ARTIFICE

CHARACTERS

MAGGIE LA RUE ................ in her 30s-early 40s

RICHARD ...................... in his 30s-early 40s

GRACIELA ............. in her 20s, a Latina with a killer body and attitude to match

TRENT MATLOCK ...... in his 20s, impossibly handsome; incredibly dim

JUDITH FONTAINE ............ in her late 50s, elegant and unflappable

MICK FITZGERALD ............ in his late 50s, a burly man with a booming voice

EMMA ............................ in her 30s

PAYNE SHOWERS ............... in his 40s, charismatic and self-absorbed

TIME: Present day.

PLACE: A renovated farmhouse in upstate New York.
ARTICLE

CHARACTERS

MAGGIE LA RUE

in Pet 100-
cent. she

in Pet 100-
cents. she

EICHARD

in Pet 200 a
within a

GRACIELA

and minutes to

CREEK WATKINS

in Pet 200 pro-

motions to

JUDITH ONION

in Pot 100-

and minutes to

MICK GRACIELA

in Pet 200-

with a

EMMA

in Pet 100-

PAYNE SHOWES

in Pet 100-

PLACE A

IN ARTICLES

PLACE A

IN ARTICLES
SETTING: The living room of a renovated farmhouse. Many large, abstract paintings adorn the walls. The furniture is eclectic yet tasteful. Floor-to-ceiling shelves brimming with books and various decorative touches suggest the inhabitants are well traveled. The foyer leading to the front door sits R. Other doors suggest entrances to the kitchen, study and hall closet. A stairway leading to the second floor is broken up by a mezzanine/landing. The door beyond that leads to the art studio and bedrooms.

AT RISE: Offstage, we hear the front door open. A winter storm is brewing. The door bangs shut and RICHARD enters, laden with brown, paper grocery bags. RICHARD dumps the bags on the coffee table and then quickly sheds his winter coat, under which he wears a fashionable suit. RICHARD always wears a fashionable suit. He then sets about unpacking the bags, which are filled with bottles of wine, liquor and party supplies.

RICHARD. Hello!! Maggie? 
MAGGIE (offstage). In the kitchen! 
RICHARD. I’m back! 
MAGGIE (offstage). Can’t hear you!
RICHARD. It's freezing! And the ice! I barely made it up the drive. I hope Fitzgerald has snow tires.

MAGGIE (offstage). What?

RICHARD. Does Fitzgerald have snow tires?

MAGGIE (offstage). Look in the lefthand desk drawer.

RICHARD. Never mind. I couldn't get the wine you wanted.

MAGGIE (offstage). Did you get the wine?

RICHARD. Nigel wasn't there. His wife was—she made some suggestions. She's dyed her hair black.

MAGGIE (offstage). What?

RICHARD. Jet black! And with those tiny little eyebrows—it's like she wants to be Chinese but she's so obviously from Idaho.

(MAGGIE enters from the kitchen. She wears a white chef's apron over a quintessential Little Black Dress. She helps RICHARD unpack the grocery bags and then begins to tidy up the living room. Except when they pause for a drink, MAGGIE and RICHARD are in constant motion as they prepare for the party.)

MAGGIE. Who's from Idaho?

RICHARD. Nigel's wife.

MAGGIE. She's from Ohio.

RICHARD. Same thing. I think she drinks.

MAGGIE. Nigel's wife? No.

RICHARD. Yes. She's got this "glazed-over" look—

MAGGIE. She doesn't.

RICHARD. —always looking off somewhere...

MAGGIE. Did you find the Chateau Leoville?
RICHARD. No. Nigel is out of town and the rest of the staff hasn’t heard of it, although they all agree it “sounds French.” (Re: wine.) I got this instead. Receipt.

MAGGIE. I hope this is enough.

RICHARD. It’s only five people.

MAGGIE. Two of whom are high profile—they may have an entourage.

RICHARD. Entourage? As in posse?

MAGGIE. Advisors, managers, assistants...

RICHARD. No one RSVP’d “entourage.”

MAGGIE. It’s understood.

RICHARD. Not by me it’s not. My understanding of the statement “I will attend” is that “I” refers to the individual uttering said statement and unless I, Richard, have an egregious misunderstanding of the English language, “I” is singular as in individual as in one as in uno. If not, then our esteemed guests should have RSVP’d “Yes, I will attend and I plan to bring X number of fawning, pu-erile sycophants with me.”

MAGGIE. As long as they buy something.

RICHARD. We’ll have to ration the canapés.

MAGGIE. Ideally, four or five paintings.

RICHARD. The good wine goes to invited guests only.

MAGGIE. Imagine selling the entire collection.

RICHARD. The groupies drink from the box.

MAGGIE. I’m not serving box wine.

RICHARD. Figuratively.

MAGGIE. I’m not serving figurative wine either. OK, I’m not going to stress about this. If we’re running low on supplies, you’ll simply pop out and buy more.

RICHARD. Me? It’s Alaska out there.

MAGGIE. It’s part of the job.
RICHARD. Maggie, my job is to manage your art gallery, not run the Iditarod. Do you think Madison Kalb’s staff has to scale snowdrifts in search of Bordeaux?

MAGGIE. Do you want to work for Kalb?

RICHARD. Are you insane?

MAGGIE. Because if I don’t make a sale soon, you’ll have to.

RICHARD. I didn’t hear that.

MAGGIE. God, I don’t want to lose this house.

(RICHARD begins to mix two cocktails at the bar.)

RICHARD. Shush. This evening will change everything. With Fitzgerald, you’ve got the perfect customer—a *nouveau riche* thug who longs to be “cultured.” He’d buy and frame this grocery list if we told him to. Plus, the whole shebang will be in the *Daily News*.

MAGGIE. My gallery featured in the *Daily*—can you imagine?

RICHARD. Don’t need to. Judith Fontaine will make it a reality. She owns the damn paper.

MAGGIE. Oh, I don’t want to jinx this, but I think, after tonight, we just might be OK.

RICHARD (serves Maggie a drink). Let’s drink to it.

MAGGIE. To a successful evening.

RICHARD. To an obscenely and decadently profitable evening.

MAGGIE. You said it.

RICHARD. And to the one who made it all possible—

MAGGIE. And necessary.

RICHARD. Payne Showers. You are dearly missed.
(They drink. The doorbell rings. They jump up. MAGGIE continues to clean as RICHARD crosses to the foyer.)

RICHARD. That should be Christopher. I told him five o'clock.
MAGGIE. Good. He can set up the bar.
RICHARD. I'll tell him to pour liberally—we want our sheep good and drunk before we fleece them. (He exits to the foyer. MAGGIE calls after him.)
MAGGIE. We're not fleecing—we're selling valuable art.
RICHARD (offstage). Can I help you?
GRACIELA (offstage). Nah—I'm here to help you.
MAGGIE. Close the door!

(MAGGIE exits to the kitchen as GRACIELA enters, followed by RICHARD.)

GRACIELA. Damn, but that is some crazy-ass cold!
RICHARD. Who are you?
GRACIELA. Graciela. Christopher's cousin.
RICHARD. Where is Christopher?
GRACIELA. He said you needed a bartender.
RICHARD. We do. Christopher.
GRACIELA. Yeah, well, he says he's really sorry but he booked the *Forever Plaid* tour—he just got the call and had to leave like yesterday for Indiana or was it Iowa or—I can't remember, some "I" state—anyway, I told him don't worry—I'd fill in.
RICHARD. Have you tended bar before?
GRACIELA. No—but I've been a cocktail waitress and I figure it's pretty much the same thing except maybe tonight I won't have guys grabbing my ass.
RICHARD. I’ll try to restrain myself.

