

*[CRAIG comes close to NAKIA and touches her chin, looks into her eyes.  
This scene is played freely, with improvises movements  
and gestures until NAKIA's mood improves.]*

CRAIG

Good. That's a bit better.

*[A few seconds of silent painting ensue. Then:]*

NAKIA

Hon?

CRAIG

Yes?

NAKIA

Have you thought any more about my idea?

CRAIG

Hm? Was that Nakia descending a staircase? Where I paint you in multiple abstract positions, all nude?

NAKIA

No, not that one. Reach back in your memory.... Way back to a few hours ago.

CRAIG

Oh! about giving up floral paintings and focusing on nudes of...you.

NAKIA

It's not so absurd. There's definitely a market. The Philadelphia Museum of Art sent you that letter about wanting to do a show of your figurative work. Remember?

NAKIA

Well, don't look down your nose at an exclusive show of your nudes. And the market for those flower paintings is declining.

CRAIG

It is not! I just had a buyer here today who expressed quite an interest.

NAKIA

Well, people with no taste can be found anywhere. I mean, how can a flower petal compare to this...

*[NAKIA showcases various body parts or poses in this next sequence.]*

NAKIA

Or this.... Or this.... Compared to the infinite expressiveness of human flesh, a flower is so...

CRAIG

So what?

NAKIA

So *dead*.... Sweetie, when you're not doing figurative painting, you're wasting your time.

CRAIG

How can you say that?! That's so hurtful!

NAKIA

You need to hear it. They're just not worthy of your talent. They're like ash.

*[NAKIA grasps a flower, hold it. Drops it.]*

As uninteresting as ash. And just as deceased.

*[NAKIA takes an ash tray and upends it, sending ash to the floor, atop the flower.  
The lighting dims or blackens on NAKIA and the rest of the set.  
NAKIA freezes in a tilted position.*

*CRAIG steps forward to speak to the audience, with a spot on CRAIG.]*

CRAIG

Do you see how it is? Oh, not just today, ALL MY LIFE it's been that way! Pardon me, ladies. You can tell from what you've seen so far that I love women, I adore them. Madam, I'm sure I'd be crazy about you, if your husband would let me know you. But why, ladies, do you have to change us??

Are we ever good enough as is? Ladies? Hmm? Are we ever good enough? Let me hear it.

*[CRAIG waits for audience response]*

Admit it: never! NEVER!! Guys, you know how they see us? Like this.

*[CRAIG takes an egg of Silly Putty out of his pocket and squeezes it into a cube.]*

See this cube I'm making? Pushed in from all sides. Then when that's not satisfying, they stretch us in

all directions. Like this! (*stretches out the Silly Putty*) That's what they do. And then--

NAKIA (*still frozen, in the darkness*)

We do NOT!

[*CRAIG is taken aback.*]

CRAIG

You're not in this scene! I specifically asked Albert to keep you frozen.

NAKIA

The hell with what Albert wants! He's not the boss of me.

CRAIG (*to NAKIA*)

Well will you have the decency to let me finish my soliloquy before butting in?

NAKIA

Hmpf!

CRAIG (*to AUDIENCE*)

You can see what I'm up against. (*rubs his neck*)... I lost the train of my tirade. I'm gonna get back to the scene.... Here, catch!

(*CRAIG tosses the Silly Putty to someone in the audience  
and returns to the scene on the main set.*)

(*to NAKIA*)

Nakia, you're wonderful... You're the only model I'm using now. In fact, you're a model for so much that's beautiful in my life. But I can't let you dictate what I paint!

NAKIA

Dictate! I'm just advocating for your best interests. But seriously, Craig, languorous is just going to put me to sleep! Can't we do *jazzy* instead?

CRAIG

No! Languorous gives you the essence of your lines!

NAKIA

Tell it to me again, baby!

CRAIG

Let me sing it to you, Nakia! Sing your beauty to remind you of why I create poetry out of your gorgeous body! In your infinite relaxation, here....

NAKIA

I remember.... Last Tuesday... but it comes back so strong.

CRAIG

As traced by this sinuous line... Remember how I traced it with this vine stick of charcoal?

NAKIA

I do.... Those lines you drew were so... fluid, I think. I fit right into them....

CRAIG

See? You still do.... Your back gracefully arches as you contemplate.... Move to this point, see?

