

CRITICAL DISTANCE

A full length play

By

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4W, 1M

CHARACTERS:

INEZ: woman late 20s; white/Latina; art history PhD student at Columbia University; insecure about her academic prospects; trips on her white privilege (or, white-passing, depending on how you look at it) with varying levels of self-awareness

FELICIA: woman; early 30s; black; security guard at the Guggenheim museum; from the Bronx; highly opinionated about everything; tells it like it is

TAMSIN: woman; 60s; white; distinguished art history professor at Columbia University; pretentious; vindictive; considers herself enlightened

HASEEM: man; early 30s; Middle-Eastern by way of Queens; former security guard at the Guggenheim; now operates a halal cart outside the museum; anti-intellectual but very perceptive

WAITRESS / CHLOE / DENTAL STUDENT / DENISE: woman; black; 40s; Chloe is a Yale-educated TV producer; Denise is a security guard at the Guggenheim

PLACE/TIME: New York City, 2018

SYNOPSIS/BLURB: *Critical Distance* is a dark comedy that pits two women from different backgrounds against each other: Inez, a white/Latina art history graduate student at Columbia University, and Felicia, a black security guard at the Guggenheim Museum. Inez is attempting to navigate the highfalutin waters of academia and write her dissertation on outsider art, but her scholarship is turned on its head when she encounters Felicia, a no-nonsense autodidact who calls it like she sees it. When Inez grants Felicia a platform to voice her unorthodox opinions, she unwittingly creates a competitor in the world of art criticism, and the two women fight it out for the sake of relative fame and fortune. The play examines the intersection of art and class, and the extent to which art is subjectively defined.

SCENE 1: TAMSIN'S OFFICE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Inez sits while Tamsin prunes and waters her office plants.

INEZ

So, what are your thoughts?

TAMSIN

How's your German?

INEZ

What?

TAMSIN

Dein Deutsch. Wie ist das?

INEZ

I mean, it's okay. I passed the PhD reading test.

TAMSIN

And your French?

INEZ

I thought the program only required one foreign language.

TAMSIN

Un homme qui sait deux langues en vaut deux.

INEZ

A man who knows two languages is worth two?

TAMSIN

If you count English, I'm guessing you're worth—what? One and-two-thirds-men?

INEZ

I speak Spanish.

TAMSIN

Well, it's a good thing Kant and Derrida wrote in Spanish, now isn't it?

(they didn't; a beat while this sinks in)

My thoughts are I don't care for...mother-in-law's-tongue.

The plant, darling. The plant. Also known as snake plant. Sansevieria trifasciata in Latin.

Look at it. It's so...kitsch.

INEZ

Plants can be kitsch?

TAMSIN

Everything can be kitsch, provided the thing in question is a utilitarian object lacking all critical distance between object and observer. If it “offers instantaneous emotional gratification without intellectual effort, without the requirement of aura, without sublimation...”

INEZ

Walter Benjamin.

TAMSIN

Eine Studie über die Entartung der Kuns. So I guess you *were* paying attention in my Aesthetic Theory seminar.

Tamsin hands Inez a piece of a leaf.

TAMSIN (cont'd)

Aloe?

Inez accepts the leaf, not sure what to do with it.

INEZ

Now talk about a tacky plant. Get it? Because aloe's sticky...

TAMSIN

Inez, darling, your dissertation proposal is, well, it's like this mother-in-law's-tongue. It's adequate. It's hearty. You can buy it anywhere. It'll look fine in a doctor's waiting room. Or in the office of a professor who's apparently let her good taste slide. The common name for it—mother-in-law's-tongue, or snake plant, sounds cheeky and maybe even a little transgressive. Ouch, it suggests. But then you touch it, and—what do you get?—smooth waxiness with only a moderately sharp tip. Like a fucking candle. So, it's kitsch. It's mass-produced to the extent that flora can be mass-produced, and it says simply: “I'm a house plant. I'm cheap decor. I'm a means of acquiring oxygen indoors.” Aloe, on the other hand! Now there's a perennial with dynamism. Prickly on the outside but medicinal on the inside, it seduces the observer, tempting one to puncture it while knowing that to do so would be, in part, to destroy it. A succulent that poses a moral dilemma, aloe is a house plant that does, not merely is—do you understand?

INEZ

Does this mean I need to find a new advisor?

TAMSIN

No, I'm afraid you're stuck with me, faculty sabbatical schedules being what they are. But your dissertation topic, it bores me. Look, you can write about Folk Art, Instagram and Grandma Moses going online—

INEZ

The working title is: The Viability of Outsider Art in the Internet Age.

TAMSIN

Whatever. But folk art, outsider art—so-called primitive or naive art—we're not allowed to call it that anymore, by the way.

She playfully slaps herself on the wrist.

TAMSIN (cont'd)

It's banal. It's passé. It invites obvious meditations on: What is art? To whom does it belong? Is the academy elitist? Etcetera, etcetera. All that navel-gazing—and for what? Some crude cross-stitchings of American pastoral life. The brightly-colored finger paintings of institutionalized schizophrenics. Giant sculptures made out of cheese.

INEZ

Professor Brodsky, with all do respect—

TAMSIN

Please, call me Tamsin. Dissertation-advising is the kind of gritty, uncensored endeavor that merits the use of first names.

INEZ

Tamsin, I think you're being a bit unfair in your characterizations of outsider art.

TAMSIN

Oh of course I am, darling. Much of it's quite good. I mean, who doesn't love Henri Rosseau? You know, the nineteenth-century Frenchman who painted jungles—

INEZ

I know who Henri Rosseau is.

TAMSIN

No need to be defensive, darling. It's my job to play devil's advocate, to push you to come up with something ground-breaking, or at least marginally not dull. Do you want a job in academia?

INEZ

Yes.

TAMSIN

Because it's fine if you don't. You wouldn't be the first person at Columbia to have parents on the board of the Met who's just looking to gain a little Ivy League legitimacy before the torch gets passed.

INEZ

I'm not rich. I have a post-doc teaching fellowship lined up at SUNY Binghamton for next year.

TAMSIN

They hired you ABD—in this job market?

INEZ

I have to show them at the end of the semester that I'm on track to finish, but yeah.

TAMSIN

Jesus. The standards at SUNY Bumfuck get lower ever year. You really want to work there?

INEZ

I feel lucky I got a job.

TAMSIN

Who'd you have to blow?

INEZ

Excuse me?

TAMSIN

That's academic humor, darling.
So you want to be a professor at a backwater state school? That's grand.

INEZ

It's...respectable...
It's not working at a Paint-a-Pot in a Delaware strip mall.
Paint-a-Pot is this thing where you pay money to a paint—

TAMSIN

I know what Paint-a-Pot is.

Look, I'm just trying to help you get a job. So you got a post-doc despite being pre-doc—well, contingent on your dissertation. Good for you. But surely you're aware that there aren't many tenure-track art history professorships out there, even at safety schools in the sticks. And, if one wants to be hired, especially in spite of certain deficiencies in language, or what have you, one needs to make a splash with one's research.

(with a laugh)

I'm lucky though. I was sleeping with the right person at the right time. That's a joke, darling.

INEZ

So how do you propose that I make my dissertation...sexier? More like an aloe plant?

TAMSIN

Oh beats me. All I'm saying is you need a better hook than "gee-whiz today's Henri Rousseau has an Instagram." Look, the best artists are the ones who cause a stir. The same's true for critics who, in the cultural ecosystem, leech off of the artists. Which reminds me, do you want a few lychees?

Tamsin hands Inez a few small red fruits.

TAMSIN (cont'd)

I like to give these to my students during our first dissertation meeting.

INEZ

What are they?

TAMSIN

Lychees. They're fruit. From China.

The idea is that, as an art historian-slash-critic, you're dependent upon artists like a parasite—or, to be more specific, like a leech. It's a homophone, get it?

I'm very botanical in my analogies.

It's not an insult! Inez, darling, I say this to humble you. And to encourage you. It's not uncommon in this line of work to become consumed by one's writing.

So, don't overthink it, okay? Just write something.

Write something that's novel and even a bit controversial.

Something demonstrative of a unique point of view.

But most crucially, write something that gets finished.

A half-finished Lucian Freud will still sell for millions.

A half-finished dissertation just gets you a master's degree and a few lost years in your late-twenties-slash-early-thirties.

So, save the suffering for the artists. And suck off their creativity, not the rest of it.

(in confidence, with a wink)

(MORE)

TAMSIN (cont'd)

Unless that extra sucking'll help your career.
I'm kidding. Mostly.

Inez bites into a lychee.

TAMSIN (cont'd)

No, darling, you have to peel the skin off first.

SCENE 2: THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM IN NYC - SAME DAY

Inez shows her student ID at the ticket booth.

INEZ

(to unseen ticket booth attendant)

But I'm a student. Graduate student at Columbia, see? I thought this guaranteed free entry at the Guggenheim.

How much?

Eighteen bucks?

Isn't there a student discount?

That *is* the student discount?!

She fishes out cash.

INEZ (cont'd)

Here's fourteen dollars and thirty-three cents. That's all I—

Thank you.

Inez receives a ticket. She enters, plops down on a bench and sits there for a while. After some time, she pulls a lychee out her pocket and then throws it at the floor.

Felicia enters.

FELICIA

Hey! Whatchu think you doing?

INEZ

Sorry. I'm—I'm sorry.

Felicia picks up the lychee.

FELICIA

What is this, a ball? You think you can throw balls in an art museum.

INEZ

It's a lychee.

FELICIA

A what?

INEZ

It's a fruit. From China.
You have to peel the skin off first.
You can have it.

FELICIA

I don't want your weird-ass Chinese ball fruits.
You know, we got a special exhibit a couple floors up.
So, maybe you don't want to just sit here and stare at a white wall all day. That white wall ain't an exhibit, just to be clear.

INEZ

I know.

FELICIA

I feel like I gotta say that cause you'd be surprised how many people come in and'll be like: is this trash can next to the bathroom real, or is it art?
And I wanna be like: are you stupid or are you art?
Cause if you're art, then god musta been going through a Dadaist phase when he made you.

Inez laughs.

FELICIA (cont'd)

Course I can't say that they're stupid *and* art. First rule of working here is: ain't none of this art stupid, even when it most definitely is.
For real, my friend had perfect attendance and was a halfway decent employee. But our boss got wind of him making fun of one of the exhibits, and he got shit-canned on the spot.
Now he runs one of them halal food carts out front. Says he'd rather feed these tourists gyros than a bunch of bullshit.
God bless em. He makes way better money slinging shawarma. I'd join him, but shaving meat off a stick grosses me out.
Plus, I like modern art. Even if it is stupid sometimes. Hell, when it's stupid, sometimes I like it *more*. Makes me think. Makes me feel. Things don't gotta be smart to make you feel.
I can get away with calling it stupid cause I'm sly. I know my audience. Best part of this boring-ass job is speaking my mind. When the conditions are right, that is.
You feel me, I see it. You ain't gonna rat me out. You a good crowd, littering aside.

(MORE)

FELICIA (cont'd)

Haseem, my friend, he made the mistake of bitching bout an exhibit right in front of the artist who made it. I mean, course that's gonna bite you in the ass. Anyway, no more nutsack fruits in here, okay?

INEZ

What's your name?

FELICIA

Why you asking?

INEZ

I'm not going to report you or anything. I'm just curious is all.

FELICIA

Are you illiterate?

Felicia points to her name tag.

INEZ

(reading)

Felicia. Hi, I'm Inez.

FELICIA

I know.

INEZ

You do?

FELICIA

Pfft no. I gotta get back to work.

Lights change. Felicia stands looking around. Inez peers at her from a corner. Felicia fidgets. She makes restless mouth noises. She bobs her head as if listening to a song. Eventually, she steps forward to address a patron.

FELICIA (cont'd)

Hey, behind the line!