(MAGGIE enters from the kitchen.)

MAGGIE. Oh! Hi. I’m Maggie.

GRACIELA. Maggie. Oh my God, Maggie! Christopher told me about how you lost your husband. You must be, like, a total mess!

MAGGIE. Oh, well, I—we were separated when he—uh—

GRACIELA. When he bit it? Yeah, Christopher told me how your husband was like this artist and was really broke for, like, ever and just when he gets a break—some big-ass show—

RICHARD. The Whitney Biennial.

GRACIELA. —and starts to get really hot, he goes trekking in the Himalayas and gets wiped out in an avalanche. That really sucks.

MAGGIE. Yes.

RICHARD. May I take your coat?

GRACIELA. Sure. (She removes her coat. She is dressed in a sexy, French maid, Fredericks of Hollywood-type costume.)

RICHARD. Oh my.

GRACIELA. Christopher said it’s a classy party so I thought I’d better dress the part.

(RICHARD takes GRACIELA’s coat and hangs it in the closet.)

MAGGIE. Richard, why don’t you help Graciela set up and while you’re at it, you can freshen up my drink. A lot.
(MAGGIE exits to the kitchen. RICHARD mixes MAGGIE’s drink, then helps GRACIELA chop limes, polish glasses, etc.)

RICHARD. OK. First—you tell Christopher that he is on my list. He’ll know. Next—Maggie is a complete saint and while Payne, the dearly departed, was a gifted artist and my best friend, he was no businessman. Maggie has to auction off her collection of Payne’s work because he left her with huge debts. Huge. The auction is Monday. Tonight, we’re having a private showing. Nothing can go wrong.

GRACIELA. OK.

RICHARD. I mean nothing. If Maggie can’t sell the collection, she’ll close the gallery, which will “A,” break her heart and “B” put me out of a job; a job I very much enjoy—and I abhor job hunting—and I have no marketable skills—and I do not qualify for unemployment—I’ve already checked. Understand?

GRACIELA. Man—are you high-strung. You must be a Virgo.

RICHARD. Leo. We’re expecting two buyers—although they may bring groupies with them, but the invited guests are Mick Fitzgerald and Judith Fontaine.

GRACIELA. Mick Fitzgerald. Judith Fontaine.

RICHARD. Right. They are the big fish and should receive star treatment. The rest can fend for themselves. (The doorbell rings.) Agh! Already?! Answer the door—I’ll finish here.

GRACIELA. You got it.
(GRACIELA exits to the front door and then reenters, ushering TRENT into the room.)

GRACIELA (cont’d). Welcome. I’m Graciela. Can I get you something from the bar? Or maybe I should take your coat first or, wait—Richard—is this one a “big fish” or do I ignore him?

TRENT. Huh?

RICHARD. Neither. This is Trent. He’s Maggie’s....something.

TRENT. Her S.O.

GRACIELA. So?

TRENT. S period, O period—Significant Other.

GRACIELA. Oh.

TRENT. Hi. Trent Matlock. I’m an actor.

GRACIELA. Graciela. I’m the—maid?

RICHARD. The help.

GRACIELA. The help. I’m helping.

TRENT. Cool. Great outfit.

(During the following, TRENT removes his coat and hangs it in the closet. He retrieves a wrapped package from his messenger bag and places it on the coffee table.)

GRACIELA. Thanks! So, an actor? Have I seen you in anything?

TRENT. Do you watch “Love Lives Forever”?

GRACIELA. Is that a soap?

TRENT. Daytime drama.

GRACIELA. No. I think my mom watches it.

TRENT. Tell your mom you’ve met Doctor Birch.
GRACIELA. Doctor Birch. OK.
TRENT. Trust me, she'll freak-out.
RICHARD. Maggie’s in the kitchen.
TRENT. If you’re a good girl, I’ll give you an autographed photo.
GRACIELA. What if I’m a bad girl?
TRENT & RICHARD. Then I’ll give you two.
TRENT. Hey!
RICHARD. Trent. Maggie must have had some reason for inviting you. Why don’t you go see what it is?
TRENT. OK, Chief— (He exits to kitchen.)
RICHARD. Graciela, One. The aforementioned “big fish/worthless loser” distinction? That’s our little secret, OK?
GRACIELA. OK.
RICHARD. Two. Always take the coat first.
GRACIELA. Check.
RICHARD. Three. Trent is, as much as I loathe to say it, with Maggie. Off limits.
GRACIELA. Got it.
RICHARD. Good.

(TRENT enters from the kitchen.)

TRENT. Yo, Rich—Maggie wants you. She said something about the pastry not puffing and what happened to her drink?
RICHARD. Whoops. (He grabs MAGGIE’s drink and exits to kitchen.)
GRACIELA. My cousin’s an actor.
TRENT. What’s he done?
GRACIELA. Musicals mostly.
TRENT. Oh. Theater.
GRACIELA. Right now he's doing *Forever Plaid* in Indiana.
TRENT. Oh. *Regional* theater.
GRACIELA. He went to Juilliard—that's a big deal, right?
TRENT. I guess, if you're into *training*.
GRACIELA. You're not?
TRENT. Not really. I started out modeling, then moved on to commercials. That's where I perfected my craft. Then I got the show.
GRACIELA. Wow.
TRENT. Hard work pays off.

*(RICHARD and MAGGIE enter, each laden with trays of food. TRENT springs up to help MAGGIE.)*

TRENT *(cont'd).* Howdy, little lady, let me give you a hand.
MAGGIE. Thanks.
TRENT. Did I tell you how awesome you look?
MAGGIE. Yes, but you can tell me again.
TRENT *(presents MAGGIE with a wrapped package).* You look awesome. For you—for the big night.
MAGGIE. You didn't have to do that! How thoughtful!
*(She unwraps the package.*) It's—your picture. *(She holds TRENT's framed head shot.)*
TRENT. One of the new ones. Like it?
MAGGIE. Very handsome.
TRENT. You don't think my eyes look squinty?
MAGGIE. No. It's great.
TRENT. Cool. I'm gonna hang it up now. In the foyer. Next to that Polack. *(He exits with photo to foyer.)*
RICHARD *(miserably).* It's a Pollock.
(TRENT runs in, breathless.)

TRENT. Car! A car is coming up the drive!

(RICHARD points GRACIELA toward the foyer as TRENT checks himself out in the mirror.)

RICHARD. Showtime!
GRACIELA (exiting). I got it, I got it—
TRENT. My hair is flat! Maggie—blow dryer?!
MAGGIE. Upstairs.

(TRENT bounds up the stairs. MAGGIE pulls off her apron and looks for a place to stash it as RICHARD speaks. She settles for underneath a couch cushion.)

