

Something Stupid

written by

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PRESHOW:

A very rare and expensive looking painting rests against the back wall of the otherwise bare stage as audience members file in. Once everyone has taken their seats and the show is set to begin, the painting is struck by BIGGY and SMALLS and replaced by two chairs and several cardboard props resembling living room accessories (sofa, lamp, shelf, etc.) as well as a series of oil paintings made by our own Ben Hrycak.

LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE 1: THE PAINTING - APARTMENT

The stage is dark. In the darkness, we hear a voice.

VICTOR (V.)

The stage is dark. In the darkness, we hear a voice...a voice full of..... pain...pain and...heartbreak...we hear the voice boom out the first line of our show.....which I will write later... Lights up!

LIGHTS UP ON:

A twenty-something man sits alone, hunched over a laptop, typing at frantic speed. He looks like he hasn't slept in several days. This is VICTOR.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

A young, well-dressed, better-than-average looking man sits hunched over a laptop...no wait, a typewriter is way cooler...Lights down!

LIGHTS DOWN.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

(beat)

Okay. Lights up!

LIGHTS UP ON:

Victor writes on a typewriter.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

A young, unconventionally attractive man sits at his trusty typewriter pounding the keys. This is Victor... After a moment of motivated writing, Victor looks up from his typewriter and he says...

(beat)

And he says...

A young, scruffy looking man (BEN) enters carrying an easel and paint brushes. Victor has never seen this man before.

BEN

Don't worry too much about the opening line, man. Focus on the characters, and the rest will come naturally.

VICTOR

I'm sorry, who are you?

BEN

(extending his hand)

Ben. I'm a painter.

VICTOR

And what are you doing here?

BEN

Painting. I'm a painter. Your roommate made me a key. I'm on a one-month trial.

VICTOR

No, no, no. That's not a thing here. We're not Audible.

BEN

We'll have a house meeting when Ash gets back.

VICTOR

Don't make decisions like you're already living here!

BEN

I'm living, and I'm here, aren't I?

(beat)

Oh! Also, this came for you in the mail.

Ben pulls out an envelope and hands it to Victor.

VICTOR

Ash gave you a mail key, too?

BEN

How else am I gonna get my mail?

Victor opens the envelope and reads the letter. A look of panic comes over him.

VICTOR

Shit. I thought we still had another month. Of course this would happen right before I get to perform my play.

BEN

Sorry, your what-now?

ASH (OFFSTAGE)

Did somebody say dramatic entrance?!

A man covered in trash (Ash) runs in with a backpack full of, well, trash.

ASH (CONT'D)

You're not going to believe what I found in the trash today!

VICTOR

Please keep your trash away from me, Ash.

ASH

Hmm. I thought you'd be more excited to see me. Is something wrong? You need to hug it out?

VICTOR

I don't need a hug. I need you to take a look at what came for us in the mail today.

Victor forces the letter into Ash's hands.

ASH

(reading)

"Dear occupants, you have exactly one day to pay the several months rent you owe or face immediate eviction, forfeiture of security deposit, possible jail time and--

(throws away letter)

Look, it doesn't matter how much rent we owe. I've got something that's going to solve all of our problems!

Ash takes off their backpack and rummages through it, taking out an accordion.

VICTOR

Ash, we talked about this! We can't pay rent with stuff that you find in the trash.

ASH

This accordion may not be worth a lot, but if we get a whole band, we could make a killing busking out on the street!

VICTOR

Ash, I need to you to take this a little more seriously. We are about to be evicted.

ASH

You don't get it, Victor. I'm finding all kinds of crazy stuff now that The Trash Dragons let me onto their turf!

VICTOR

You're hanging out with the Trash Dragons again? You know I hate the Trash Dragons.

BEN

Who are the Trash Dragons?

ASH

Just the coolest gang in town. They control all of the city's dumpsters. Nothing goes in or out of the trash without their say. They're uh...actually about to make me a member. I'm gonna have the jacket, a cool nickname, everything.

VICTOR

Please do not let that lawless gang of juvenile delinquents corrupt you.

ASH

Victor just hates them because they tried to stab him once.

VICTOR

No, I hate them because their name is terrible, they smell like trash, and they DID stab me once! Look!

Victor shows off his scar which will be in whatever part of the body we decide is funniest.

ASH

That was a prank gone wrong, and they apologized!