NAKIA

I'm finding it!

CRAIG

And it feels good, doesn't it?

NAKIA

Craig....

CRAIG

Yes?

NAKIA

This is going to sound strange, because you tell me all the time.

CRAIG

Yeah.

NAKIA

Do you really think I'm beautiful?

CRAIG

Do I??? Huh? Don't you know that I choose you as my subject because... only you move me in that special way? The model in figure painting counts for *everything*. And you're my all!

NAKIA

Sweetie, you're so.... What's that?

CRAIG

Oh, that?... Oh it's just a model for a project I'm considering working on.

NAKIA

A new project? That's exciting! You didn't tell me about that!

*[CRAIG gets off the model's platform and rushes over to where the model of Independence Hall is. She is surprised and spends time examining it. CRAIG squirms, meanwhile.]*

CRAIG

Well, I--

NAKIA

This is.. Independence Hall!

CRAIG

Yeah, well it's just something offered to--

NAKIA

And this looks like your Hibiscus painting!

CRAIG

It's only a-

NAKIA

It IS yours! Even miniature, I can see your CARSON initials! Craig, what's this about?!

CRAIG

Well, it's a project that this person I know came up with... It's just in the concept stage. The idea is to do blow up transformations of my painting and make them into statues. The concept is pretty strange.

NAKIA

So who's this friend?

CRAIG

Someone who reconnected with me from college. A Facebook connection.

NAKIA

Well, you should be suspicious of people who just know you from Facebook. He might be a stalker or something. What's his name?

CRAIG

It's a woman. Her name is Gwynneth Ellsworth.

NAKIA

My! What a sweet working class common name! Is she from Kensington? Or South Philly perhaps?

CRAIG

She's from the main line, and she happens to be very wealthy and well-connected. She could be very helpful to us.

NAKIA

Us? So this is an US thing?

CRAIG

I mean, there's some good potential money there. It could pay a lot of bills.

NAKIA

Just what is she offering you?!

CRAIG

Half a million-- this year. That's IF I decide to take it.... We might be firming up details on the offer today in fact. There's a chance she'll stop by here this afternoon.

NAKIA

Hold on a second. Go back. Did you say half a million!

CRAIG

Yup. Now if we can--

NAKIA

Wow!... Would you, say, dedicate a part of that in advance the art classes in poor neighborhoods? You know, like we were talking?

CRAIG

Well, that's a possibility. We can discuss it

NAKIA

You don't sound as enthusiastic for some reason.

CRAIG

I'm just distracted. I mean, I'd *like* to continue this painting. Would you mind resuming the pose?

NAKIA

Not just right now. I'm going to the bathroom. I'm gonna use in the one in your house instead of your ugly little latrine.

CRAIG

It's not a latrine! It's perfectly serviceable!

NAKIA

Well, I like your upstairs one, and I love the potpourri you keep up there!

*[NAKIA begins to exit stage left. CRAIG calls out to her.]*

CRAIG

Suit yourself. But it IS made out of plants, lovely plants. But when you come back can we PLEASE make some progress!

*[NAKIA sings her reply from offstage.]*

NAKIA

Of course, dear!!

*[CRAIG resumes painting, makes adjustments, fills in lines.  
MARTY comes rushing in at Stage Left, clutching a bag of macadamia nuts.  
He collapses into a chair, semi-prostrate, clutching his chest and gasping.]*

CRAIG

Well, you could have rung the doorbell. I mean, there's a chance I could have been with someone.

MARTY

I couldn't help it. That woman! She's a force of Nature.

CRAIG

Who? Gwynny?

MARTY

No, Lady Gaga. Of course I mean Gwynny.

CRAIG

Was she offended that you didn't have one of my floral paintings at your house?

MARTY

A bit. She was looking forward to seeing it.

CRAIG

Did she agree to let you handle her investments?

MARTY

That's not all she let me handle.

*[CRAIG flings aside his paint brush in fury and approaches MARTY threateningly.]*

CRAIG

You didn't do that! No, you couldn't have. After I distinctly told you to stay away from her and to have limited contact.

MARTY

What could I do? We talked investments, and then she came on to me like a locomotive!

CRAIG

And you just had to let her into your station!

MARTY

I resisted! I threw brochures at her.

CRAIG

You were fierce!

MARTY

Look - I brought you macadamia nuts!