RICHARD. Maggie, one thing. You know how impossible Judith Fontaine is to get—
MAGGIE. Yes.
RICHARD. And her great commitment to social causes—
MAGGIE. Yes.
RICHARD. —like twelve-step programs.
MAGGIE (wary). Yes.
RICHARD. Well, in order to get her to come, to travel all this way, I—
MAGGIE. You what?
RICHARD. I told a little lie.
MAGGIE. What?
RICHARD. Just a teeny, tiny fib.
MAGGIE. What.
RICHARD. Um…you’re an addict.
MAGGIE. WHAT?!
RICHARD. But you’re in recovery! I panicked! The assistant was stonewalling me and I know how important she is—

MAGGIE. We can NOT lie to Judith Fontaine. She’ll bury us in bad publicity—

(Graciela enters with Judith Fontaine. Graciela attempts a painfully awkward “maid-like” demeanor, starting with a clumsy curtsey.)

Graciela. Right this way, Madame.

Maggie (grabs Richard by his tie and hisses). You’re going to come clean. Now.

RICHARD. OK, OK—

MAGGIE. Ms. Fontaine! Welcome, I’m Maggie.

JUDITH. Call me Judith—

MAGGIE. Thank you so much for coming. I—

(Graciela abruptly wedges herself in between Judith and Maggie.)

Graciela. May I take your coat?!

JUDITH (somewhat taken aback). Oh! My. Thank you—

(Graciela practically rips the coat from Judith’s body.)

Graciela. Right ho, m’lady! (She crosses to hang the coat in the closet.) ’Tis no bother at all, Mum.

RICHARD. Knock it off, Jeeves.

MAGGIE. Meet Richard, my friend and gallery manager.

JUDITH. Charmed.
MAGGIE. Who has something to tell you.
RICHARD. I...uh...I, well, see—I thought, but, I um—
JUDITH. You’re tongue-tied. How sweet.
RICHARD. No, I—
JUDITH. Don’t deny it, it’s refreshing. I can’t stand false
confidence. Really, I can’t stand falsehood of any kind.
Lie to me; you’re dead to me. Now, Maggie. How are
you? (Beat.)
MAGGIE. I—I take it one day at a time.
JUDITH. I understand. My first husband was a drunk. He
fell off the wagon and it killed him. He was visiting the
Amish. If I may be so bold, Maggie, is that your issue?
Alcohol?

(RICHARD, standing behind JUDITH, shakes his head.)

MAGGIE. Me? No—it’s um—drugs that— (RICHARD
continues shaking his head.) —are not the issue either.
Thankfully. I just had a little problem with— (RICH-
ARD mimes moving a computer mouse.) —dealing
cards... Gambling! (RICHARD furiously shakes his
head.) —is how I fill my time now, and that’s OK be-
cause my addiction was to— (RICHARD mimes typing
on a keyboard.) —the piano?
JUDITH. What?

(RICHARD continues to mime working at a computer.)

MAGGIE. That’s the slang term for it—that’s what we ad-
dicts call it—those of us who’re addicted to—the com-
puter! The Internet!
JUDITH. That’s an addiction?
MAGGIE. Well, yes, it is when you’re addicted to...

(RICHARD mimes several lewd acts.) Uh—porn?
INTERNET PORN?! NO!

RICHARD. Yes! Pornography! But not anymore. She’s all better now. All gone. Bye bye!

(TRENT enters from upstairs.)

RICHARD (cont’d). Trent! There you are! Look, everyone, it’s Trent!
TRENT. Uh— Hi.

MAGGIE. Ms. Fontaine, meet Trent, my—um—Trent.
TRENT. Trent Matlock.
RICHARD. Graciela, Ms. Fontaine may want a drink.

JUDITH. Yes, a drop of scotch, please, just to warm me up. It’s absolutely freezing.

RICHARD. A winter storm is just around the corner.
JUDITH. I’d say it has arrived. What a lovely home.

MAGGIE. My parents left it to me, after they went south.
JUDITH. Oh dear, they’ve passed on?
MAGGIE. No, they moved to Florida.

JUDITH. Little difference. You certainly are off the beaten track, dear. My taxi got hopelessly lost.

MAGGIE. It is hard to find, but it’s a complete escape from the city. Cell phones, PDAs, the— (glaring at RICHARD) Internet—nothing works. No reception. The land line is temperamental, mail service is sporadic, and the only radio station we get is “Christian Gold.” I couldn’t live here full time but as a weekend retreat, it’s wonderful. Payne loved it.

JUDITH. Ah—Payne. Such a tragedy. An avalanche. They never did recover the body?
MAGGIE. No. But so much time has passed, the government declared him officially... It's been nearly a year and I still can't actually say that word, that Payne is...

JUDITH. No longer with us.

MAGGIE. Yes. Stupid, really.

JUDITH. Not at all. This may be small consolation, dear, but I've buried two husbands myself. It gets easier each time. *(She accepts a cocktail from GRACIELA.)* My motto is to marry first for looks, so you have adorable children. Marry second for money, so you can feed them. *(She drinks.)* That's better. So. Are you ready for the auction?

MAGGIE. I think so.

JUDITH. The invitations are inspired. Who designed them?

RICHARD. Maggie did. *(Overly proud.)* But I picked out the stamps.

JUDITH. Lerner and Lowe. Charming.

GRACIELA. What? Lerner and Lowe are on a stamp?

That's horrible!

TRENT. Who?

GRACIELA. Oh my God! Lerner and Lowe?! They were the "Thrill Killers"! Two rich, spoiled boy-geniuses who strangled this little kid just 'cause they could—and now they're on a stamp?!

TRENT. Let me see that!

GRACIELA. Disgusting!

JUDITH. You're thinking of Leopold and Loeb.

TRENT. Who?

JUDITH. Leopold and Loeb were murderers. Lerner and Lowe wrote musicals.

GRACIELA. Musicals?

RICHARD. *My Fair Lady.* *Gigi.*
JUDITH. Camelot.
GRACIELA. Oh.
TRENT. I bet a lot of people mix them up.
GRACIELA. Yeah?
TRENT. Sure. Just like Gandhi and Goebbels. I flunked World History over that one.

(The doorbell rings once, then MICK FITZGERALD bursts in, covered in snow. EMMA follows, dressed in So-Ho black with a severe hairstyle, trendy glasses and a studied air of ennui.

MICK doesn’t wait to be welcomed but plows ahead, shedding his outerwear which he leaves trailing in his wake. GRACIELA follows, scooping up coat, scarf, hat, etc.)

MICK. The barbarians have arrived!
MAGGIE. Mr. Fitzgerald, welco—
MICK (grabs MAGGIE’s shoulders). You must be Maggie. “A lovely Lady, garmented in light.” Shelley. That’s one mother of a storm out there! The road’s blocked, you know—
MAGGIE. Blocked? I thought—
MICK. But I told the Boys in Blue “I’m not some raghead cabbie. I’m no stranger to snow—let us pass!” Good thing I’m driving a Hummer. (Clapping RICHARD on the shoulder, hard.) That monster’s indestructible!
MAGGIE. Would you like a—
MICK. Whiskey, double. Charming house. Turn-of-the-century, right?
MAGGIE. Yes—
MICK. "So fair a house, good things will dwell in it."
Shakespeare. Not bad for a Brooklyn boy, eh? This is Edith.

EMMA. Emma.
MICK. She’s an art critic.
EMMA. Ph.D. My thesis explored Deconstructionist Revisionism.
MICK. She’s gonna ID the gems and steer me clear of the crap.