Nah, I'm just playing.

The sign says you can't cross the line, but look at all them finger prints. You put up an exhibit in Braille, and you think people ain't gonna touch it.

Me, I think it's some kind of psychology test, you know? Like, certain people gonna follow directions, and certain people gonna...

You one of *those* types. Not surprising cause most guys are. Girls not so much.

It's cool. Between you and me, I've touched it like fifty times. For real.

(MORE)

FELICIA (cont'd)

A blind man told me the Braille says, "Don't touch or else."
I know. I was like: are you serious? I mean, come on now.
I was hoping it said something like: "And if you don't know, now you know."
Or: "L'eggo my Eggo."
Something unexpected, you feel me?
Or at least something about blindness.
Do you know that America's one of the only places that doesn't make different sized
dollar bills to help blind people?
As if they don't got enough problems, blind people gotta worry about getting cheated
every time they pay cash.
And they're lucky if they can enjoy a single piece of art in this place.
And don't get me started on the sign. It just says: Raised Bumps. Mixed media. This
artist's name—whoever they are. USA. 1973. I mean, what is that supposed to tell you?
Anyway, I gotta remind you to stay behind the line, so...
Yeah, bathroom's to the right.

Lights change. Felicia moves to another exhibit. Similar
restless routine.

FELICIA (cont'd)

(as if letting someone in on a secret)

I knew a lady who had "dyke" tattooed on her forehead, and she didn't end up in a
museum, you know what I'm saying?
If all's you needed to get on these walls was a big black-and-white photo with the word
"dyke" on your face, there'd be a lot more ladies in art school, and a lot less in prison.
I mean, I don't got anything against dykes or whatever. It's just...
Maybe the artist is a big deal, I don't know.
All's I know is when half the people walk by this one, they stop and stare at it like they're
praying. Like they feel they gotta squint and nod their heads like it's important. Or else
they hating on gay people.
What's that about? Is that the point?
The other half are tourists, and they be like "Qué es dyke?" But in Chinese or whatever.
And sometimes I want to tell em even though I'm not supposed to.
Yeah, bathroom's to the right.

Lights change.

FELICIA (cont'd)

Bathroom's that way.
Oh. You looked a little lost, that's why.
Lost in thought then. Never mind.
This one's a thinker. I see new things in it every day. Some days it seems real sad and
gross, and other days funny. And other days, just kinda dumb, to be honest.
It's the Guggenheim's bestseller.

(MORE)

FELICIA (cont'd)

They keep bringing it back cause apparently people love seeing Pinocchio drowned in a pool. I don't know if that says more about people or about Pinocchio. I think it's just about Disney being all over the world. Everyone gets it. People come here fresh from Russia or wherever, flush with dollars, and they be like, "How do I get to the Lion King on Broadway?"

And I want to be like, yeah, it's uptown. Just take the 5 train to the Bronx and get off at 149th Street-Grand Concourse. Let's see how much they "heart" New York then. But...that'd be cold.

Which I think is what this drowned Pinocchio sculpture is saying. We get a—whaddya call it?—"sick thrill" seeing this puppet dude face-down. Like, "Aw man, poor guy." And also, "Serves you right, you dirty little liar. And then there's the question: Did he kill himself? Or did someone push him off the ledge into the water? The cricket, maybe? His daddy, the one pulling the strings? I wonder sometimes: What if the tip of his nose got stuck in a whole at the bottom of the pool and propped him up so he could breathe out his nostrils? What if lying *saved his ass*?

That would be ironic as fuck—excuse me—that would be ironic. But I guess it doesn't matter if he jumped or fell and [hand slap!] died on impact. Blunt force trauma or drowning, who's to say, you know?

I feel sorta bad for the bougie kids who see this thing. The ticket should probably come with a warning. Children under twelve are free. But it'll cost them a Disney character. Which says more about these kids being sheltered than anything. I never went to a museum at that age. And god knows I saw a lot worse than a dead cartoon by the time I was grown.

Anyway, the whole thing's pretty thought-invoking, if you ask me. Which you didn't. So...sorry...I just...

Inez enters and interrupts.

INEZ

Can I buy you lunch?

FELICIA

You that testicle fruit girl from earlier.

INEZ

Lychees. Yeah.

FELICIA

I see you've been watching me.

INEZ

Was it that obvious?

FELICIA

You put your hood up and stare at a plaque over there for five minutes and think it don't look suspicious? I'm a security guard. It's my job to watch out for that shit.

INEZ

You're fun to listen to. Very engaging critique.

FELICIA

I'm working through lunch.

INEZ

Really? That sucks.

FELICIA

Nah, it's just called having a fucking job.

INEZ

Right...how about tomorrow?

FELICIA

I already told Haseem I'd eat with him.

INEZ

That's fine. I like kebabs.

FELICIA

I told you, I don't eat none of his nasty-ass truck food. Plus, you're paying, right?

SCENE 3: INEZ'S APARTMENT - SAME DAY

Inez types on her laptop, writing for:

“Inez Says: Half-Baked Ruminations That No One Reads (Or Should Read) But Which Inez Keeps Generating Anyway.” Her computer is projected on a screen.

We see the first sentence of Inez's new blog entry. The text then recedes, along with her typing, but italicized phrases appear briefly when spoken.

INEZ

Today was one those days where I seriously considered dropping out of school, packing it all in and moving back home to fucking Delaware.

fucking Delaware is promptly backspace deleted and replaced with *fucking Delaware*, but with the word (*fucking*) put in parentheses. Then, after a beat, *fucking* is deleted altogether.

INEZ (cont'd)

One of those days where contemporary art and the culture that surrounds it seems *so pretentious and self-involved* as to not be worth it. One of those days where I question why it is I'm spending the next *three-plus years of my life* writing a tome that no one will ever read. (Unless I write something "*novel*" and "*controversial*," whatever that means—and even then.) One of those days where I wonder what I'm even gaining by living here, going into debt just to pay for 250 square feet of NYC shitholery?

NYC shitholery is backspace deleted and replaced with *NYC real estate*.

INEZ (cont'd)

Anyway, it was *one of those days where the only thing I can think to do, other than spend forty bucks at Paint-a-Pot channeling my angst into painting motherfucking pots that I didn't even make*

Inez highlights the last clause and deletes it. The last words on screen are now: *one of those day where the only thing I can think to do...*

INEZ (cont'd)

is to sit in a museum and hope that whatever it is about art that inspired me in the first place will make itself apparent and convince me to stay the course. Turns out, *inspiration, thy name is Felicia!* Today, *a security guard at the Guggenheim* restored my faith in contemporary art, or at least its ability to resonate with those *outside of the academic-industrial-complex*. Felicia, you are *a revelation*. I thought I wanted to write about outsider art, but little did I know that there is such a thing as *outsider art criticism*—the novel, controversial, unique perspective I've been looking for without even realizing it. Felicia, when I finish my dissertation, I'm dedicating it to you.

When I finish my dissertation is backspace deleted and replaced with *if I finish my dissertation*.

INEZ (cont'd)

I wish the funds from my overpriced ticket could go directly to your pocket because your commentary is worth as much as anything in that Frank Lloyd Wright spiral. Well, maybe not...but, *you're in good company :-)*

The smiley-face emoticon is backspace deleted and replaced with a period. Then, after a beat, it is replaced with a winking emoticon ;-)) which is deleted and replaced again with a period.

SCENE 4: RESTAURANT NEAR THE GUGGENHEIM - NEXT DAY

Felicia, Inez and Haseem sit at a table.

HASEEM

I've never been here before. This place is nice.

FELICIA

She's paying.

INEZ

So, Felicia, how did you end up as a security guard at the Guggenheim?

FELICIA

Haseem had the job first, and we were friends, so.

HASEEM

More than friends, baby.

FELICIA

Anyway, he hooked me up.

INEZ

Did you have any special interest in art or...?

FELICIA

No. But I've always been good at watching and talking. Which is what the job requires. Although they wish I did less talking.

INEZ

Who's they?

FELICIA

My boss. But my job's safe cause the regular patrons like me and don't think I'm creeping on em. Which is more than can be said for some people.

HASEEM

Ladies love to talk with me about art. I can't help it if the museum's art happens to be real erotic in nature and things get misconstrued.

FELICIA

Haseem here had a couple sexual harassment strikes against him before the whole insulting-the-art-in-front-of-the-artist incident.

HASEEM

Pfft. I make almost double what I made before, so their loss.

Waitress enters.

WAITRESS

What can I get you folks?

FELICIA

I'll have the fancy beat salad.

INEZ

Just coffee, please.

HASEEM

Nothing for me.

FELICIA

She's paying.

HASEEM

I know that, but I don't accept free meals from white ladies I ain't never met before. Not without knowing what they up to.

INEZ

(to Waitress)

That'll be all, thanks.

Waitress exits.

INEZ (cont'd)

I'm not up to anything. Also, for what it's worth, I'm Latina.

HASEEM

So? You're still white.

INEZ

Where are you from?

HASEEM

Egypt.

FELICIA

He's from Queens.

INEZ

I just wanted to get to know Felicia. And by extension, you, I guess. I work in art, broadly speaking, at Columbia, and I was wondering if maybe you were interested in pursuing art criticism in a more...um, traditional sense.

FELICIA

Like what, in school? I don't got money for college. I'm going broke as is taking night classes to become a dental hygienist.

INEZ

You don't want to work at the Guggenheim?

FELICIA

With the shit they pay, no thanks.

HASEEM

That's why you gotta go into business with me. After all, we already got business together.

FELICIA

We broken up, Haseem. Let it ago. And besides, I don't eat no shish kebabs.

HASEEM

They tasty, you don't know!

FELICIA

Also, being a dental hygienist better suits my passions.

HASEEM

You hear that? Girl's got a passion for plaque.

FELICIA

No. I got a passion for saying what I'm thinking and having people listen. And what do people do when they're stuck in a chair with your fingers in their mouth? They listen.

INEZ

Would you talk about art?

FELICIA

Now that I know a lot about it, probably. But I'll talk about whatever. Basquiat, gingivitis, I don't care. Give me a topic, I got opinions.

INEZ

I'm sure you do. I think you've got a really exciting and unique voice, and I'd love to help you find a platform to share it.

FELICIA

Oh yeah? What kind of platform?

INEZ

Well, if you're comfortable with your name being out there—

Felicia

Is this gonna get me fired? Cause I need this job till I get my hygienists' license.

HASEEM

You gotta be careful who you share your opinions with. I learned that the hard way.

FELICIA

That artist you shat on was wearing a VIP tag. You think I'm gonna walk up to Mr. Guggenheim, and be like, yo, your museum's got a lot of duds. Use your brain, man.

INEZ

The original Mr. Guggenheim is actually dead, but—

HASEEM

You just jealous cause I got natural charisma with the females, and that artist *wanted* to talk to me. Not my fault she didn't like what I had to say.

FELICIA

Ain't no museum-goer ever wanted to talk with you, not after the first few seconds. A pretty face only gets you so far. After you start talking, you gotta offer something interesting, something a person might otherwise not have thought of. Something more than just: "Yo, check out this light installation. Doesn't it look like a bunch of boobs?"

HASEEM

So you admit it: I got a nice face. And that titty exhibit was fucked-up, so!

INEZ

Okay, shh!

FELICIA

Yeah, but why was it "fucked-up"? You can't explain it.

HASEEM

I don't gotta explain it

FELICIA

Not since you started selling falafels you don't.

HASEEM

Oh that's what they pay you to do! Explain the art. See, I thought you were there to make sure no one sticks their gum on it. But excuse me! This random white girl tells you that you hot shit, and suddenly you a fucking art expert, huh. You fucking little miss Picasso now. Too good for street food.

INEZ

Guys, let's lower the volume a bit. People are staring.

FELICIA

I never liked that hummus shit and I never pretended to.