*[MARTY opens his bag of nuts and pours it into a bowl.  
CRAIG flings the bowl aside, sending the nuts flying  
across the floor and perhaps into the audience.]*

CRAIG

I *care* about that woman!

MARTY

But you *have* a girl-friend!

CRAIG

And what are you? A friend who decides on his friend's quota for women? Like I've got to weigh in with you? What kind of friend are you?

MARTY

A weak one, I suppose.... I'm sorry. I said *sorry!* But listen. She's coming this way soon. And she wants to know your decision about the painting. You know, the styles.

CRAIG

She's on her way?

MARTY

She's in her limo. Making calls or doing some business. But she said she'd be in shortly. Did you decide what you want to do?

CRAIG

No. Not yet.

*[The doorbell buzzer rings. MARTY welcomes GWYNNY in.]*

GWYNNY

Hello again! You have such a lovely neighborhood, you two gentlemen! The incredible colorful variety of tulips all in a row alongside the driveways. The Asian honeysuckles. The hanging brumansia! I must stay around some afternoon until evening to enjoy their perfume. Do you feel you're as lucky as I think you are?

MARTY

I think I speak for both of us when I say we both feel lucky you've come into our lives.

GWYNNY

I'm so delight-

*[Enter NAKIA from Stage Left, at first unaware of guests.]*

NAKIA

I'm ready to be languorous! I've reconsidered that emotion and feel I-- Oh.

CRAIG

Nakia, I'd like you to meet Gwynneth.

GWYNNY

Hello.

NAKIA

Hello. Are you... the person who might be giving Craig a nice deal?

GWYNNY

Yes, I am.

NAKIA

And you're the one who created that... thing over there, that poster?

*[NAKIA points to the Independence Hall poster.]*

GWYNNY

That would be me. And I believe you are Nakia Washington.

NAKIA

How would you know my last name?

*[GWYNNY smiles and nods.]*

GWYNNY

And aren't you the model for those dreadful nude paintings that are so distracting to my Craig?

NAKIA

*Dreadful* nudes! *Your* Craig! Who do you think you are?

GWYNNY

I am Gwynneth Ellsworth. And I suggest you take your traveling road show of nudity and whatnot elsewhere Craig has a vested interest in pursuing the plan I've laid out for him.

NAKIA

An interest in vests! They went out with the disco era. And he don't like turtlenecks either. If you don't know that, then he can't be your Craig. Girl, you oughta get yourself a fashion consultant.

MARTY

Nakia, he's not talking about being interested in vests. He means Craig can make a lot of money by following Gwynny's approach to beauty.

CRAIG

My head is spinning. But at least someone's mentioned beauty. That's all I ever wanted in my life.

NAKIA *(to CRAIG)*

The bitch mainly mentioned money. *(Now speaking to GWYNNY.)* But you did lay it all out for us so neat. So I'm gonna make you a very attractive offer.

*[NAKIA takes a dollar bill out of her purse.]*

NAKIA

Here. Take this and go – before I make your life really miserable.

GWYNNY

You really couldn't want Craig to spend his career painting you in the buff for pennies. He might as well paint Velvet Elvises! Dear, I am sure you are the sweetest little trollop.

*[NAKIA rushes to CRAIG and asks:]*

NAKIA

What did she call me? Tripe?

CRAIG

Trollop. It means goddess. I'm pouring myself a scotch.

*[CRAIG steps over to a table or cabinet to pour liquor.]*

GWYNNY *(to NAKIA)*

Since you suggested cash... I happen to have five crisp thousand dollar bills here.

*[GWYNNY pulls them from her purse.]*

GWYNNY

Here, go pay your cell phone bill. Then take your friends to McDonald's and you'll still have money left for a fun night at the casino.

NAKIA

I've had about enough of you. This is my turf, and it's time you got offa it!!

*[NAKIA lifts the Independence Hall poster and chases GWYNNY like a knight with a lance.*

*NAKIA charges GWYNNY, who escapes her thrust.*

*GWYNNY grabs NAKIA's scarf.*

*NAKIA charges again. GWYNNY again escapes.]*

NAKIA

Bitch!

GWYNNY

Whore!

NAKIA

Take your filthy money and get out of our studio!

GWYNNY

Skank! I'll make your life so miserable you'll wish you'd never seen me!