GRACIELA. May I take your coat?
EMMA. No thank you.
GRACIELA. I’m supposed to take your coat.
EMMA. I’d rather—
GRACIELA. It’s not like I’m gonna steal it.
EMMA. I didn’t mean—

RICHARD (coaxes GRACIELA toward the bar). Mr. Fitzgerald would like whiskey.
GRACIELA (glaring at EMMA). Sure.
RICHARD. And for you, Ellen?
EMMA. Emma. Nothing, thank you.
JUDITH. Why not something to warm you up?
GRACIELA. Why? She’s already got her coat.
EMMA. I’m fine.

MAGGIE. Mr. Fitzgerald, may I introduce Richard, Trent, Graciela, and, of course—
MICK. This lady needs no introduction! Ms. Judith Fontaine. My mug has graced the pages of your paper so many times, it is high time I am graced with yours.
JUDITH. Here it is.
MICK (takes a drink from GRACIELA and toasts). And a lovely face at that. May the roof above us never fall in, and may we friends below never fall out.
GRACIELA. I know you. You’re the landlord guy.
MICK. Developer.
GRACIELA. Yeah. I used to date a guy that lived in your building.
MICK. Ah. The Fitzgerald Palace?
GRACIELA. No, down on East 13th.
MICK. Fitzgerald Hall?
GRACIELA. Further east—
MICK. Mick’s Manor?
GRACIELA. Uh-uh. This was a real rattrap—
MICK. Then it wasn’t a Mick Fitzgerald property!
GRACIELA. Yeah, it was. I know ’cause this guy, he had a dartboard with your face on it—
MAGGIE. Graciela, this isn’t the time for—
GRACIELA. And all he did was bitch about you, how he was gonna sue you—
MAGGIE. Graciela, we need more napkins! Right now.
MICK. No, no, Miss Maggie—If there is a problem with one of my properties, I need to know. Please, go on.
GRACIELA. Well, the place was a dump and lousy with mice and this guy, he put down rat poison and dead mice were turning up everywhere—in the sofa and the cupboards and shit—and he wouldn’t even know about it till they started to stink. I about died when he told me this ’cause I was sitting there, right on the sofa, and he keeps asking me if I smell anything. Anyway, he says he’s taking you to court ’cause he’s got proof and I’m like, “OK, what proof?” and he goes over to the fridge, opens the freezer, and pulls this Ziploc bag out of the side compartment, you know, where you keep frozen OJ? He brings it over to me and it is, swear to God, chock full of dead frozen mice. He starts shaking the
bag in my face, saying “Here’s my proof! Here’s my proof!” and the dead mice, they’re knocking together like marbles, and you better believe I never looked at an ice cube the same again.

EVERYONE. UGH! *(They all slam down their drinks with a solid THUD. Beat.)*

MICK. I will look into it.

GRACIELA. Ready for a refill?

MICK/JUDITH/RICHARD/MAGGIE. Yes! *(Beat.)* No ice!

GRACIELA. Coming up.

EMMA. Mr. Fitzgerald, I’d like to start evaluating the art if I may.

MAGGIE. Of course! The studio is upstairs.

JUDITH. Ooh—I’d love a peek at Payne’s work before dinner.

TRENT. Go ahead. I’ll bring the drinks.

*(MAGGIE, RICHARD, JUDITH and MICK exit upstairs to the studio, talking animatedly [ad lib away!]. EMMA follows, notebook in hand. TRENT helps GRACIELA prepare a new round of drinks and place them on a tray.)*

GRACIELA. Thanks.

TRENT. No problem. I’ve seen the art like a million times already.

GRACIELA. You don’t like it?

TRENT. It’s OK, but I don’t see why Payne was such a big deal. It’s just a bunch of colors swirled together. Like, I could do it. If I had paint. He was no Thomas Kinkade, that’s for sure.

GRACIELA. Who?
TRENT. Thomas Kinkade? Painter of Light? He’s the best. He paints these waterfalls and cottages with, like, white picket fences around them—and the cottages look so real—it’s amazing. You can see Kinkade’s work in most major magazines—on those little cardboard inserts. I own two of his pieces, both limited editions.

GRACIELA. Wow.

TRENT. They’re painted on dinner plates.

(Gracielas heads toward the kitchen as Trent makes his way toward the studio, carrying a tray of cocktails.)

GRACIELA. I’d like to see them sometime.

TRENT. Yeah?

GRACIELA. Sure. I’m a big fan of art. And tableware.

TRENT. Cool!

(Both Gracielas and Trent exit. Slight pause. Then we hear the front door open and Payne enters. Payne is dressed in very old jeans and an oversized knit sweater. He sports a full beard and carries a large rucksack.)

PAYNE. I’m baaaaaack! Ha! Maggie? Ah! (He races to one of the abstract paintings and rotates its position from vertical to horizontal, then steps back and admires it.) Maggie? (Looking around, he sees the food and drinks.) A party! Oh, Mags, you are too much!

(Richard enters from the studio, calling over his shoulder.)
RICHARD. I’ll get it—I think we left it in— (He sees PAYNE and freezes, stunned.) Oh.
PAYNE. Richard!
RICHARD. Oh my.
PAYNE. I see you got my letter! I wasn’t expecting such a lavish reception—this is wonderful! Man, it’s good to see you! You look great. Don’t say it—I know I’ve changed—lost twenty pounds, all muscle tone, and grew this beard—that’s what being in a coma will do to you—I’ve got to start with a trainer right away but I’m toying with keeping the beard—what do you think?
RICHARD. I think I must be very drunk.
PAYNE. Why?
RICHARD. Because you are not supposed to be here.
PAYNE. Why not?
RICHARD. Because you are supposed to be dead.
PAYNE. What?
RICHARD. You were climbing a mountain.
PAYNE. Yes.
RICHARD. There was an avalanche.
PAYNE. Yes.
RICHARD. And you died.
PAYNE. No! What idiot told you that?
RICHARD. The U.S. government.
PAYNE. Morons. I was climbing a mountain and, yes, I got caught in the avalanche but I didn’t die. I was in a coma for forty-five days and broke damn near every bone in my body but I was saved by an obscure sect of Tibetan monks. I really should send them a gift—they don’t drink, so perhaps flowers or a nice cheese wheel? Anyway, under the monks’ constant care, I snapped out of the coma, although I had amnesia for quite some
time, during which I worked in the herb garden, communed with Buddha, and grew this beard, which I may keep, if Maggie likes it, I’m not sure what her stance is regarding facial hair. When I finally came to my senses, by the grace of meditation, manual labor, and hallucinogenic mushrooms, I started my journey home. I wrote all of this to Maggie—she didn’t tell you?

RICHARD. I don’t think she got your letter.

PAYNE. No? Then why all—

MAGGIE (offstage). Richard? Are you down there?

RICHARD. I apologize now, I’ll explain later.

PAYNE. Hey!

(RICHARD pushes PAYNE into the closet as MAGGIE enters.)

MAGGIE. There you are. What are you doing?

RICHARD. Nothing.

MAGGIE. Who were you talking to?

RICHARD. No one.

MAGGIE. I heard you talking.

RICHARD. Talking? Oh, yes.

MAGGIE. To...?

RICHARD. Myself. Stupid habit.

MAGGIE. What’s wrong with the closet? Is something in there?

RICHARD. No!

MAGGIE. Something is! (She attempts to open the door while RICHARD blocks her. They continue to wrestle with the door, MAGGIE finally tickling RICHARD to gain access.) Don’t tell me I have mice—

RICHARD. Mice? Mice! Never!
MAGGIE. Why are you acting so oddly?
RICHARD. I'm odd! I'm an oddity!
MAGGIE. Come on, open up!
RICHARD. No! No! Stop!
MAGGIE. Richard—
RICHARD. Maggie, please!
MAGGIE. Let me—
RICHARD. NO!