HASEEM

And why's that, Felicia? Can you write me an essay about why hummus does not agree with your ever so sensitive and sophisticated tastebuds?

FELICIA

Please. And by the way, your insult is ignorant because Picasso wrote poetry and surrealist plays, not art criticism.

INEZ

I didn't know he was a writer too.

FELICIA

There was a special exhibit about his writing a while back.

INEZ

Huh. I must have missed it.

FELICIA

It was good, not the museum's best. Like, me? I wish there'd been more about his influences. You know, why'd he switch gears? Why'd he think he could write?

HASEEM

Me, I heard it's cause Picasso saw Michael Jordan started playing baseball. And he was all like: challenge accepted, hand me a typewriter!

INEZ

I wonder if the exhibit was co-produced by the Met because they have that famous painting he did of Gertrude Stein. Gertrude Stein was a poet who—

FELICIA

I know who Gertrude Stein is.

HASEEM

Oh do you now? But you ain't never heard of Michael Jordan.

FELICIA

Air Jordan. His Airness. The Black Cat.

HASEEM

Then why didn't you laugh at my joke!

FELICIA

Cause it's stupid.

HASEEM

So I'm stupid, huh?

FELICIA

No. Just what comes out of your mouth.

HASEEM

Oh! And you ain't a bitch. You just say bitchy things.
Which—turns out—comes in real handy when you want to put down your boy so you can come off all smart.
You two seem real pleased with each other. So I'll let you have some privacy while you kiss each other's asses,
(raising his voice)
here in the middle of this classy, non-food cart establishment.
Felicia, you still owe me lunch.

Haseem exits.

FELICIA

Don't mind him. He's been huffy ever since I dumped him. He thinks it's cause I don't want to be with no halal cart man. But I just don't think he appreciates me and what I gotta say.
Like just last week I tried to get him to watch this movie about Basquiat with me—

INEZ

David Bowie plays Andy Warhol? That one?

FELICIA

(as in, you're proving my point by making it
about the famous white guy)

Yeah. But the movie's about Basquiat.

And I was telling Haseem I think this movie makes Jean-Michel look kinda like a dummy. Like a fragile victim type who doesn't know his ass from his elbow and accidentally shits out great art.

And Haseem's like: well, maybe he was. After all he did do a lot of heroin.

And I was like: Listen. Do you know who directed this movie? Julian Schnabel.

He was this painter and a contemporary of Basqu—

INEZ

I know who Julian Schnabel was—is. He's still alive.

FELICIA

Well, don't you think it's a little fucked up that he made a movie about Basquiat when he and Basquiat weren't really friends, and in fact, Basquiat thought he was a hack?

INEZ

I don't know. Better him than someone who doesn't know about the art world.

FELICIA

And yeah, there's this white guy in the movie who's supposed to be Schnabel and he's portrayed as a total dick. But I don't think that lets Schnabel off the hook, you know? Because at the end of day he still made movie in which Basquiat comes off as like a...mentally retarded black Jesus.

INEZ

I'm don't know if that's a fair characterization—

Felicia

Anyway, Haseem, was like, whatever, can we do a little less Netflix and chatting and a little more Netflix and...[wink, wink].

Where'd you say you a professor at?

INEZ (cont'd)

Columbia. I'm still a student.

FELICIA

Oh.

INEZ

I'm going to become a professor though. Probably.

FELICIA

Yeah, me too.

INEZ

Really?

FELICIA

I mean *probably*, right?

Tell me more about this platform thing. How much does it pay?

SCENE 5: HASEEM'S FOOD CART - LATER THAT DAY

FELICIA

I'm not apologizing. So what's so important it couldn't wait? I got class in an hour.

HASEEM

You used to love hanging with me after work.

FELICIA

That was then.

HASEEM

Come on! I still treat you good. You want a...grape soda? Here you go, on the cart.

Haseem hands her an grape soda. She throws it back at him.

FELICIA

How many times I gotta tell you! That's some fucking black stereotype. I don't drink that shit.

HASEEM

I'm just messing! Your bottled water, madame.

He hands her the water.

FELICIA

You a piece of work.

HASEEM

Yo, I just want to say: I got a bad feeling about that restaurant girl. Why's she so interested in you anyway?

FELICIA

Maybe cause I'm an interesting person? You don't want to believe it, but people care about my thoughts.

How else you think I get away with talking so much on the job?

HASEEM

Well, you are fine, so.

(changing tactics because she's not having it)

Among other things! A movie-watcher, a thinker—you love to see it.

Look, all I'm saying is I think she's fetishizing you.

FELICIA

You think she wants to fuck me?

HASEEM

No! I mean, maybe, but...no?

I'm saying, she's into you cause you're...exotic. Like:

(leaning into an affected way of speaking)

“You black, you from the Bronx, you a tough-ass bitch.”

FELICIA

Isn't that why you like me?

HASEEM

I mean, yeah, but...it's different. Like, I'm me. And she's—

FELICIA

White? Educated? Not just trying to fuck me?

HASEEM

Well, we don't know about the last thing...but yeah.

FELICIA

I think you're just jealous cause I'm finally getting recognized for more than my looks.

“I wanted to be a star, not a gallery mascot.”

You know who said that? Jean-Michel Basquiat.

HASEEM

Oh for fuck's sake.

FELICIA

What? The man knew what he wanted.

HASEEM

Yeah, dead of an overdose at age 27. What a star.
And props to him for making bank, but honestly I'm kinda on the fence about a lotta his scribbly art.
Like it's dope. But also...it looks like a little kid made it.
What?
Is his where you call me a—what's that museumy word?—philistine?

FELICIA

No. Haseem. I just don't call you.

SCENE 6: GUGGENHEIM - NEXT DAY

INEZ

So I'm going to point the camera at you. Just do your thing. Try not to act like you're being filmed, but at the same time, be extra charismatic. Like, smile. And speak into the mic, okay? Oh, and here. Put this in.

Inez hands Felicia an earpiece. Inez wears an accompanying headset device.

FELICIA

What's it for?

INEZ

So we can talk from a distance. Cool, right? It's amazing how much expensive equipment a school like Columbia has just lying around.

Inez sets Felicia up with the earpiece and attaches a microphone to Felicia's collar. Inez moves off to a distance, so it doesn't necessarily look like she's filming Felicia. Awkward silence while Felicia waits for an opening to speak to a patron. Inez motions for her to start talking.

FELICIA

I can't rush it. I gotta wait for an opening.

INEZ

Sure, right...
What about now? Those Asian tourists seem like they'd be receptive.

FELICIA

Nah, too Asian.

INEZ

Oh! What about that well-dressed old lady?

FELICIA

Hm, racist.

INEZ

How do you know?

FELICIA

I just do, okay?

INEZ

Fair enough.

FELICIA

All right. This middle-aged couple. You filming?

INEZ

Yep. Don't forget to smile!

Felicia smiles awkwardly.

FELICIA

So, uh, do you guys think he drowned or fell off the balcony?

Quite a sight, huh?

And then you gotta ask yourself: Did he off himself or was it murder? Maybe at the hands of Jiminy Cricket, his conscience? Or maybe Geppetto, the guy who made him? Either way, some real dark shit—stuff—dark stuff.

But! Um, what people forget is that in the Disney movie the same thing happens to Pinocchio.

Yeah, same thing as this.

Pinocchio gets swallowed up by a whale and washes up on shore, face down in a tide pool. Everyone thinks he's dead—Jiminy, Geppetto, his cat Figaro, his fish Cleo. And they're all crying, right? Even the fish somehow. And they're having a little funeral. But then the Blue Fairy decides that Pinocchio, cause he rescued Geppetto from the whale, he's "proven himself brave, truthful and unselfish." Those are her words. So then he's reborn as a real human boy and everybody celebrates.

What I'm saying is that even though he's dead, what we're looking at here may actually be the beginnings of a happy ending.

The cafe closes at 3:30 today.

INEZ

Well, that was different.

FELICIA

I figured if I'm gonna talk about the exhibit, I should do some research. So I watched Pinocchio last night.

INEZ

I sorta wished you hadn't. I mean, I liked the perspective you offered last time. This one sounded like a Disney movie endorsement.

FELICIA

So my ideas can't evolve? I gotta be a fucking parrot.

INEZ

Of course not. I just think your brand, such that it is, is a kind of sassy but approachable tell-it-like-it-is cynicism.

FELICIA

Sassy?

INEZ

Brash.

FELICIA

You said sassy.

Felicia rips the earpiece out.

INEZ

Never mind, it's great. I'll edit it. And I have a pretty good memory of what you said the first time, so I'll pepper that into the story too. And—Felicia? Hello?

Inez takes her earpiece out and walks over to Felicia.

INEZ (cont'd)

What's wrong?

FELICIA

Why yes, ma'am, the gift shop's a-thataway. Uh-huh!

Felicia does an exaggerated head and finger-snapping gesture for Inez.

FELICIA (cont'd)

That sassy enough for you?

INEZ

Oh come on. I'm sorry, all right? I didn't mean to offend you.

FELICIA

Haseem was right. You're fetishizing me. Why? I don't know. But I don't wanna do your little song and dance long enough to find out.

INEZ

Can we talk?

FELICIA

I'm busy. Unlike some people, my job ain't just dicking around with free spy toys and slumming it with the common folk.

(to a patron)

Bathroom's on the right.

SCENE 7: TAMSIN'S OFFICE - ABOUT ONE MONTH LATER

Tamsin is seated. Inez enters and Tamsin claps slowly and deliberately.

TAMSIN

The fifth most e-mailed article in the New York Times right now.

INEZ

New York Times *Magazine*. And they published it with a video and clickbaity title, so.

TAMSIN

The Guggenheim's Best Kept Secret is a Security Guard Who Won't Shut Up.

INEZ

It's clunky, I didn't choose it.

TAMSIN

So is this what you do now? You're an uncannily successful freelancer. Documentarian. Literary journalist.

INEZ

I don't know—

TAMSIN

I gotta say, I'm surprised because I read your blog and you don't seem like the next Joan Didion. Uninspired prose to say the least. And that cutesy, self-deprecating title: Inez Says: Half-Baked-Shoot-Me-In-The-Face.

INEZ

How did you—? I took it down after the article blew up.

TAMSIN

Oh don't flatter yourself. I set up Google Alerts for all my dissertation advisees because one time I thought someone dropped out. But, turns out, he died. From suicide. Unfortunately.

INEZ

Well, I'm not planning on dying.

TAMSIN

No, you're just going to drop out to write potentially exploitative portraits of security guards.

What? Well, I take it you're not a Marxist. Although you do fancy yourself a woman of the people.

What did you call me on your blog—"pretentious" and "self-involved"?

INEZ

I didn't call *you* that. I believe I was referring to—

TAMSIN

Anyway, what do you have for me? Research, chapter one draft, something? It's been a month.

INEZ

About that. I've decided to switch gears. And now I want to make Felicia the focal point of my dissertation. I want to write about a new field that I'm dubbing "outsider art criticism." Like, a philosophical examination. And then also a case study, concentrating on Felicia, but maybe others like her as well—if I can find them. I've written up the proposal in more detail. So, here.

Inez hands Tamsin the proposal. Long silence.

INEZ (cont'd)

I see you still have that plant.

TAMSIN

(a beat, without looking at the proposal)

Okay.

INEZ

Okay?

TAMSIN

It's gimmicky and, as I said, potentially exploitative, but sure. It's the kind of shtick that attracts attention. Could even turn into a book, what with your newfound publishing success.

INEZ

Wow. Alright.

TAMSIN

Although granted, it does undermine our entire profession. If security guards can be critics, then, darling, what the fuck are we doing?
So, I am, in my pretentious self-involvement, inclined to hate you.

INEZ

(trying to lighten the mood)

Like that plant you still won't get rid of?