*[GWYNNY gets behind NAKIA and wraps the scarf around her neck, attempting to strangle her.*

*The two women continue to struggle.*

*The men work to pull them off each other.]*

MARTY

Ladies, stop!

GWYNNETH

I can't imagine why you'd want to consort with such a low-grade person!

NAKIA

Craig, why don't you tell this foolish woman to scram. And that you're stickin' to painting your favorite, beautiful subject – me.

CRAIG

I don't think we have to go to such extremes at all!

MARTY

Gwynny, why won't we just leave now and come back at a more opportune time?

GWYNNY

Not at all. I feel inspired!

MARTY

Inspired.

GWYNNY

To educate this young woman in esthetics.

MARTY

You gotta be kiddin'.

NAKIA (*to CRAIG*)

I think I wanna hear this. Let her educate me -- *IF* she'll let me have my say. Is that a deal?

GWYNNY

Listen to you later? I don't know what good it would do me. But--

CRAIG

Nakia, this is not likely to end well. Why don't we just forget it.

MARTY

Gwynny, we have a lot to do back at your home. Those galleries you wanted to show me and--

GWYNNY

Another time. This is important. Educating the public is what I'm about.

MARTY

But-

GWYNNY

Have a seat! Down there.

*[MARTY begins to get down, and GWYNNY points to the floor.  
MARTY finally succumbs and sits on the floor.]*

CRAIG

Ladies, how in the world is all of this supposed--

NAKIA

Shah! That's one good idea she had. Get down there with Marty. Down!

CRAIG

This is all so--

NAKIA

This is OUR thing now, so have a seat!

*[GWYNNY prances a bit, as if warming up to her demonstration lecture.]*

GWYNNY

Now I will tell you what I am talking about.... esthetics. Can you say that?

NAKIA

Don't treat me like a schoolgirl!

GWYNNY

Then SAY it if you can. Es-the-ticks!

NAKIA

Esthetics.

GWYNNY

Esthetics asks and answers the question: *What is beautiful?*

NAKIA

How 'bout *you* -- with a concussion?

*[GWYNNY is aghast at this rudeness and turns to leave.]*

GWYNNY

What?! I'm just about--

NAKIA

No, I'll stop. Then later you'll have to listen to me.

*[GWYNNY stops leaving and returns to her talk.]*

GWYNNY

You don't have to respect me -- just listen to me.... I'd like to educate you.

*[GWYNNY turns to an orchid in a pot on a stand and brings it forward.]*

GWYNNY

Now this particular blossom is an orchid. It is often considered the Queen among flowers. They are morphologically diverse and part of a widespread family of monocots in the order Asparagales. It is currently believed to be the largest family of flowering plants with between 21,950 and 26,049 currently accepted species.

*[NAKIA turns to CRAIG and whispers:]*

NAKIA

She really expects me to listen to this stuff?

GWYNNY

What did she say?

CRAIG

She really enjoys listening to this stuff.

GWYNNY

But the beauty of this flower is universally acknowledged. The tepals or upper petals are admired for their curvature and color. See how splendidly they curve? This is a nirvana of opportunity for a talented floral artist like Craig! And the staminae are splendid for their uprightness and pride. They are another remarkable opportunity for the artist to showcase floral beauty....

*[GWYNNY brings forward an easel with Craig's painting of an orchid on it.]*

GWYNNY

And here is Craig's representation of all of this beauty. Note how judiciously he illuminates certain key areas of the blossom, and highlights it against the background in unity, balancing this element and that one to provide perfect artistic composition. THAT is beauty -- and talent my dear!

NAKIA

I like people-pictures better. They're more interesting. And if I have to like a special flower, I like roses better.

GWYNNY

But unlike people, flowers are pure -- unspoiled by human frailties. They are, once painted by as

master, forever pure and perfect. Now that is surely not the whole of esthetics. But to my view it is a major portion. And so... have you learned anything?

NAKIA

That you're obsessed with orchids! Now listen to me.... See this leg?

*[GWYNNY looks at her leg.]*

This leg of mine has more beauty than all of the flowers in the world!

And see this foot? This foot holds the world record for most men's heads turned. Want to know what happens when I walk down the street? Men walk into telephone poles and street signs. And that's when I'm not even tryin'. Am I right Craig?

CRAIG

I've seen it.