(MAGGIE wrenches the door open. We see a bunch of coats, hanging from the closet bar.)

MAGGIE. There! There is...there’s nothing here.
RICHARD. As I said.
MAGGIE (rummaging through the coats). But why were you so—
PAYNE. Ow!
MAGGIE. AH!
PAYNE. My eye—
MAGGIE. There’s a man in—

(PAYNE emerges from behind the coats. He covers his face with his hands, rubbing his eye.)

PAYNE. Nearly blinded me—
MAGGIE. In—in—
PAYNE (drops his hands, uncovering his face). Hi Mags. (MAGGIE faints. He catches her in his arms.) Guess that’s a “no” on the beard, huh?

(BLACKOUT.)
SCENE TWO

SETTING: The same, a few seconds later.

AT RISE: MAGGIE lies on the couch, passed out. RICHARD fans her with a sheaf of papers.

RICHARD. Get me some water. From the bar.

(PAYNE retrieves some water and sprinkles it on MAGGIE’s face. She jolts awake.)

PAYNE. She’s back.
RICHARD. Drink this.
MAGGIE (sips some water, then gazes at PAYNE). You’re Payne.
PAYNE. Yes.
MAGGIE. You’re alive.
PAYNE. Yes.
MAGGIE. Oh my God.
PAYNE. Somehow, I pictured a more festive homecoming.
MAGGIE. Homecoming?
RICHARD. He’s not staying.
PAYNE. What?! Look—I didn’t just hop off a bus from Hoboken—I trekked halfway across the globe. What do you mean I’m “not staying”?!?
RICHARD. You don’t understand—
MAGGIE. They can’t see you—
RICHARD. You’ve got to go—
MAGGIE. Now.
PAYNE. Richard! You’re my closest friend. It’s as if you’re not happy to see me.
RICHARD. I’m not.
PAYNE. As if I’m not wanted—
MAGGIE. You’re not.
PAYNE. Maggie?! You’re my wife!
MAGGIE. We are separated.
PAYNE. Have you both lost your minds?
RICHARD. Payne, of course we’re happy to see you. We were devastated by your loss and we are thrilled to learn that you are, in fact, alive. We missed you terribly and we desperately want to hear what happened—on Tuesday.
PAYNE. But—
RICHARD. Wonderful. That’s settled. Oh—and while we’re at it, can you also remain dead until Tuesday?
PAYNE. Did he go off his meds?
MAGGIE. There’s an auction on Monday, Payne. Both the press and a private buyer are here now. They’re upstairs, evaluating the collection.
PAYNE. Here? Why aren’t they at the gallery?
MAGGIE. I’m not just selling the work hanging there—
RICHARD. It’s all up for grabs.
PAYNE. Works in progress?! No—they’re not for sale!
MAGGIE. All your work’s been appraised—
PAYNE. The “Floating Moon” series? That’s nowhere near completion.
MAGGIE. Everything. The assessed value of each painting is—quite high.
PAYNE. Really?
RICHARD. Astronomical.
PAYNE. Be specific. (RICHARD shoves the sheaf of papers at him.) Great Buddha! Finally! After all these
years of groveling. You said the press was up there? Have I got a story for them!

MAGGIE. Payne, wait! The work was appraised after your—accident.
PAYNE. So?
MAGGIE. These figures are based on the fact that you are deceased.
PAYNE. Deceased.
RICHARD. Dead.
PAYNE. I know what it means.
MAGGIE. We need to sell at these prices.
RICHARD. If it’s known you are alive—
MAGGIE. Before the auction—
RICHARD. The price plummets—
MAGGIE. As do we. Understand?
PAYNE. Did it occur to either of you that the appraisal is due to my talent? That the price has nothing to do with my being dead or alive? (Beat.) Obviously not.
RICHARD. Payne, you are incredibly talented—
MAGGIE. Truly gifted—
RICHARD. We’re your most ardent fans.
PAYNE. I’d thank you, but you want me dead.
MAGGIE. Don’t be an ass.
PAYNE. Me?!
MAGGIE. This may come as a shock since you’ve never bothered yourself with mundane concerns such as finances, but I’m drowning financially. I’ve sold everything but a kidney to keep the gallery open. Richard has taken so many wage cuts, he can barely pay his rent.
RICHARD. And I’m wearing knock-off Armani.
MAGGIE. I fully supported you through the fiasco called our marriage, financially and emotionally, for precious
little in return. This isn’t about your worth as an artist, this is about recouping losses.

PAYNE. At my expense.

MAGGIE. It’s time something was.

PAYNE. What do you—

RICHARD. Shhh! They’ll hear you. Sotto voce, please.

Payne. I’m not going to beg because groveling does not become me. Allow me, however, to say this. If Maggie can’t sell this collection, at top dollar, she’ll have to close the gallery. Meaning, I’ll have to find a job. Meaning, as an unpublished poet with no marketable skills, I’ll be forced into the world of retail, meaning minimum wage, time clocks, and polyester uniforms. It’s a nightmarish yet very real possibility that I’ll end up in the food court of a New Jersey mall, wearing a striped orange tunic and a “Biggie Size It!” button. That, Payne, will be on your shoulders.

PAYNE. Richard.

RICHARD. But don’t do anything you aren’t comfortable with.

PAYNE. It’s fraud.

MAGGIE. Not really. We thought you were dead, honestly, and you weren’t around to say otherwise. All we’re asking is that you remain “not around.” It’s not fraud, it’s just...not being around.

PAYNE. Have you looked outside?! I was lucky to get here—caught the last cab out of the city—it’s snowing like mad—hail this big—they’re blocking off the roads—where do you advise I go so that I’m “not around”?

RICHARD. You were a Boy Scout—can’t you build some-
MAGGIE. You can hide in the basement.
PAYNE. I am not going to lurk in the basement like an ogre.
MAGGIE. What else can we do? If they see you, we’re screwed. It’s not like we can pass you off as Payne Showers’ long-lost twin brother, the black sheep of the family whose name was not to be spoken as he disappeared until this fateful day. That stuff works in the movies, but not in real life.

(TRENT enters.)

TRENT. Maggie, what are— (Re: PAYNE.) Oh. Hello.
PAYNE. Uhh—
RICHARD. Umm—
MAGGIE. Trent! This is Payne Showers’ long-lost twin brother, the black sheep of the family whose name was not to be spoken as he disappeared until this fateful day!
TRENT. Payne had a twin?
MAGGIE. Yes. This is Payne’s brother…Rayne.
TRENT. Rain?
MAGGIE. Yes.
TRENT. Rain Showers?
MAGGIE. Oh.
PAYNE. Terrific.
RICHARD. His parents were hippies.
TRENT. You said Payne’s parents were stuffy conservatives.
MAGGIE. Stuffy, conservative hippies—yes.
TRENT. Are you an artist like your brother?
MAGGIE. Some consider it an “art.” Rayne—
RICHARD. —sells life insurance.
TRENT. Selling insurance is an art?
RICHARD. When it’s done well.
TRENT. Honey, why are you so jumpy?
PAYNE. “Honey”?
MAGGIE. I’m not!
TRENT. Babe, as an actor—
PAYNE. “Babe”?
TRENT. I’m trained to read subtext and something’s going on. Subtext... fully.
PAYNE. All right, you’re on to us.
MAGGIE. No!
PAYNE. I’m not really a life insurance salesman.
MAGGIE. P—Rayne—don’t. Please.
PAYNE. Fact is... I’m an international spy.
TRENT. Payne’s brother.
PAYNE. Yep.
TRENT. A long-lost twin.
RICHARD. Yep.
TRENT. Who’s a spy.
MAGGIE (weakly). Yep.