TAMSIN

I just don't water it. It should die soon enough.
But, if that hideous thing were suddenly to sprout fruit—fruit that, say, draws a lot of acclaim—I might be inclined to water it. Hell, I might be inclined to love it and claim I always have.
Do you follow?
I'm signing off on the proposal. I'm just saying you're going this alone, darling.
Until you bear fruit.

INEZ

Didn't I just do that? Produce famous fruit or whatever.

TAMSIN

That's only the first harvest. Show me a bumper crop next season.

INEZ

So, what? You can steal the fruit?

TAMSIN

Who told you that?

INEZ

No one. I just—

TAMSIN

Because I don't steal from my students. I don't.

INEZ

Okay...I'll see you when I finish...?

TAMSIN

If you finish.

SCENE 8: SPLIT STAGE: PAINT-A-POT & DENTAL SCHOOL - LATER THAT DAY

On one side of the stage Inez addresses a Paint-a-Pot employee. On the other side Felicia talks to the fellow student on whom she's practicing dental hygienist procedures.

INEZ

Hey. The usual, please. You know the drill. Stressful day...
Yeah, just put it on my tab.

Inez receives a pot and paint palette. She sits and paints in silence.

INEZ (cont'd)

(to Paint-a-Pot employee)

What do you think?

Oh no, that's on purpose.

See, I'm *trying* to make the pot look cracked and dirty.

Why?

Um, because I like the trompe-l'oeil. Optical illusion.

By the way, have you finished my pot from last week? The one with the Pinocchio on it?

Cool, thanks.

FELICIA

So you know the movie Pinocchio?

Everyone thinks it's about telling truth and, like, letting your conscience be your guide or whatever.

But turns out it's actually about exploitation.

Straight up.

You've seen it, right?

Rinse.

Pinocchio gets all magic puppetry and becomes a side show act and like takes up a life of lies. Which is bad enough, you know. Cause he gets put in a cage and his boss threatens to turn him into firewood.

Does that hurt?

(MORE)

FELICIA (cont'd)

But then—do you remember this part?—a fat, creepy guy kidnaps Pinocchio with a bunch of boys and takes them to Pleasure Island.

Pleasure. Motherfucking Island.

If that's not some Jeffrey Epstein shit, I don't know what it is.

Rinse.

And this island—let me tell ya—it's pervy as hell. All the boys get drunk and wild and eat "pickles" and smoke "cigars." I mean...

And the pedophile guy, he says of the kids, he says:

"They never come back. *As boys.*"

Because they turn into donkeys.

But also cause he molests them. I assume.

And forces them to work in the mines.

Rinse.

So yeah.

They never get out.

INEZ

I just show up with my membership card and then boom: another lacquered piece of crap to try to find space for in my apartment.

(sensing she's caused offense)

No, I'm saying *my* stuff is crap. I didn't mean to denigrate the entire Paint-a-Pot enterprise—sorry.

Anyway, I like to play up the crap part.

There's beauty in the crap.

Who said that? Felicia?

Actually, I think I'll paint a bird shit on this one.

As if it's been sitting outside as a planter, and then—

You get it.

FELICIA

So Pinocchio—the Blue Fairy swoops in and saves him, right? So he's okay.

But the boy-turned-donkeys?

They stay donkeys.

The movie just sorta forgets about them.

They're just left to hee-haw and work in the mines for no money.

And get ass-grabbed.

Literally.

They're asses, and they get grabbed.

It's bleak.

Rinse.

So like don't be as an ass.

I think that's the moral of the story.

(MORE)

FELICIA (cont'd)

Or like if you are an ass, you better find yourself a Blue Fucking Fairy and ride those sparkly coattails outta hell, you know what I'm saying?

INEZ

Can I please have some more white paint?

Yeah, for the fake bird shit.

Thank you.

FELICIA

Girl, dental student to dental student, you really gotta floss better.

And your breath. I don't want to say it's like working in the mines, but...damn if it were, I'd be a dead canary right now. No offense.

SCENE 9: OFFICE OF A TV NETWORK - NEXT DAY

Inez and Felicia are seated.

FELICIA

I can't believe I'm going to be on TV.

INEZ

We don't know that yet. This is just a preliminary meeting.

FELICIA

You should have seen my boss's face when I was, like: sorry, I can't come to work tomorrow cause I'm famous.

She was all: fuck you. And I'm like: I know.

Yo, you got paint on your face.

Inez tries to wipe the white paint off her face.

INEZ

Better?

FELICIA

Not really.

And she would fire me, she totally would, but I'm a hot commodity now, baby.

People been coming to the museum to take pictures with me. Not the architecture, not Pinocchio—me!

INEZ

That's great.

FELICIA

What crawled up your ass?

INEZ

Just, whatever you do, don't go to grad school, okay?

FELICIA

Pfft. Tell that to my GED.

Chloe, a TV producer enters. Inez stands up to shake her hand. Felicia waves hello.

CHLOE

Hello. Nice to meet you. I'm Chloe. We spoke on the phone. Thank you for coming. Can I get you anything?

FELICIA

Do you got any grape soda?

CHLOE

Uh, we have water. Coffee. Tea.

FELICIA

It's okay. I was just messing with you.

Awkward pause.

CHLOE

Ha. Funny. You're funny! First of all, loved the article. Really compelling stuff. And we think that there may be a market for a show centered on you, Felicia.

FELICIA

Little ole me?

CHLOE

So, we've been batting around some ideas. But we're curious to hear what you have in mind.

FELICIA

Well, I was thinking like a talk show. You know, like Oprah but fun.

CHLOE

Glad you mentioned Oprah.

FELICIA

And it would just be, like, me speaking my truth, you know? Off the top of my head: there'd be special segments on art. And teeth maybe. Cause I'm pretty knowledgeable about those things. And—

CHLOE

Like disabled artists who paint with their teeth?

FELICIA

No. But sure.

CHLOE

Great. Yeah. I think we're on the same page. We're imagining, like, a travel show where you visit various museums, galleries, studios, and voice your opinions on the art. And then also, maybe interview artists. A working title, for instance, might be: Felicia's Intro to Art or Art 101 with Dr. Felicia.

INEZ

She's not a doctor.

FELICIA

So I'd be like a teacher?

CHLOE

Of sorts, yeah. Kinda like Bob Ross. Actually we could even call it The Joy of...Looking at Art...or not.

You're right, it's clunky.

But why am I telling you that? You're the one with the critical eye.

FELICIA

So I'd have control to do what I want, right?

CHLOE

In essence.

FELICIA

I don't want to be dressed like a security guard. I just want to dress like myself.

CHLOE

Easily accommodated.

Is that it? Excellent. I'll start drawing up the papers, and we can get this ball rolling.

FELICIA

One thing: why's she here?

INEZ

Yeah. Why am I here?

CHLOE

Well, we figured you might want to be an executive producer.

FELICIA

And if I don't want her to be—

CHLOE

Ha. This is awkward. I guess I should have consulted with you separately. You two just seemed to have a good rapport based on the article and video, so we thought that—

FELICIA

I mean, I like Inez fine. But to be clear though: I'm the talent here, right?

CHLOE

Yes, ma'am.

Just, for the sake of the show, we will want an actual art person on staff to—

FELICIA

I'm an actual art person.

CHLOE

Of course. I meant an expert.

FELICIA

You know she's still a student, right?

INEZ

(in spite of herself)

Fuck you.

CHLOE

We're all students in a way. Students of life.

Okay. Let's hold that thought. And we'll revisit this soon.

FELICIA

I'm ready to sign now.

CHLOE

You know what, I think we do have grape soda. Or at least Sprite. I'll go see, and my assistant will see you guys out.

Chloe exits. Lights change so as to suggest a slight change in scenery (from the TV office, to just outside of it).

FELICIA

“Fuck you”? Fuck you?!

INEZ

You threw me under the bus!

FELICIA

Girl, you *are* the bus. You took me where I needed to go. And I was waving you on to the next stop.

INEZ

Never mind that you rode me in here for free!

FELICIA

Oh don't act like that article thing was some kind of fucking charity. Like, it wasn't part of your Columbia art homework or whatever.

INEZ

I didn't have to do it. I chose to! The least you could do is let me enjoy the fruits of my labor.

FELICIA

You pointed a camera at me and wrote down what I said. How is that labor? Besides, you got paid for the article, didn't you?

INEZ

It wasn't much.

FELICIA

It's more than I got.

INEZ

Think of it as a finder's fee. You said it yourself, I'm the only person who's ever really cared about what you have to say.

FELICIA

Well, not anymore.

INEZ

Thanks to me!

FELICIA

Yes, thanks to you, Inez. Is that what you want to hear? Thank you so much, Inez, for making me the sassy black woman I am today.

INEZ

I said sassy *one* time!

FELICIA

And I was willing to look past it in exchange for you getting me somewhere. Somewhere where important people listen. But your little temper tantrum in there may have cost me the chance of a lifetime. Where I'm from, you'd get shot dead for pulling that shit.

INEZ

Sorry, I keep forgetting you're a gangbanger from the South Bronx. Because apparently you're also a professor. And Oprah. And Bob Ross minus-the-niceness.

FELICIA

Damn right I am! And it's a fucking winning combo!

INEZ

It's sensational media hype! I mean, all of it is. This whole TV show thing sounds insultingly stupid.

FELICIA

Then why do you want to work on it so bad, huh?

INEZ

Because you're not the only one who wants options, okay? It's not like my life is some dream wherein a lucrative TV gig wouldn't be, like, you know, a nice side job.

FELICIA

Side job? You don't even have a main job!

INEZ

I'm an art historian and critic specializing in outsider art.

FELICIA

So you walk around outside, pointing at pretty things. And that takes what—one hour a day? Two if you work overtime?

INEZ

You don't know what you're talking about. You like to pretend you do, but we both know that's not really true.

FELICIA

I know this art criticism stuff is just talking about what you see and then making shit up.

INEZ

So you think we're all just liars?

FELICIA

Fancy bullshitters.

INEZ

The bullshit—well, it's not bullshit—the *commentary* has to be based on something. Not just whatever springs to mind.

FELICIA

I base it on my experience of the art. How is that not legit?

INEZ

It is. I mean, to a point. But then you've got to substantiate it with, you know, facts. Antecedents.

FELICIA

You're just jealous. Cause in this relationship, you're the Geppetto.

INEZ

What?

FELICIA

Pinocchio's daddy. And Geppetto doesn't like that his puppet's real and doesn't need him like he used to.

INEZ

Oh please. Sure, yeah, okay. I can always trust on you to tease out the subtle metaphor. Why don't you run off to—what's it called?—Pleasure Island? With the bad boys. Become a donkey. Grovel at the feet of that Chloe person and make some mindless TV show. See if I care.

FELICIA

Good luck writing your book report or whatever about me. Cause this book is closed.

SCENE 10: INEZ'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Inez reads aloud from *What Was Contemporary Art?* by Richard Meyer.

INEZ

“Scholars of contemporary art frequently seek to interview, correspond with or otherwise interact with the artists about whom they are writing.”

She skims ahead.

INEZ (cont'd)

“The unpredictability of contemporary art history as a field of study flows in part from the unpredictability of living artists and their responses to the scholars who seek to write about them.”

She skims through the next few pages and opens up her laptop to write in a Word Doc titled “Dissertation Research Notes.” Same staging as her blog entries.

INEZ (cont'd)

Peggy Guggenheim, when once asked how many husbands she had had, replied: “*My own, or other peoples?*” Guggenheim might be proud to learn then that her *larce nous, devil-may-care attitude* lives on among the security guards who protect her precious collection.

Inez shuts her laptop and indulges in a private moment of despair. Distraught, she lies down, closes her eyes and drifts to sleep. Felicia enters dressed in a dream. She sings and dances in a garish manner. [Script note: This is the song from the Disney movie. The melody need not be—and due to copyright issues probably cannot be—the same, so have fun with it.]