NAKIA

And if I ever tried -- well just look out, traffic police! And Craig - MY Craig - paints me nude like no one else. You could say he celebrates my beauty.

MARTY

We know he has in the past.

NAKIA

What past! People BUY these paintings now for good money. So that's why and how --- we're gonna build our future together.

GWYNNY

Excuse me.

*[GWYNNY confers silently to the audience,  
but speaks carefully with MARTY. Then she  
makes a serious phone call and hangs up.  
GWYNNY and CRAIG return to the main scene.]*

GWYNNY

Well, are you opting for the magnificent offer I have laid before you? ... I need to know.

MARTY

You should seriously consider this. It's the best career offer you've ever had.

*[NAKIA gets a phone call. She answers it.]*

NAKIA

Hello, Adrienne! Yes, I-- What? But how could you lose that account so quickly? They what? When?... And who made that call to them?... Well, that's a lousy way to reward all the years of service I've given you.... And whoever made that call ....*(she looks at GWYNNY)* oughta think about what you will say to the Lord, your maker, when the time is come! Yes, think about it!

*[NAKIA goes rushing, crying off-stage, into the house. CRAIG follows.]*

MARTY

Do you think that was a little extreme?

GWYNNY

There's was no other way to reach that woman. She was recalcitrant!

*[NAKIA and CRAIG return, NAKIA crying on CRAIG's shoulder.]*

NAKIA

Craig, tell this evil woman to go!

*[CRAIG sits and holds his head, wracked with conflict.  
ALBERT comes onto the stage from a seat at the front of the audience.]*

ALBERT

Freeze, everybody!

GWYNNY

Albert, why don't you return to your seat and let us finish this.

MARTY

We're too agitated to listen to you!

NAKIA

Really, Albert! This is none of your business!

ALBERT

I just want a word with Craig.

CRAIG

I have enough trouble as it is -- What?

ALBERT

The person who cares the most about you here is Nakia. So I think it's important you go with her. Paint

the nudes. You'll be happy if you do.

CRAIG

What makes you think I have to listen to you?

ALBERT

Well, I invented you. So I can tell you what to do.

CRAIG

No you can't! Where did you get THAT egotistical idea. What I decide to do with MY life is my decision. Now listen to us and go back to your seat.

ALBERT

But-

NAKIA

Do what Craig says.

*[ALBERT returns to his seat.  
The actors return to their previous poses.]*

*[Back in character, CRAIG is suddenly elated.]*

CRAIG

Nakia, I feel for you. And I will help you survive! And Gwynny, you are lovely! And rich! And kind to make me such a phenomenal offer! And Marty, you are such a good friend, with all your impartial advice! I have to thank my lucky stars I have you. But I am my own artist! I don't have to listen to any of you! I can paint or not paint! Sculpt or do Jello sculptures or whatever!

Whatever I want! Ha ha!

*[CRAIG dances around like a mad-man.]*

And now old Craig Carson has an idea. One you'll all enjoy!

*[CRAIG leaves the set for a moment, as if to another room  
in the studio-house. He returns in a cow costume.]*

CRAIG

Ya know, cows are under-represented in the art world! And in the performance art world! But I am going to fix that! I am! Ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha! Check this out.

*[CRAIG shows a video of himself cavorting as a cow.]*

My sponsors are ready for more cow art, and I plan to give it to them! Milk anyone?

*[CRAIG pours a glass of milk and offers it to NAKIA,  
who sees the humor of it and accepts a glass.]*

NAKIA

Well, can they be nude cows?

CRAIG

Only a few will be clothed! And you might not even recognize them -- I'm an abstract cow-expressionist!

NAKIA

And when you make money in the cow art business, you're still gonna share some with art classes for the inner-city students, right?

CRAIG

Mooooove on with that program!

*[GWYNNY leads MARTY away across the stage.]*

GWYNNY

Come, Marty. It's time to move into that nice little room I've chosen for you.

MARTY

But I don't want that room. I like my house!

GWYNNY

Come now. We have artists to identify and funds to manage.

MARTY

But I--

GWYNNY

I said *come!*

MARTY

But--

*[Exit MARTY and GWYNNY]*

CRAIG

Mooo!

NAKIA

Mooo!

CRAIG and NAKIA

Moo! Moo! Ha ha ha ha.

**THE END**