(TRENT crosses to the closet, opens it and grabs his messenger bag. He pulls out a head shot.)

TRENT. That’s awesome! I can relate. Last season, my character posed as a drug addict to catch a dirty cop.
What I did was I wore my hair regular when I was the doctor and then slicked it back when I was undercover.

RICHARD. The Method, you see.

TRENT. Anyways, I better get back up there. Judith Fontaine wants my head shot!

PAYNE. Not the Judith Fontaine.

MAGGIE. Yes.

PAYNE. Fontaine Publishing?

RICHARD. You see? Big, big wigs, P—Rayne! Rayne.

TRENT. And the other guy is totally digging the “Floating Moon” series. He’s thinking of buying all of ’em. One for each hotel. (He exits upstairs.)

MAGGIE. Oh my God, that’s incredible! Richard—go—cover for me. I’ll be up as soon as I can.

RICHARD. Right. (He starts to exit to studio, then pauses.)

PAYNE. Two words: Food Court.

PAYNE. Richard.

RICHARD. Food Court! (He exits.)

PAYNE. An actor?

MAGGIE. Don’t start.

PAYNE. “Babe”?

MAGGIE. It’s none of your business.

PAYNE. I’m your husband.

MAGGIE. Whom I thought was deceased.

PAYNE. As evidenced by your obvious grieving.

MAGGIE. I can’t believe this.

PAYNE. Payne! Welcome home, darling! I’m so glad to see you! I’m so glad you are alive, here, right in front of me! Ready to fall into my open arms! I’ve missed you so much and— Oh! Did you grow a beard? Why, you did. It becomes you!

MAGGIE. Don’t do this.
PAYNE. Do what?
MAGGIE. You left me.
PAYNE. You kicked me out!
MAGGIE. You didn’t fight very hard to stay.
PAYNE. Your lawyer threatened me.
MAGGIE. So?
PAYNE. With a restraining order!
MAGGIE. Since when did you follow rules?
PAYNE. I would’ve been arrested.
MAGGIE. Wouldn’t have been the first time.
PAYNE. Being arrested along with a hundred other PETA protestors and being arrested for stalking are vastly different.
MAGGIE. Fine.
PAYNE. Let me get this straight. You are saying that despite what you said, despite your lawyer, the police, a restraining order, and your cousin Jake who’s got a black belt in Karate—
MAGGIE. Akido.
PAYNE. —if I really loved you, I still would have come after you?
MAGGIE. Well—when you say it like that, it sounds stupid.
PAYNE. Maggie, I left because I knew I’d blown it. I thought if I got some distance—some space—I’d be able to figure out what I wanted.
MAGGIE. Did you figure it out—what you wanted?
PAYNE. Yes. You.

(GRACIELA enters from the kitchen.)

GRACIELA. Excuse me, Ms. La Rue?
MAGGIE. Not now, Graciela.
GRACIELA. But it's—
MAGGIE. Please, Graciela, not now.

(In a huff, GRACIELA exits to the kitchen.)

PAYNE. Coming this close to death turned out to be a blessing. The time I spent with the monks, it was so peaceful, so quiet—for once, I didn’t run away from introspection, I welcomed it. What I realized, what I should have seen all along, was that my life—my work, my success—it doesn’t mean anything if I’m not with you.

MAGGIE. Oh, Payne.
PAYNE. Yes?
MAGGIE. Payne, Payne...
PAYNE (goes to kiss her). Maggie.
MAGGIE. You’re such an ass.
PAYNE. What?
MAGGIE. Did you honestly think I’d fall for that ridiculous story?
PAYNE. It’s the truth!
MAGGIE. The hell it is. You’ve probably been drying out at Betty Ford—
PAYNE. Recuperating at a monastery!
MAGGIE. Sleeping it off in a brothel.
PAYNE. With monks!
MAGGIE. Or doing time in Bangkok—
PAYNE. I herded sheep!
MAGGIE. Now you’re out of money so you thought “Good Old Maggie, I’ll crash with her—get back on my
feet—then it’s off to another high-stakes poker game and, what do you know, I wake up in Cleveland.”

PAYNE. I’ve changed.

MAGGIE. “And—whoa! Who’s this blonde and how did she wind up in my bed?!”

PAYNE. I never slept with her. Well, I mean, we slept, yeah, but we never—

MAGGIE. Sorry, Payne, but I’m not buying it. I don’t believe this “new and improved” man any more than I believe your ludicrous story. Comas. Monks. Really.

PAYNE. But—

MAGGIE. I can’t do this. (Re: studio.) I need to get up there.

PAYNE. You don’t understand.

MAGGIE. No, you don’t understand. I’m done, Payne. Done. I’m tired, I’m broke—

PAYNE. Broke? Really? I mean, I know I ran up a few debts—

MAGGIE. A few?

PAYNE. But I made investments—all that AIG stock, surely it—

MAGGIE. Maybe you really were in a coma.

PAYNE. Yes! Why don’t you—

MAGGIE. Look—wherever you were, you’re here now and your timing, as usual, is awful and—

PAYNE. It’s crazy to try and pull this off.

MAGGIE. I need you to do this. For me. Please. (Beat.)

PAYNE. OK. Just until Tuesday. OK.

(RICHARD enters.)
RICHARD. Maggie! Fitzgerald wants the entire "Floating Moon" series! Little Miss Ph.D. has given it the thumbs up and he's not even questioning the asking price.

MAGGIE. Really?! That's—that's great!

RICHARD. Where is the ledger? If I'm dreaming don't pinch me because Fitzgerald is just about to pull our tits out of the wringer—

PAYNE. Fitzgerald?

RICHARD. Mick Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald Properties.

PAYNE. You're kidding, right?

MAGGIE. No! Can you imagine—a Payne Showers in every Fitzgerald hotel. It's not just the sale—think of the publicity!

RICHARD. Now do you see the importance of your laying low?

PAYNE. No, I see the importance of doing just the opposite.

MAGGIE. Wait! You agreed to—

PAYNE. Do you have any idea who Mick Fitzgerald is?

MAGGIE. Yes! Mick Fitzgerald is the most successful real estate developer in the U.S.

RICHARD. He owns practically all of Manhattan.

MAGGIE. And Denver, and Miami, and Las Vegas.

RICHARD. He has more money than God!

PAYNE. Do either of you know how he got started?

MAGGIE. Well...no.

PAYNE. I don't believe this!

MAGGIE. What?

PAYNE. Mick Fitzgerald is connected. Very well connected. See?

RICHARD. No.