FELICIA

I got no strings
To hold me down
To make me fret, to make me frown
I had strings
But now I'm free
There are no strings on me
Hi-ho the me-ri-o
That's the only way to go
I want the world to know
Nothing ever worries me
I've got no strings
So I have fun
I'm not tied up to anyone

(MORE)

FELICIA (cont'd)

They've got strings
But you can see
There are no strings on me

She winks and briefly affects a cockney accent.

FELICIA (cont'd)

Ay, gov'nr. The rain in Spain stays mainly in the...
(now like a TV announcer)
Sundays this fall at 7, 8 central.
Watch what happens when Dr. Felicia visits the Georges Pompidou Center in Paris.
And says, "Pompi-what-the—bleep!"
Only on the Oprah Network!

SCENE 11: SPLIT STAGE: PAINT-A-POT & DENTAL SCHOOL - NEXT DAY

Inez is painting a pot, and Felicia is talking to a fellow dental student on whom she's practicing procedures.
Same staging as before.

INEZ

(to Paint-a-Pot employee)

I'm okay...
What? How can you tell?
Oh right. Duh. Because I'm here.
Yeah, I had a rough time of it yesterday.
Trying to paint-a-pot away the pain as they say.
I don't know who says that. I just—

FELICIA

Girl, from one aspiring dental hygienist to another, you got a fuck ton of gum recession.
Are you a teeth grinder?
Cause, hey, no shame, we all got our stresses.
Me, I recently started wearing a mouth guard at night.
Swear to god.
I'm a talker. Always have been, always will be.
But these days I'm trying to turn the talky-talky into the ca-ching-ca-ching, you know what I'm saying?

INEZ

Yep, I'm continuing the fake bird shit series.
I'd use real shit, but, you know, yuck.
I guess I could just leave this thing on my fire escape.

(MORE)

INEZ (cont'd)

Literal outside art.

Give it a couple weeks in the elements, and it'd be nice and pigeon-shitty.

But then how would I spend my time, you know?

Dissertating, right...

FELICIA

TV—just you wait, I'm about to have me a show.

And that's been making me chomp in my sleep for fear I'm somehow gonna choke.

I keep having these nightmares that I'm gonna get tripped or slip and fall *splat* on my face.

And then where would that leave me?

Here.

Toothless, toiling away. No offense.

And teeth, they're the window to the...I don't want to say soul, but...definitely the mouth.

And look, we all need a little window dressing, do we not?

Cause good luck moving up in this world if you look like a...like a donkey.

Donkeys, when you pull up the lip, real gummy.

Not that you look like a donkey cause you don't.

I just mean...girl, you got a fine ass—haha.

Jokes!

Dental Student gets up and leaves.

FELICIA (cont'd)

Hey, come back. Girl, I'm sorry. You got great gums. Gorgeous gums.

They should call you Gumby, that's how good your...fuck.

(to an unseen fellow student)

Yeah, I know I need a better bedside manner.

I need a lot of things.

Is that a Basquiat iPhone case?

No reason.

Well, actually I don't know—

It just seems a little obscene how his work has been licensed onto every dinky made-in-China piece of shit, dontcha think?

It's not like his estate is hard up for cash. His folks were Haitian and—Puerto Rican, I want to say?—but, you know, racism aside, solidly middle class, I'm pretty sure. Better upbringing than me, tell you that much.

And his paintings are selling at Sotheby's for something like a hundred million dollars.

Which is crazy. Cause I love Basquiat, don't get me wrong, but.

Come. On. Why the money grab?

I mean I guess it's worth having your images—your voice, your ideas—everywhere.

I guess, dead or alive, who wouldn't want that.

I'd want that.

(MORE)

FELICIA (cont'd)

I think.

Okay. Fine. Walk away.

(making a scene)

Sorry for trying to engage in the art of conversation!

Sorry for trying to bring a little culture to our evening of tartar-scraping!

I don't want to interrupt your all's practice fluoride treatments, so.

Felicia's gonna shut up now.

Felicia's gonna just recede into the background.

And your iPhone case is tacky.

There. I said it.

No shade to the ghost of Jean-Michel. My king, I respect the hustle.

You wanted fame and fortune, and brotha, you got it.

But let's be real, that thing is tacky. It's kitsch.

SCENE 12: HASEEM'S FOOD CART - LATER THAT DAY

Inez enters.

INEZ

One falafel over rice, please. And a grape soda.

HASEEM

Eight-fifty.

INEZ

Hey, remember me?

HASEEM

I don't know where Felicia is.

INEZ

Oh, I'm not looking for her. Just doing some research at the museum.

He hands her the falafel and soda.

HASEEM

If you see her, though, you can tell her we're over.

INEZ

You guys got back together?

HASEEM

No. I'm just saying. If she's interested, it ain't happening. Not now. We always hang out and whatever on the nights she got her dental class. But she stood me up this week, so fuck her.

INEZ

Well, she's busy. She might be getting her own TV show.

HASEEM

What? The Uppity Show with Miss Felicia.

INEZ

Woahhh.

HASEEM

I'll say it. I don't care. You really fucked her up.

INEZ

Uh, her life is awesome now.

HASEEM

Awesome for you, maybe.

INEZ

Hardly. I just lost my research subject.

HASEEM

You mean your little guinea pig outgrew you. She doesn't really know what she's talking about. And you know that as well as I do. And soon enough, other people are gonna catch on. And she's gonna be a joke. Hell, she already is one.

INEZ

People love her.

HASEEM

Yeah, but why? Cause she's the next Peggy Guggenheim? There! You see that! You just smirked when I said Peggy Guggenheim cause you didn't think I knew who that was. I know stuff! She was the rich bitch who bought most of the shit in that museum And she was famous for being a slutty diva sucking off those drip-droppy painters or whatever. But at least she knew something about something. You got Felicia thinking she's more than she is. I mean, anyone can drop a few names. Say a few smart things. Doesn't mean they're a fucking genius.

(MORE)

HASEEM (cont'd)

And you! You've got such low expectations that someone like me or her says something halfway intelligent, and you think we deserve some kind of affirmative action Pulitzer. And yes! I know what the fuck a Pulitzer is. And I know she's never gonna win one. And it's wrong that you and your New Yorker are building her up like that.

INEZ

New York Times Magazine.

HASEEM

What?

INEZ

The article was in a different publication—never mind.

HASEEM

You're so fucking pretentious and into yourself.

INEZ

I'm not! I swear. Not compared to most people in this line of work.

HASEEM

And I'm not greasy. Not compared to most people who shave meat off a stick all day. Anyway, if you see Felicia, tell her she makes a great dancing monkey.

INEZ

Jesus.

HASEEM

Dance, monkey, dance! And then she spouts her made-up art bullshit.

INEZ

Yeah, no. I get it. It just seems kinda...racist.

HASEEM

Oh right. You're an expert on race too. I forgot. That's what you guys all study in college, right? How not to be racist. Look, you want baklava or something? I can't be talking this long and not make a sale.

SCENE 13: GUGGENHEIM - SAME DAY

Inez sits on the same bench as before. She looks around. She fidgets. After some time has passed, she throws the baklava on the ground. She waits. She proceeds to spill soda on the floor too. She waits some more.

Finally, she picks up the baklava and mops up the soda with a napkin. Denise, a security guard approaches.

DENISE

Oh that's real sweet of you, but you don't gotta clean that up. We got people who can—

INEZ

Well, I threw it on the floor, so.

DENISE

You mean dropped. Cause you're not allowed food in here, but—

INEZ

No, I threw it.

DENISE

Why would you do that?

INEZ

Because I was hoping to talk to you.

Denise looks Inez up and down.

DENISE

You don't got any more food, right?

INEZ

No.

Denise starts to walk away.

INEZ (cont'd)

Wait! I have a question.

DENISE

Bathroom's that way.

INEZ

No, umm...

Inez reads Denise's name tag.

INEZ (cont'd)

Denise! Denise, what's your favorite piece of art in here?

DENISE

Why you asking?

INEZ

Just curious. I figure, you're here all the time, so you probably have some insights.

DENISE

Is this cause of that article? Felicia got opinions, so now we all got have em.

INEZ

You know Felicia?

DENISE

Everybody knows Felicia. I'm not a fan.

INEZ

Oh yeah? Why's that?

DENISE

Girl's a loudmouth! If visitors really wanna hear about the art, they can get one them audio what-its. And she should have been fired a long time ago on account of this is a museum, not an open mic. But management doesn't want another Haseem on their hands.

INEZ

Haseem. The halal cart guy?

DENISE

How do you think the bosses feel walking past him every day? It's awkward as hell. And it would look bad if they fired his girlfriend too, especially cause she's, you know...

INEZ

...? Black?

DENISE

Famous. Jesus.

Denise starts to walk away again.

INEZ

I want to hear more! Come on, I'll buy you lunch.

DENISE

What, why? No.

Denise exits. Inez sits on the bench again. She returns to the ticket booth.

INEZ

Excuse me. Oh, I already have a ticket.
I just want to know about you.
Do you look at the art a lot?
But do you at least have, like, a favorite piece?
The big Picasso?
Okay. Anything else?
Yeah, that light installation does look like boobs.
Okay, well, thank you for your time.
I know where the bathroom is.

SCENE 14 : TV NETWORK OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

Inez and Chloe sit in a conference room.

INEZ

Thanks for meeting with me. I know you must be busy. And here I am just, you know, showing up out of—

CHLOE

You have five minutes.

Chloe stares at her phone.

INEZ

Oh. Wow. Okay...um...well....so, uh...

CHLOE

Four minutes, fifty-six seconds.

INEZ

I just want to apologize for the friction you witnessed in that meeting. My little “fuck you” outburst was...uncharacteristic. I actually do want to be part of your Felicia show. Maybe I always did. But definitely now because my dissertation has kind of, uh...hit a production roadblock.

And, um, well, I’m sort of an expert on outsider art. It’s this thing where art is created by outside weirdos—you get it. And, uh, now I think it might be a cool subject to explore in a *televisual* medium, if you will. My dissertation advisor Tamsin would probably disagree, but—

CHLOE

Tamsin Brodsky?

INEZ

Uh yeah.

CHLOE

Do you think she'd want to consult on the show?

INEZ

What?

CHLOE

She's a powerhouse. We'd love to have someone with her kind of credentials behind the scenes. Or hell, even in front of the camera. She's got charisma, in her own way.

INEZ

You've met her?

CHLOE

I took a modern art seminar with her when I was a sophomore. I don't think she liked me.

INEZ

Probably not.

CHLOE

I'd ask her myself, but every academic I've reached out to so far has turned me down. They're all worried about how the show would make them look. That article you wrote is divisive to say the least.

INEZ

Yeah...

CHLOE

Yeah you'll ask her?

INEZ

I meant yeah it's divisive.

CHLOE

So that's a no? I really should get going.

Chloe gets up to leave.

INEZ

If I do ask her and she says yes—which, no promises—could I get a job on the show too?

CHLOE

As like an intern?

INEZ

As like a paid researcher-slash-producer. Maybe focused on outsider art since that's my—

CHLOE

Whatever, sure, why not.
Uh! Time's up!

INEZ

I don't think it's been five minutes.

CHLOE

I know, it feels so much longer.
My assistant will see you out. She's an intern too.

INEZ

I don't want to be an intern.

CHLOE

Right. Important Person. Buh-bye.

SCENE 15: INEZ'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Inez types on her laptop, writing for her blog. Same staging as her blog entries.

INEZ

So, the blog is live again, *because why not?* Tamsin hates me regardless. (*Tamsin, are you reading? I hope so since you won't return my e-mails.*) And my attempts to parlay my brief journalistic success into something resembling a dissertation continue to fail. This week, I visited *MoMA, the Met, the Whitney, the Frick and the New Museum* all in search of a security guard in the model of Felicia, which is to say, *someone interesting with well-formed opinions.*

But no dice.

"*Outsider art criticism,*" as I imagined it, might just not be a thing—or at least not one I can eke two-hundred plus pages out of.

As I see it then, I have three options.

(MORE)

INEZ (cont'd)

One: I can return to my original proposal, the one Tamsin derided as boring and unmarketable as far as long-term academic prospects go.

Two: I can drop out, move home to Delaware, get a quote-on-quote real job and start paying back my student loans while indulging in weekly outings at Paint-a-Pot where I henceforth direct my all of my artistic appreciation and frustration into painting motherfucking pots and critiquing those of other people with too much time on their hands.

Three: I can attempt to track down Felicia and convince her to work with me *in creating...something—my dissertation? Plus, a book and TV show? I don't know.* Tamsin would add that there's also a fourth option, which is that I can die, darling. But I'd really prefer not to do that—although it does make for good leverage.

Tamsin, if you don't respond to my messages, I'll kill myself ;-)

SCENE 16: TAMSIN'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

TAMSIN

Cute. That was really cute.

INEZ

It worked, didn't it? I'm here in your office. And check this out.

Inez pulls a banana out of her bag and tosses it to her.

INEZ (cont'd)

Ta da! I come bearing fruit.

TAMSIN

You're producing a TV show with Felicia?

INEZ

About that. I came here to ask—

TAMSIN

Oops, I'm sorry. That's me. *I'm* producing a TV show with Felicia. We have our first meeting tomorrow.

INEZ

What?

TAMSIN

It's a funny story really. A former student of mine reached out in need of an art scholar to consult on this show because you apparently weren't cutting the mustard. She said *you* were the one who inspired her to call me.

(MORE)

TAMSIN (cont'd)

Said that even if I didn't care for her—and I don't—I'd probably still prefer her to you. Which I do.

Oh, don't look so surprised, darling. Art history is terribly incestuous, you know that. Of course it's just a matter of time before my circle should overlap with yours.

INEZ

Overlap? You mean fucking swallow.

TAMSIN

Inez, darling. Don't be so vulgar and possessive. It's not as if you own Felicia. God, even saying that out loud.

INEZ

I just—I don't. You accused me of exploiting her. And now you're happy to pick up where I left off.

Besides, that show sounded terrible. Why would you even want to be involved?

TAMSIN

It's not that bad. It's supposed to be...Oprah-esque.

INEZ

Says who? That Chloe lady? You can't trust her. She'll tell you whatever you want to hear.

TAMSIN

She's my former student.

INEZ

And so am I. Doesn't mean you respect me.

TAMSIN

Former. So you're dropping out?

INEZ

I didn't say that.

I could at least use the fellowship money. And my reputation is already tied to Felicia, so it's not like I have something to lose.

But what do you get out of this show?

TAMSIN

I get the privilege of molding a young mind and making art more accessible to the masses. Plus, someone has to watch out for this girl after you threw her to the wolves.

INEZ

You're jealous. You're jealous that I hit upon something novel and controversial.

TAMSIN

How dare you call Felicia "something."

INEZ

You know what I mean. The democratizing of art criticism—you found it threatening. And you especially didn't like that I got all this attention for it.

TAMSIN

The attention was misplaced. There's no talent in picking a security guard out of obscurity and having people gawk at her.

INEZ

Who's gawking? When Felicia talks about art, I'm genuinely interested in what she has to say.

TAMSIN

Because you're surprised. Because she exceeds your low expectations.

INEZ

No! Well, yes, okay, she is more eloquent than your average security guard. I know, I checked. But the surprise eventually wears off. And when it does, I think there's still a lot there. I think, given different circumstances, Felicia could have been a scholar in her own right.

TAMSIN

A scholar? Are you kidding me? That word used to mean something.

INEZ

Yeah, once upon a time you couldn't just turn someone's name into an adjective and call it a day. "Oh, how Foucauldian. How Deleuzian."

TAMSIN

Inez, so righteous, so above it all. And here you are at an Ivy League university collecting a stipend to study what exactly? Outsider art? So you came to the academy—which you loathe apparently—in order to write about artists, who, for whatever reason are outside the academy.

To what end? If the academy is so flawed, why bother bringing in people who are, in many cases, quite content being on the margins?

You could claim generosity. For living artists, you're helping them sell their work.

You could claim appreciation.

(MORE)

TAMSIN (cont'd)

You believe these artists merit being seen by a wider audience.

You could even claim reform. You're changing the academy from the inside out by broadening its horizons.

Or maybe—maybe it's just...opportunism. Maybe it's easier to write about work that's seldom-to-never been discussed than to wrestle with some preexisting body of criticism and still find something compelling to say.

Felicia's certainly new. Always helps to start fresh.

If you really have such a low opinion of your field, then it seems the dignified thing to do would be to leave and stop trying to drag others into it.

INEZ

I didn't say I loathed the academy. But I will say I loathe you. Darling.

TAMSIN

And yet you seemingly want what I have. What I represent.

INEZ

What's that? Petty almost pathological rivalries with a woman half my age?

TAMSIN

I've written four books and contributed to another half dozen. I'm a winner of the Franz Jewett Mather Award. My writing regularly appears in Art Forum. I'm an endowed professor at Columbia, and I've also taught at Yale, NYU and The New School. I've delivered lectures on five continents. I'm close personal friends with Cindy Sherman. I own a two-bedroom condo on the Upper West Side with excellent views of the park. And I recently inherited a collection of sketches by Lucien Freud that's worth more than your life.

But what's this about a rivalry, darling?

INEZ

You got me. You have everything.

I have nothing. No doctorate. No dissertation. No dissertation therefore no post-doc job. It sounds like you're forcing me out of the program, which means I'll lose my stipend and won't be able to pay rent.

And that TV-producer opportunity—well, you squashed that.

So, I guess I'll just go end it all.

TAMSIN

No! Uh-huh! You already cried wolf once.

INEZ

Yeah, I'm probably lying.

Or maybe not. Maybe I'll drown myself in the pond in Morningside Park.

TAMSIN

It's like two feet deep.

INEZ

I'll have to dive headfirst off one of the rocks then. Blunt force trauma or drowning? That'll be for the coroners to decide.

TAMSIN

That's a sick joke, Inez.

INEZ

That's what everyone will say.
How tragic that she should never partake in the success born from her article.
And yet, doesn't she look like Pinocchio in the pool? Ah, the irony.

TAMSIN

Jesus Christ. I'll call 9-11 right now if you don't quit it.

INEZ

(faux solemn)

No need, I'm on my way. Farewell, Tamsin. Thank you for—thank you.

Inez gets up to leave.

TAMSIN

Oh fuck. I'll make you an intern on the show. You happy?

INEZ

Researching producer. Focused on outsider art.

TAMSIN

Whatever. Just—I can't have another suicide on my conscience this year.

SCENE 17: TV NETWORK OFFICE - ABOUT A WEEK LATER

Chloe and Felicia stand shaking hands.

CHLOE

Glad we were able to work things out. Can I get you anything? I made sure we have grape soda.

FELICIA

I don't want grape soda. Didn't want it then either. It just seemed like the kind of thing someone in your position might expect someone like me to ask for. Like, a sista-to-sista I-see-you-but-also-fuck-that-noise kinda joke.

CHLOE

I don't follow.

FELICIA

I was playing the fool. You know, like, irony and shit. I'm not stupid.

CHLOEAZ

No one said you were.
I'd like to introduce you to someone.

Chloe guides Felicia into a conference room. Tamsin and Inez are seated.

FELICIA

(pointing to Inez)

Why is she here?

CHLOE

Felicia, this is Tamsin Brodsky. She knows everything there is to know about art, and she'll be a consulting producer on the show.

TAMSIN

Nice to finally make your acquaintance. I've heard so much about you.

FELICIA

Whatever. What's *she* doing?

INEZ

I'm working with—

TAMSIN

She's working with me. As an assistant. Don't worry. You'll hardly even notice her.

FELICIA

Assistant, huh? Nice to see you finally got a real job.

CHLOE

So the purpose of this meeting is to map out what we'll shoot for the pilot episode.

FELICIA

I think we start at the Guggenheim since that's what I'm known for.

CHLOE

Yes! We're of the same mind.

FELICIA

But I don't want to repeat what I said in the article, so we'd have to—

TAMSIN

So we could make it into more of a dialogue wherein you and I discuss and debate our interpretations of the art. A sort of Everyman-v-Expert tête-à-tête. A study in contrasts. An Odd Couple buddy comedy.

FELICIA

Hmm. No. That's not what I signed on for.
And forget Inez, where'd *she* come from anyway?

CHLOE

Professor Brodsky has been a professor at Columbia University for twenty years.

FELICIA

Nuh-uh. I'm over Columbia and all ya'all who went there. No offense.

CHLOE

None taken, I'm a Yalie.

TAMSIN

I think what Felicia means is that she doesn't want this show to devolve into an ivory tower lecture. Nor do I, darling, so I'm sure we can reach some kind of consensus. Something that allows you to be...authentic. And me to be well-versed, or what have you.

FELICIA

Oprah and the dude with the fro who painted happy trees—they didn't have sidekicks.

TAMSIN

I'm pleased you mentioned Ross's happy little trees because I'm a big proponent of aloe plants. Are you familiar with aloe?

FELICIA

The moisturizer?

TAMSIN

Aloe is prickly on the outside but medicinal on the inside. And I think that's the dynamic we want to strike here, darling. We want to play with audience expectations wherein you seem like just your typical security guard albeit one who's exceptionally sharp-tongued.

(MORE)

TAMSIN (cont'd)

But poke beneath the surface, and one discovers an unguent rich in knowledge and conceptual thought. Felicia, I can be that unguent—and, in time, help you be that unguent.

FELICIA

What the fuck is unguent?

INEZ

Lotion.

TAMSIN

A balm.

FELICIA

Then why don't you just call it that?

TAMSIN

Because unguent's got a nice ring to it.

FELICIA

Lotion sounds way better.

TAMSIN

Tomayto, tomahto.

FELICIA

Lotion, lotion.

Just admit it. You used a big ugly-sounding word because you want to seem smart.

TAMSIN

Felicia, darling, I know you fancy yourself an expert in art, but that doesn't make you an expert in language as well.

FELICIA

Fancy myself?

TAMSIN

Imagine yourself—

FELICIA

I know what the fuck fancy means!

I'm sorry, I can't work with her. Don't you know any experts who are black?

CHLOE

Not personally, no. But—

FELICIA

But you're black, right? So what gives?

CHLOE

Would you two give us a moment?

TAMSIN

Identity politics are...sensitive, I understand.

Tamsin and Inez exit. On her way out, Inez has a word with Felicia

INEZ

(winking)

And you thought I was bad, huh? Miss me?

CHLOE

Do you want to do this show? Felicia? Because I will pull the plug if you keep behaving this way.

FELICIA

For real?

CHLOE

No, for fake. Yes, for real!

FELICIA

All right, you don't gotta be all sarcastic.

CHLOE

Apparently I do since you're the queen of "irony and shit." So do you really want to be here? Or is this like your little grape soda game? Where you ask for it, but somehow the joke's on me for taking you seriously.

FELICIA

No, I want the show. I need the show. I quit the museum cause I was counting on this show.

And dental school too.

Well actually they kinda asked me to leave, but.

CHLOE

Good. Because the network is really invested in creating something that appeals to...diversity. That's why I'm spearheading this.

FELICIA

Well, from one diversity to another, I'm not working with her.

CHLOE

Tamsin's already signed on as an on-screen producer, so I'm afraid she's not going anywhere. Do you have any idea how hard it was to get someone with her résumé to participate in this?

FELICIA

Why do we even need someone like her? And why's she got to bring in Inez?

CHLOE

Because otherwise it runs the risk of being like a...minstrel show.