PAYNE. He's a mobster.
MAGGIE. But—isn’t Fitzgerald an Irish name?
PAYNE. Yes! You think all mobsters eat cannoli? You’ve never heard of the Shillelagh?
RICHARD. It’s an Irish walking stick.
PAYNE. It’s also the name of an Irish American “organization” that runs a good part of this city. Fitzgerald started out as a leg breaker for Mad Dog O’Reilly but he got restless, iced O’Reilly, and took control of the gang. Fitzgerald has over a dozen politicians in his pocket, half the police force on his payroll, and his enemies tend to disappear without a trace. This is the man you want to defraud by selling him the work of a dead artist who’s not really dead?
MAGGIE. Oh.
RICHARD. Crap.
PAYNE. Oh crap is right. What do you think he’s going to do when he finds out I’m alive? Probably kill me, that’s what. And both of you. We’ve got to tell him right now, before he buys anything because if he buys something, I won’t have to stay dead till Tuesday, I’ll have to stay dead forever!
MAGGIE. Oh no—
RICHARD. We didn’t know—
PAYNE. Tell him. Now.
MAGGIE. Yes, yes—
RICHARD. Right away—

(TRENT enters from studio, followed by JUDITH, MICK and EMMA. TRENT sweeps MAGGIE up in his arms and twirls her around.)

TRENT. You did it, Maggie! You’re rich! You’re rich!
MAGGIE. What?
TRENT. Mick just bought the whole *enchilada*!
MAGGIE. No!
MICK. It's a hell of an investment.
TRENT. I didn’t want to bother you and Rayne, so I did the deal for you.
MAGGIE. You—what?
TRENT. We wrote the sales contract on the back of my old head shot.
MAGGIE. Oh no!
TRENT. It’s OK, I’m using the new photo now.
RICHARD. Tell me you didn’t.
MICK. He did—
JUDITH. And I’m covering the whole thing in Sunday’s paper.
MAGGIE. You can’t!
JUDITH. I already have. I just called it in—you weren’t kidding about your phone, terrible connection, but I got through, mere minutes before the paper was put to bed. This feels like a champagne moment! Where is your girl?
TRENT. I’ll get it.

*(TRENT crosses to bar. During the following, he opens a bottle of champagne and fills eight glasses. MAGGIE runs to the telephone.)*

JUDITH. You must be Rayne. Trent told us all about you.
TRENT. Not all.
PAYNE. Ms. Fontaine, you’ve got to retract your story.
JUDITH. Whatever for?
MICK. I assure you, the check is good.
RICHARD. It’s not *that*—

MAGGIE. Damn! The phone’s dead!

JUDITH. *I just* called. From upstairs—

MAGGIE. It’s dead now!

JUDITH. My, my. From the pictures I’ve seen, you look exactly like your brother. It’s uncanny.

MAGGIE. Because they’re identical twins.

JUDITH. Still—there must be some differences?

RICHARD. Well, yes. Rayne is much thinner—

PAYNE. And I’ve got a beard—

MAGGIE. And a lisp! (*PAYNE shoots her a withering look.*) It’s very slight.

JUDITH. Really?

PAYNE. Yeth.

*(GRACIELA peeks out from the kitchen.)*

GRACIELA. Ms. La Rue?

MAGGIE. Not now, Graciela!

GRACIELA. But—

MAGGIE. Not now!

*(GRACIELA slams back into the kitchen.)*

JUDITH. Maggie, this article is a *good* thing—it’ll be a feature—full color—front page of Sunday’s “Living” section.

MAGGIE. I’m sorry—we can’t—

JUDITH. Too late, dear. It’s done—we’ve gone to press. You can’t back out of the deal now, Mick.

MICK. I don’t intend to.
JUDITH. Because no one makes a liar out of Judith Fontaine. I’ll crush them like a bug!
RICHARD. Oh God.

(MAGGIE, PAYNE and RICHARD are speechless. TRENT brings a tray of champagne-filled glasses to central coffee table. TRENT, JUDITH, MICK and EMMA take a glass.)

JUDITH. Look at them, they’re stunned. How cute. That’s exactly how I felt when I inherited my first million.
MICK (raises his glass in a toast). To art.
JUDITH. To business.
TRENT. To my new head shots! (They look to MAGGIE, who is silent.) Maggie, what is wrong with you? Even Eloise is drinking!
EMMA. Emma.
MAGGIE. I’m sorry—I don’t know how to—

(GRACIELA enters from the kitchen, in command.)

GRACIELA. Ms. La Rue.
MAGGIE. Graciela—
GRACIELA. I know, I know, “Not now”! Well, I’m sorry but it’s got to be now because we need to make some things clear because I was originally just supposed to help with drinks and dinner but now that’s all changed and I’m gonna have to renegotiate my pay rate but first I need to know exactly how many beds you got and if there is more food than just what’s out there because—
MAGGIE. What are you talking about?!!
Act I

ARTIFICE

GRACIELA. What I've been trying to tell you! I was in the kitchen and the radio was on and oh, did you know Jesus had a brother? Maybe he's mentioned in the Bible but I've never heard of him, then again I haven’t read the whole book, just some little bits here and there or like a quote on a greeting card but—

MAGGIE. Graciela!

GRACIELA. OK, OK, so that emergency signal came on—boooook— and then this guy came on, not the Jesus guy, another one—more “announcery” with a voice LIKE THIS—HELLO LADIES AND GENTLE—

MAGGIE. What did he say?!

GRACIELA. We’re snowed in.

MAGGIE. No!

GRACIELA. Uh-huh. Maybe just tonight—maybe all weekend.

PAYNE. Snowed in?

RICHARD. All weekend?!

GRACIELA. That bar better be stocked.

EMMA. But I have a lecture—

TRENT. You? I had an audition!

GRACIELA. Yeah?! I had a date!

MICK (peering at his cell phone). Damn! No signal!

PAYNE. Maggie—we should—

MICK. When I find the bloke who sold me this phone—

MAGGIE. How can we—?

MICK. I'll rip off his head!

RICHARD. Oh God—

GRACIELA. I hope you got more toilet paper.

RICHARD. Is there more champagne??

JUDITH. Everyone—stop fussing! This isn’t a tragedy—it’s a slumber party! All these people—all these
stories! This will be fun! *(She grabs her notebook from her bag.)* It has been a long, long time since I wrote a human interest piece but our little plight has the makings of a fabulous one. My reporter’s instincts are piqued. Trust me, darlings, by the time we are thawed out, none of you will have any secrets left!

*(BLACKOUT.)*

END ACT ONE
ACT II

SCENE ONE

SETTING: Later the same evening.

AT RISE: MAGGIE, PAYNE and RICHARD confer in the living room. Offstage, we hear the guests singing “Danny Boy” to a piano accompaniment.