FELICIA

Ho-ho! Black producer lady got some balls on her.

CHLOE

I can't just have you up there saying inaccurate things for the sake of a laugh.

FELICIA

Nothing's inaccurate about what I say! It's just my opinion. You look at art, and there is no right or wrong. Tomato, potato.

CHLOE

Those are actually different vegetables though. Do you understand? You've got to ground your opinion in something, some critical understanding...of art or whatever. I don't pretend to be an expert; I hire them. Because, you know that saying: Opinions are like assholes.

FELICIA

My opinions are not full of shit!

CHLOE

That's not what I—
Look, you've got a special charm. No one's disputing that. Just, for the show, we've got to harness that charm into something that's grounded in reason.

FELICIA

Ain't nothing reasonable about turning me into fucking aloe vera.

CHLOE

What can I say? She's colorful in her metaphors.

FELICIA

She's white as hell.

CHLOE

Which is why she needs you as much as you need her.
Meaning! She'll sound silly unless you reign her in...and maybe vice versa.

FELICIA

But I'm still the star though?

CHLOE

Yes...

FELICIA

And she's just like the annoying teacher who sucks but we need her anyway.
(imitates teachers from the *Peanuts*)

Wah wah, wah wah, wah wah.

CHLOE

If that's how you want to—sure.

FELICIA

Okay. Taz-manian-what's-her-face...

CHLOE

Tamsin?

FELICIA

She can stay.

CHLOE

Oh thank god. I'll go get her.

Chloe exits. Felicia talks to herself, rehearsing what she might say on the show.

FELICIA

And now let's turn to our resident asshole for her perspective...
Snore. Snore. Shoot me in the face. Snore.
And back to Felicia who tells you what's up without boring the shit out of you.
Woo! We love you, Felicia! Don't stop talking, Felicia! Crawl into my ear-hole and be the birdie in my brain, Felicia!

Tamsin, Chloe and Inez re-enter.

TAMSIN

I look forward to working with you, darling.

CHLOE

Great. Glad we're all friends again.

FELICIA

I wouldn't go that far. Inez, you're still on my shit list.

TAMSIN

Ha! You *are* feisty.

Just to be clear, I'm afraid I had no say in that article she wrote. And on her behalf, I just want to apologize if you feel you were taken advantage of.

INEZ

I can speak for myself, thank you.

FELICIA

I'm fine.

TAMSIN

Because considering the arguably exploitative nature of the article, it's a crime that it got so much attention. What's next? A book deal?

FELICIA

A TV show apparently.

TAMSIN

Oh but this is different. You'll get to speak for yourself.

FELICIA

Most of her article was quotes from me. Plus, there was a video online.

INEZ

That's true.

TAMSIN

But this will be so much more tasteful.

FELICIA

What? Cause you're involved?

TAMSIN

Ha! Again, such spunk you have!
I was referring to the spirit of it, darling—which, thankfully, doesn't reek with the desperation of a grad student trying to make a name for herself.

INEZ

I'm right here.

FELICIA

You mean cause this time it's a professor instead?

TAMSIN

Ugh, god, I want to bottle you up and spray mosquitos with you! Because you're just so very acerbic!

CHLOE

Ha-ha. Repartée. Good times. Good television. Let's, uh, save it for the cameras.

SCENE 18: GUGGENHEIM - DAY OF THE PILOT SHOOT

Tamsin and Felicia are getting outfitted with microphones
Their make-up is being prepped. Chloe and Inez enter.

CHLOE

You're wearing that?

FELICIA

Not my choice. But the wardrobe people gave me a security guard uniform. And I told you, I'm not playing that role no more. So this is what I had on me when I got here.

CHLOE

You can't wear sweatpants on TV.

FELICIA

Watch me.

CHLOE

You'd look better in uniform.

FELICIA

I could say the same for you.

TAMSIN

Felicia, no need to be combative, darling.

FELICIA

They got you in elegant old lady clothes. But me, I gotta dress the role of hired help.

TAMSIN

Do you want to look like a security guard or a slob?

INEZ

I could go run and pick her up a new outfit.

FELICIA

Yeah! You heard her!

CHLOE

We don't have time, I'm afraid.

TAMSIN

Alas.

CHLOE

We are on a tight schedule. This is non-negotiable, Felicia. You can wear what you want next time. But there's not going to be a next time if you don't cooperate.

INEZ

(to Felicia)

I'm sorry, I tried.

This sucks, but pick your battles, I guess?

Felicia obliges and exits to change.

TAMSIN

I'm glad you put your foot down.

CHLOE

It's like dealing with a toddler sometimes.

INEZ

Hey, so, the lanyard ID they gave me says intern. I thought that we agreed that I'd be a researching producer. That I'd do some scouting for outsider artists—

CHLOE

I don't have time for this, I'm sorry.

INEZ

Is there like an HR person that I could talk to to get this—

TAMSIN

Inez, please. Priorities.

Felicia re-enters in a security guard uniform.

CHLOE

Remember, we have a small window to shoot this before the museum opens. So, keep it moving. Keep it light. And, try to do what you did in that article-video-thing, but without being redundant. Okay? Great. Let's take it away.

Chloe moves to the side.

FELICIA

So, um, we're here at the Guggenheim. Which is a white spiral building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

TAMSIN

Wright.

FELICIA

Right?

TAMSIN

Who's on first? Ha-ha!

FELICIA

Anyway...it's pretty tight. Like, when you look up, it kinda looks like a snail shell. Or the inside of a beehive.

And, uh, the thing about it is if you go to the top, you gotta circle back, so you see all the art twice. I think that's probably the point.

But I don't know, maybe it's also annoying. So there's an elevator in case you wanna get the hell out of here. Or if you're in a wheelchair or whatever.

Although cause the place is all twisty-sloped, it probably would be fun going down in a wheelchair.

I've seen kids do it in those roller skate sneakers. And I gotta tell them off for it. But part of me is like, yo, I want in on that.

Same thing with spitting from the top floor to the lobby. I know it's wrong, and I'll enforce the rules. But damn, sometimes, it's like the museum's whispering in my ear, saying "Spit, Felicia. Spit."

The single-occupancy bathrooms inside the main column are freakishly small. Made for like children and midgets.

They keep it real white in here.

I mean clean. But also white as in, *white*.

Place has good lighting. Can't complain.

(MORE)

FELICIA (cont'd)

I've never seen the roof leak, so that's nice.
And...uh...okay, I'm done talking about the building.

CHLOE

Cut.

TAMSIN

That's it? That's the riotously entertaining and perceptive commentary I'm supposed to bounce off of?

FELICIA

What? What else is there to say? Those are my thoughts. The architect dude fucked up on the bathrooms. But the roof not leaking is, like, a sign he knew what he was doing.

TAMSIN

The roof also doesn't leak at most Taco Bells. Does that mean they were designed by Frank Lloyd Wright?

CHLOE

Well, Tamsin, let's hear from you now.

TAMSIN

Wait hold on.

Red leather, yellow leather. Red leather.

The rain in Spain stays mainly—

A-E-I-O-U, A-E-I-O—

Okay.

In 1943, Frank Lloyd Wright was commissioned by Solomon R. Guggenheim to build a new home for Guggenheim's Museum of Non-Objective Painting. The project was an arduous undertaking as the architect pitted himself against the opinions of city officials, his clients, and the public at large.

FELICIA

He was stubborn. That's good.

TAMSIN

Maybe. But both Guggenheim and Wright died before the building's completion in 1959. The building is the quintessence of Wright's efforts to render the inherent flexibility of organic forms in architecture.

FELICIA

I bet you eat a lot of organics.

TAMSIN

Organic here means—forget it. Wright’s inverted ziggurat appears—

FELICIA

What?

TAMSIN

Ziggurat. A stepped or winding pyramidal temple of Babylonian origins. It’s the shape of the building.

FELICIA

Nah, I’d say it’s more of an upside down wedding cake.

TAMSIN

But it *is* an inverted ziggurat. That’s what he modeled it off of.

FELICIA

Agree to disagree.

TAMSIN

Visible from the rotunda are several galleries, which are sub-divided like membranes in a citrus fruit, with self-contained yet interdependent sections.

FELICIA

Wait! So you shoot down my wedding cake idea, but now the place looks like a grapefruit? Does it feel like aloe vera too? Does it have un-gu-ent?

TAMSIN

Cut.

I can’t work like this.

CHLOE

Felicia, let’s dial back the interruptions a little, okay?

FELICIA

I thought I was supposed to dish it out. But she can’t take it.

TAMSIN

Because your “dishing” is stupid. I’m sorry. I thought I could be the voice of reason for this thing.

FELICIA

Who you calling thing?

TAMSIN

I was referring to the show.

FELICIA

Which revolves around me!

CHLOE

Woah. Okay. Let's all take a deep breath. Maybe it would be best to move on to something else in the museum.

Pinocchio! Everyone loves Pinocchio! We've heard your take, Felicia. Let's hear what Tamsin has to say.

TAMSIN

This sculpture entitled "Daddy, Daddy" was created in 2008 by the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan. It is composed of polyurethane resin, paint and steel. Cattelan sited the work within the fountain at the base of the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed rotunda, suggesting that the hapless puppet—the victim of foul play, a tragic accident, or suicidal impulse—has plummeted to his death from the ramps above. Although Disney's Pinocchio eventually finds a happy ending through moral redemption, Cattelan's puppet is titled with a filial cry for approval or protection that has apparently gone unanswered. Pinocchio, the wooden toy who yearns to become a real boy, holds a special significance in Cattelan's thematic repertoire with its pervasive anxiety about the authenticity of his artistic status. Styling himself as the tragicomic court jester of contemporary art, Cattelan's self-image is often at the center of his provocative work.

(beat) [Script note: This speech was cribbed from the Guggenheim's website. In the world of the play, Tamsin is a pathological plagiarizer.]

And that's how it's done.

Chloe

Cut! Brava!

Tamsin takes a bow.

CHLOE

Felicia, since that article already featured your thoughts on Pinocchio, we thought it would be fun to up the stakes a bit. I know you don't like your security guard uniform, and that's fair. Why don't we do a costume change?

FELICIA

You had Inez go get me real-person clothes?

CHLOE

Better! Hurry off on to wardrobe.

Felicia exits.

CHLOE (cont'd)

Can you get me a coffee?

INEZ

I'm not an intern.

CHLOE

I'm sorry, producer-thingamajig, can you get me a coffee?

TAMSIN

Inez, darling. You know what they say: There's no "me" in "show business."

CHLOE

Black, two sugars.

Inez begrudgingly steps aside to get coffee.

TAMSIN

I apologize for her. She's only here because a student recently cited me in his suicide note. Some baseless accusations of academic predation—nonsense really. But I just don't want her to kill herself too.

CHLOE

Are you joking?

TAMSIN

Is *she* joking? That's the question.

FELICIA (O.S.)

I want to talk to Inez!

INEZ points at herself confused.

CHLOE

What's the matter, Felicia?

FELICIA (O.S.)

Send me Inez!

Chloe waves Inez towards Felicia.

TAMSIN

Maybe I should accompany her?

FELICIA (O.S.)

Just Inez!

Inez walks over towards Felicia's voice, still holding Chloe's coffee. Felicia comes out of the wardrobe department half-undressed, holding an adult-size Pinocchio costume.

INEZ

Holy shit!

CHLOE

(calling to them in Wardrobe)

What is it? What's going on?

FELICIA

Don't come in here or I'll walk off the set!

CHLOE

That's an empty threat, Felicia!

FELICIA

Is it?!

CHLOE

God, give me strength.

FELICIA

I can't wear this.

INEZ

Yeah...no...

FELICIA

You need to tell them that.

INEZ

What makes you think they'll listen to me?

FELICIA

I don't know, you're white?

INEZ

That doesn't always—
Okay, let's just try to reason with them.

Felicia and Inez move, costume in hand, towards Chloe
and Tamsin.

INEZ (cont'd)

So, we talked it over, and we have some reservations about the Pinocchio costume—

TAMSIN

Ah, how Italianate!

FELICIA

I'm not wearing it.

INEZ

She's not wearing it.

CHLOE

Well, I'm afraid you have to. Because it cost a fortune to get the rights from Disney. And
it's the only visual intrigue we have for the episode.

INEZ

What about the art? Isn't that visual intrigue?

CHLOE

It's just fun! It lightens the mood. Adds a theatrical flair to what might otherwise be a
boring show. Come on, it's cute having you dress up like the art. We don't want this
thing getting too high-minded, now do we?

TAMSIN

Save that for us pointy-heads.

CHLOE

You're being much too grave about the whole thing. If you can't laugh at yourself, then
what's the point?

TAMSIN

Too true, darling. I always say that.

CHLOE

Also, it's non-negotiable.

INEZ

How many non-negotiables are there?

CHLOE

I don't know, consult the contract.

Felicia pulls Inez aside.

FELICIA

What do you think?

INEZ

I wouldn't do it.

FELICIA

Yeah, but unlike you, I don't got a bunch of fucking back-up jobs

INEZ

Well, I don't really—I mean I can barely pay my rent in New York and—

FELICIA

Please. Where you from?

INEZ

Delaware. It sucks, trust me.
I mean it's not the Bronx, but—

FELICIA

Excuse you.

INEZ

I just mean I don't know what your...circumstances are...as far as...

FELICIA

"I was born a poor black child." Is that what you want to hear?

INEZ

No...I just...

FELICIA

Cause it's not *not* true. But also who gives a fuck? I just want a good ass job like you—like everyone else.
I made minimum wage here before. At least I'd make a lot more as Pinocchio. And people would actually fucking listen to me.

INEZ

Then I don't know. Can you live with yourself if you—?

FELICIA

That's how you frame it? Do it or kill yourself?

INEZ

I mean is this the hill you want to die on?

FELICIA

Maybe I can't just go picking and choosing my hills, you ever consider that?

Maybe I can't just pack up and back move to the burbs.

(imitating Inez)

“Poor me. If I get kicked out of artsy fartsy school, I'll have to [gasp!] suck a dick.”

INEZ

What? That's not what—

FELICIA

Exactly.

INEZ

Look, I concede that this isn't the worst thing. Embarrassing, maybe. Tacky. Even kinda racist...but...

FELICIA

Kinda?

INEZ

Okay. A lot racist.

So what? You want my blessing?

FELICIA

I don't know what I want from you. You can't help me. You never really could. Not after you used me.

INEZ

So now this is my fault?

FELICIA

You got me in this mess.

INEZ

Fine. Do what you want.

I'm not trying to be the Warhol to your Basquiat.

(MORE)

INEZ (cont'd)

I'm not trying to point you in any one direction.
Okay, so just...you do you.

FELICIA

Do you think Jean-Michel would have done this show?

INEZ

Basquiat?

FELICIA

WWJMD?

INEZ

Uh...I don't...

Felicia grabs the costume and exits to change.

CHLOE

(to Inez)

Let's try again with the coffee, shall we?

Inez prepares the coffee.

Tamsin

(referring to her get-up)

I like this look they got me in. What is this? Eileen Fisher?

CHLOE (cont'd)

How should I know?

TAMSIN

You seem very particular about clothes, so I just thought—

CHLOE

So that speech you did about Pinocchio—was that cribbed from the Guggenheim's website?

TAMSIN

What are you implying?

CHLOE

It just sounded sort of familiar.

TAMSIN

(defensive)

I mean I...I do my homework and...and I...

You know what Picasso said: Good artists copy, great artists steal.

CHLOE

And that goes for critics?

TAMSIN

We can add a citation if need be.

CHLOE

(as in, you bet your ass we will)

Uh. Yeah.

Felicia reenters as Pinocchio.

CHLOE (cont'd)

Wow.

TAMSIN

Very...Florentine.

Inez turns around with the coffee, and upon seeing Felicia, drops it.

CHLOE

Jesus! Can someone...?

(aside)

I wish she *would* kill herself. Save us the hassle.

Inez tries to mop up the coffee with napkins, but her eyes are on Felicia.

CHLOE (cont'd)

Okay, so we thought we'd have you climb into the fountain to demonstrate how deep it is. And reveal whether or not your nose props you out of the water.

A pool suddenly appears on stage.

TAMSIN

Because you brought up such a good question in your article. What if Pinocchio's nose is so long that he's actually able to breathe? As in, what if he's saved by his lies?

INEZ

That was meant as a metaphor—not a science experiment!

TAMSIN

Why can't it be both? Frank Lloyd Wright was a man of art and science.

Felicia climbs into the pool.

CHLOE

Excellent.

FELICIA

So I think there are two ways to read this Pinocchio thing. First way, is—

CHLOE

No, wait! Felicia. Before you give your critique, can you do a little Pinocchio-like jig?

FELICIA

In the pool?

CHLOE

Uh-huh. We'll add some music in post.

Felicia awkwardly dances around.

CHLOE (cont'd)

Hold on! Stop! Can we get a PA to tie some strings to her? You know, to complete the effect?

You, Inez! Quit being a fuck-up and come help.

INEZ

No.

TAMSIN

I told you this was a hands-on job.

INEZ

But this is—I can't. It's too much.

Felicia! Felicia, you don't have to do this.

Stagehands enter to put strings and a harness on Felicia so that she's partially suspended out of the water.

INEZ (cont'd)

Felicia! Come on!

FELICIA

Don't tell me what to do.

TAMSIN

She's got a point. She's her own woman.

INEZ

How are you okay with this? Look at this imagery. Doesn't it, you know...?

TAMSIN

It's evocative, certainly. Can be read on several levels...some of them less than...

CHLOE

Shut up! Both of you!

TAMSIN

She started it.

CHLOE

I don't care. Just have your little micro-aggressions debate over there, off my set.

INEZ

I quit.

CHLOE

Finally! Thank you.

Inez starts to exit but lingers to watch.

CHLOE (cont'd)

Okay. Felicia, you ready? And action!

Felicia does some half-hearted puppet-like movements.

FELICIA

So I think there are a few ways to read this piece.

First way is: he's dead and gone. Maybe killed by Geppetto. Maybe himself.

Second way is: He's dead but about to be brought back to life by the Blue Fairy and turned into a real boy on account of he's brave, truthful and unselfish.

There's a third way to read it too.

The third way is he's dead, and the Blue Fairy is going to wake him up.

But the Blue Fairy decides he's not brave enough or truthful enough or unselfish enough to be made into a real boy.

So the Blue Fairy lets him live, but only as a puppet.

My point is, maybe for Pinocchio, being a puppet ain't the worst.

At least people listen to his puppet songs. And pay him good money to puppet dance.

And hey, maybe he likes singing and dancing.

(MORE)

FELICIA (cont'd)

Maybe he's always wanted to perform, to be a star, but no one ever gave him a chance on account of people just thought of him as a block of wood. And blocks of wood are just supposed to sit there and be quiet—even when they got a lot more to offer.

So maybe that's a good puppet life.

I mean, hey, it beats being a donkey.

And deadass broke in a pool.

Felicia's strings are cut. She falls into the pool face down.
She flails around.

CHLOE

Great! Yeah!

TAMSIN

Oh my.

Felicia gasps for breath.

CHLOE

No, stay down, Felicia. We want to see if the nose can—yes. Excellent.

SCENE 19: PAINT-A-POT NYC - ABOUT ONE YEAR LATER

Possible scene transition: An MTA bus passes by. On it is a giant advertisement for an Emmy-award-nominated TV show called "PLEBE & PROF," starring Tamsin and Felicia. Tamsin is seen painting a portrait of Felicia who is made-up to look like she's part of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (O.J.F. version O).

Inez addresses the class.

INEZ

So the Situationists were a group of 60s anarchists who defaced existing art as a kind of middle-finger to capitalism and notions of canonical art.

A slide show displays paintings by Asger Jorn. Good examples might be "Master Profana" and a "Big Fuck You to the Cardinal of America."

INEZ (cont'd)

With that in mind, here's a pot I painted that's made to look like it was shat on by birds.
See that?

So you can have fun with this medium. Doesn't have to be all pretty.

(MORE)

INEZ (cont'd)

In fact, there's a long legacy of making art that isn't pretty. That doesn't even look like art, per say. That was created by individuals with no formal training—that's one definition of outsider art.

Some people would say outsider art really has to do with being on the fringes of society.

Slide show displays paintings from Jean Dubuffet's
Collection de l'art brut.

INEZ (cont'd)

This work was created by institutionalized mental patients.

But me, I would say you don't have to be insane or mentally challenged to be an outsider artist.

So if you're of sound mind, don't worry, you're still welcome!

Haseem enters.

INEZ (cont'd)

I know Paint-a-Pot gets a bad rap for being associated with, like, Ladies Wino Night where that one chick from work paints hers all Tiffany blue cause she just got engaged. And "oh-my-god, it's going to be a spring wedding, and maybe we can use these pots as DIY center pieces or whatever."

But, here at the NYC Learning Annex, I encourage you to think beyond that. Experiment. Treat Paint-a-Pot as your own little studio.

And yes, full disclosure, I am an employee of Paint-a-Pot, the Dover, Delaware branch.

I was a fan first though. And I'm mostly getting paid in dental benefits to be here.

Rent's cheap in Delaware, thankfully, but—

Who cares, right? That's part of the broke outsider art esprit du corps.

I'll be walking around if you want to hash anything out. Talk concepts.

(to Haseem)

Woah. What are you doing here?

HASEEM

I like art. Am I not allowed to like art?

INEZ

No, yeah. That's cool.

HASEEM

I saw a flier for this Porta-Pottie thing.

INEZ

Paint-a-Pot.

HASEEM

Which is weird cause I thought you were part of that Plebe & Prof blackface show.

INEZ

They don't have her in blackface. Do they?

HASEEM

Picasso's African masks or whatever. Same thing.

INEZ

Huh. That's an astute observation.

HASEEM

I know.

INEZ

Do you ever hear from her?

HASEEM

Nah. It's for the best. She sold her soul.

INEZ

For a good price though.

HASEEM

Well, it was a good soul.
I still blame you.

INEZ

Me too.

It's not all bad though. I've been blogging about outsider art, which is cool. I'm here in New York doing some research. Still kind of finding my critical voice, you know, but I don't need a PhD for that. I've got a pretty decent readership, and—

HASEEM

I only date black women.

INEZ

Oh. What? I wasn't trying to—

HASEEM

At least you're not scrubbing Porta-Potties though like I thought.

INEZ

I'm not.

It'd be fine if I did, but—

HASEEM

No it wouldn't.
This is actually a pretty decent gig you got going.

INEZ

Only six people showed up. And two of them are children.

HASEEM

Yeah but they look like they're into it.
And you're doing your thing—whatever this is.
Now, show me how I'm supposed to make this pot not look like shit.

INEZ

But maybe you want it to look like shit, huh? Ever consider that?

HASEEM

Why would I—no.

INEZ

Fair enough.

SCENE 21: CODA

Felicia appears on TV, dressed in a security guard get-up.

Felicia

Welcome back, folks, to Plebe & Prof.
We've had an...eventful day here at the Guggenheim.
Just to answer your all's question before we go: believe it or not, but Pinocchio's nose *did* actually keep him out of the water, blowing bubbles and breathing and such. So don't go saying lies never gets you anywhere.
Er, not lies.
Creative bull[bleep].
Singing off, I'm Felicia.

She unbuttons the security guard shirt to reveal a
Basquiat t-shirt.

And to quote my boy Basquiat: "Don't listen to what art critics say. I don't know anybody who needs a critic to find out what art is."

END OF PLAY