MAGGIE. What else can we do?
RICHARD. For a murderer, Mick Fitzgerald can really sing.
MAGGIE. We’ve got to tell him the truth.
RICHARD. Did you hear him over dinner? All that stuff about “crushing his competitors.”
PAYNE. I heard. Did you, Mags?
RICHARD. And the way he kept waving his knife around!
PAYNE. Because you seemed to only have eyes for—what’s his name? Trench?
MAGGIE. Trent.
RICHARD. He’ll slit our throats while we sleep!
PAYNE. Why not just get a puppy?
MAGGIE. Shut up. Richard, we have to tell Fitzgerald.
RICHARD. Tell him what—we knowingly defrauded him? And then Judith will have to retract her “scoop” and he’ll look like a complete ass? You’re signing our death warrant.
PAYNE. Maggie, what if you changed your mind? Say my work holds too much sentimental value.
MAGGIE. I’m not that good an actress.
RICHARD. She’s a dealer, she can’t change her mind. Her reputation would be ruined.
PAYNE. But this is the work of your husband who died tragically. Wouldn’t that make a difference?
RICHARD. In New York?
MAGGIE. We have to fix it so Fitzgerald backs out of the sale.
PAYNE. He won’t.
MAGGIE. What if we slash all the paintings?
PAYNE. No!
MAGGIE. Hear me out. We slash the paintings, Fitzgerald won’t buy them, Judith will have a sensational story about mysterious vandals, we’re off the hook. I mean, I’m out my life savings but we’ll be alive.
PAYNE. What mysterious vandals? We’re snowed in.
RICHARD. It was an inside job! Rayne slashed them. He went mad, jealous over his twin brother who got all the attention, and wham!
PAYNE. Once the “vandalism” hits the news—and it will, seeing as Judith Fontaine is in the next room, someone will do a bit of research and discover that Rayne does not exist. It’ll come out that I am the artist and attempted to defraud Fitzgerald. He’ll still kill me and because all my work will have been destroyed, I won’t even get a memorial show.
MAGGIE. Richard could do it. We’ll say he had a breakdown—
RICHARD. ME? You’re the porn addict!
PAYNE. No one is defacing my work!
RICHARD. Oh God, the Food Court approaches. Like the Angel of Death.
MAGGIE. What if robbers broke in and stole the paintings?
PAYNE. Again, we are snowbound. How would they get in and out?
MAGGIE. They could...ski.
PAYNE. Ski.
RICHARD. It sounds far-fetched.
MAGGIE. James Bond did it.
PAYNE. Oh, well, if James Bond did it.
RICHARD. Those films are sooo realistic.
MAGGIE. You two have a better idea?
PAYNE/RICHARD. No.
MAGGIE. OK, after everyone goes to sleep, we’ll hide the paintings in the coal cellar. As soon as we can, we’ll move them to a storage space, file a police report, wait for Payne to be resurrected, then somehow recover the stolen work. The art will be reappraised and I can auction it off. Heck, Fitzgerald might still be interested. With you alive, the prices will be considerably lower.
PAYNE. Maybe not considerably.
MAGGIE. This way, buyers won’t boycott the gallery, Judith won’t savage us in the press, and Fitzgerald won’t have us killed. Win/win.

(Offstage, the music stops.)

RICHARD. Oh no. He’s coming! He’s coming!
MAGGIE. You’ve got to calm down.
PAYNE. Act natural.
RICHARD. I am acting natural for one about to be killed!
PAYNE. You need a mantra—something relaxing.
MAGGIE. Something that soothes you.

(MICK bursts into the room and tosses a Nerf ball at RICHARD, who fails to catch it.)

MICK. Heads up!
RICHARD. AHH! (Muttering, under his breath.) Cashmere...cashmere.

(JUDITH, EMMA, GRACIELA and TRENT enter the living room behind MICK. TRENT carries the board game "Clue." He, GRACIELA and MICK settle in to play it upstage. JUDITH and EMMA join the rest downstage. JUDITH alternates between taking notes and leafing through a coffee table book of PAYNE’s work.)

JUDITH. Rayne! There you are. If I didn’t know better, I’d think you were avoiding me.
GRACIELA. I call Miss Scarlet.
TRENT. Dibs on the professor dude.
MICK. We need a fourth.
JUDITH. We were talking about your brother’s work.
PAYNE. My brother hated interviews.
MICK. Richard, come! Join us for bloody murder!

(RICHARD rises shakily and joins the game, muttering to himself.)

RICHARD. Chinese silk. Italian leather. Tulle.
JUDITH. From what I’ve heard, Payne was quite the publicity hound.
MAGGIE. A hound certainly.
PAYNE. He was not!
TRENT. A candlestick’s not really a weapon.
MICK. Sure it is—if you use it like this. *(He mimes brain-*

- *ing RICHARD, who shakes violently.)*
PAYNE. My brother was an artist. Some say brilliant.

*(EMMA snorts.)*

JUDITH. You don’t agree?
EMMA. While Payne’s work is arresting, it lacks focus.
   It’s undisciplined. A common characteristic of the out-
sider artist.
JUDITH. Outsider artist?
EMMA. As in self-taught. No formal training—
PAYNE. What?!
EMMA. Like Grandma Moses.
MAGGIE. Actually, Payne went to art school.
PAYNE. Eight years of art school, an M.F.A. from Rutgers
   and an apprenticeship with Julian Schnabel. I’d say that
   more than qualifies as formal training. It certainly cost
   enough. Or so he told me.
TRENT. What about the top hat? Isn’t there a top hat?
GRACIELA. Different game.
RICHARD. Yes! You can’t kill someone with a top hat
   now can you?
MICK. You could smother them.
RICHARD. Egyptian cotton! Five hundred count!
JUDITH. Grandma Moses. Hmm. Why aren’t there more
   female artists?
EMMA. There are plenty. Just not well known.
JUDITH. Why, I wonder?
EMMA. Sexism.
TRENT (passing her a card). Nope.
PAYNE. Payne wasn’t sexist.
EMMA. But the art world is.
PAYNE. Payne was recognized for his talent—not his penis.
MAGGIE. Who knows? He shared both liberally.
PAYNE. He did not! How do you come up with this crap?
EMMA. Payne’s work is typical of our white, male-dominated patriarchy. Ego-driven, self-important, and oppressive to women.
PAYNE. Oppressive to women?!. He painted abstract oils on canvas.
EMMA. Exactly! Talk about gender polarization.
JUDITH. I wonder, Rayne. Was it difficult? Being Payne’s twin?
PAYNE. Why?
JUDITH. From what I’ve heard, he was an incredible egomaniac.
PAYNE. He was not!
JUDITH. Extremely self-centered.
PAYNE. Richard, was my brother self-centered?
RICHARD. Well...I’d say Payne’s world view was that it basically revolved around him—but I don’t know if I’d call that self-centered.
PAYNE. Maggie, what do you say?
MAGGIE. I don’t like to speak ill of the dead.
TRENT. What’s a conservatory?
GRACIELA. Where all the Republicans hang out.
PAYNE. But you loved him. You married him.
MAGGIE. We were separated.
PAYNE. You would’ve reconciled.
MAGGIE. How? He’s dead.
PAYNE. But if he lived—
MAGGIE. But he didn’t—
PAYNE. You would have gotten back together, don’t you think?
MAGGIE. No.
PAYNE. How can you say that?!
JUDITH. My—you are certainly protective of your brother’s memory.
MICK. A bit over protective, I’d say.
GRACIELA. Twins can be creepy that way.
PAYNE. Maggie, why not?!
MAGGIE. Because he was too much. He needed so much. Not a partner—an audience. After he died, I did a stint as the Pity Guest. During my tenure as fifth wheel, I studied the couples; well, the ones that were happy, and I saw how they complimented each other. They were really together. Solid. It wasn’t like that with us. With Payne, I had excitement and passion and despair, but never that assurance. Never that peace.
PAYNE. So that’s what you want? Peace?
MAGGIE. Yes. I do.
TRENT. Me too. War sucks.
PAYNE. I can’t believe this. The two people my brother loved most trash him.
MICK. Look, son, I understand the brotherly bond. I’ve got six m’self—all strong, strapping bruisers. Any troubles I have, it’s their trouble too.
RICHARD. Oh God.
MICK. But you’ve got to forge your own identity.
PAYNE. I have! I’m Rayne Showers, car insura—