(beat)

Plus, you ever see something as cool as this?! Cause I got 2.

Ash puts on dinosaur hands from his backpack.

VICTOR

I'm glad you're out having the time of your life instead of finding a way to make us some real money.

ASH

It only takes one haul, and we could be set for life. Forget about affording rent, I'm talking about the kind of rich where you can have people assassinated.

VICTOR

You wanna have someone assassinated?

ASH

No, I want the option. Anyway, I don't see you coming up with a better plan for making rent.

VICTOR

I'm pouring everything into my life's work. It'll be a huge hit, I just have to figure out the ending... And the beginning.

ASH

Oh God, you don't mean--

VICTOR

Yes! My play, which I'll finally have the chance to perform at the place where dreams come true... The Hollywood Fringe Festival!

(beat)

But alas, it's all going to waste if we can't come up with some money fast.

ASH

Actually, Mr. Smarty Smart McSmart Pants, I do have something guaranteed to get us money fast. I was saving it for last.

Ash runs offstage. They come back with a large canvas facing away from the audience.

ASH (CONT'D)

Okay, so, The Trash Dragons were talking about a drop off for this very rare and expensive painting, right? So, I got to the spot early, found a nearby dumpster, and hid inside all night. I kinda fell asleep, BUT I swear my internal clock is perfect, because I woke up to this beauty waiting for me!

Ash turns the frame around to reveal the painting.

VICTOR

(skeptical)

This is a very rare and expensive painting?

ASH

Yeah, sure, I don't know. BUT that's not the craziest part. Guess who was supposed to collect this thing.

VICTOR

The garbageman?

ASH

No. The mob.

VICTOR

(doesn't believe her)

Ha! The mob? Really, Ash?

ASH

Yeah! The drop off was at the dumpster behind Don Joey's Pizzeria, which is run by the mob.

Ben picks up the painting and examines it.

BEN

I can't believe it.

ASH

I know right? Explains why there were bullet holes in my cannoli.

Ben takes the painting.

BEN

No, I'm talking about the painting. This looks like it could be the rare missing *Painterino Fakenami*.

ASH

Oh yeah, you can really see the artistry behind it. Something that could only be painted by a true master. Very...good.

BEN

I only said it's rare. I didn't say it's good. I could paint that in an hour.

VICTOR

If someone like you could paint it, what makes it so rare?

BEN

It has nothing to do with the quality of the painting itself. It's all about the life of the painter. *Painterino Fakenami* was born in a dank prison cell and had his hands smashed by boulders as a child for not praying to God hard enough. Each painting he made took 20 years to finish, and he only completed three while he was alive. One of them is in the Met. One of them got destroyed by a warlord. And the third one has yet to be found. That basically makes it priceless.

ASH

Heyo! Guess who's buying groceries at Erewhon from now on!

Ash turns to Victor for a high five. He ignores him.

VICTOR

Ash, please, that painting's probably a fake. The mobs involved and it was in the dumpster.

(beat)

Ben, can't you tell if this is real or not?

BEN

Feels real to me, but what do I know? You're going to need to get an actual art appraiser's opinion on it to be sure.

Ben hits his vape.

BEN (CONT'D)

I actually know a guy.

Ben hands a card to Victor.

BEN (CONT'D)

His name is Giuseppe Artolini. He's an obscenely wealthy art collector who has the sharpest eye in the whole art world. If he says it's real, he might buy it from you for millions.

VICTOR
Millions? Maybe we should check this Giuseppe Artolini out.

Ash snatches the business card out of Victor's hand.

ASH
Oh he's a Mulholland Doctor too? This guy is accomplished!

VICTOR
No, Ash, he lives on Mulholland Drive.

ASH
Right, that does make more sense. Come on!

VICTOR
What, where are we going?

ASH
To sell the painting, dingus!

VICTOR
I can't. I have a rehearsal space booked, I'm not done working out my one-man-show. My team needs me.

ASH
What team? Your play is a one man show written by, directed by, and starring you. You decide when you want to rehearse.

VICTOR
Fine. I'll figure out another time. Now put me down and let's go.

Ash exits. Victor stays a moment, his blood pressure rising. Ben cuts the silence.

BEN
Hey, while you're gone, can I borrow your shoes for a piece I'm working on?

VICTOR
Don't push it.

Victor exits.

LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE 2 - THE ART HUNTER - LAVISH MANSION

LIGHTS UP ON:

Priceless busts (made from cardboard) sit atop marble pillars (also made from cardboard) forming a lavish mansion set. A pile of money is stacked on the floor. A FRENCH (non-negotiable) MAID dusts the money pile.

Ash & Victor enter.

VICTOR

Wow, you were right. Rich people really don't lock their doors when they live in the hills.

ASH

It's not breaking and entering if there's no breaking.

VICTOR

This house looks like the real deal. We need to act like we fit in here.

ASH

Oh don't worry about that. I'm great with first impressions.

Ash gesticulates wildly, knocking over a bust.

MAID

(angry French)

Qu'est-ce que tu fous? Pour qui tu te prends?
/ What the heck are you doing? Who do you think you are?

ASH

(slowly and loudly)

Sorry, I don't speak Swedish.

MAID

(angrier French)

Je ne veux pas te parler.
/ I don't want to talk to you.

The French Maid storms out.

VICTOR

Ash, we've got a lot on the line here. You can't mess this up for us. Just hand me the painting, and I'll take care of buttering up the rich asshole.

ASH

You think I can't butter somebody up? I'm the king and queen of buttering my loyal subjects up.

VICTOR

I'm serious. I'll take the lead on this one.

ENTER a flashy-dressed, vaguely European man. This is GIUSEPPE ARTOLINI. He holds a golden goblet and talks into a burner cell phone.

GIUSEPPE

(into phone)

--And I told to him, listen, Jeffrey, if you can think of a better way to illegally transport drugs into the country, then next time, you can host the orgy.

(beat - notices Ash/Victor)

I'll have to call you back, Mr. President.

Giuseppe gets rid of the burner cell phone.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

Ciao bella! Welcome to my lavish mansion. I am Giuseppe. Can I offer you some cocaine?

VICTOR

No, no.

ASH

Just had some, actually.

GIUSEPPE

Well, then you must try some elephant blood!

Giuseppe dumps the goblet down Victor's throat.

VICTOR

Wow! I did not think that was going to be so... viscous.

GIUSEPPE

Do you not feel the strength of the elephant flowing through you?

VICTOR

Something's flowing, and I'm trying really hard to keep it all in one place right now.

GIUSEPPE

Bah! I do not wish to talk to weak men.

Giuseppe rips his goblet away and finishes it with a big chug. He changes his focus to Ash.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

You there. Hello. I am Giuseppe. That is my name, what is yours?

ASH

Hello, Mr. Giuseppe, I'm Trash...wait, shit--

GIUSEPPE

Your name is Trash?

ASH

Sure. Yeah. I'm Trash. No last name. No middle name either.
It's a Trash family tradition.

GIUSEPPE

Eh, like Madonna. That's so vogue of you.

(sips blood)

And this tiny man, who is he?

ASH

This is my apprentice, Victor... Van Goff. As in *the* Van Goff.

GIUSEPPE

Oh impressive. Although I think it's pronounced *vanHoGHgh*.

VICTOR

It's Van Go.

GIUSEPPE

Do not correct me, piggy boy. I do not care to hear any more words come out of your head... your head... yes, your head which would look so good mounted on my wall.

Giuseppe starts eyeballing the measurements of Victor's skull. Victor tries not to squirm.

VICTOR

Ash. Maybe you should take over-

ASH

Mr. Artolini, we were hoping you could use your expertise to tell us if this painting is real.

GIUSEPPE

Ah! But of course I can appraise your painting. How else do you think I made my vast wealth? Certainly wasn't from illegal drug trading. Ha ha ha.

ASH

I can't wait to see what you make of this, then.

Ash uncovers the painting.

GIUSEPPE

(spit takes blood)

Oh me-oh my-oh! Is that the missing Painterino Fakenami?!

ASH

So...you've heard of him? That's not a totally made up name?

GIUSEPPE

I studied Painterino Fakenami at evil billionaire art school. I even made love for the first time underneath a portrait of him. We made eye contact the whole time.

ASH

HAHA great! So, I bet you'd love to add another rare piece to your "doin' it" collection, right?

GIUSEPPE

Hmm, yes, this would look good hanging above the bed of my 4th guest room. The problem with Painterino is there are so many fakes of his work... But I know a way to tell if a painting is real or fake.

Giuseppe holds the painting up to his face. Like a bloodhound, he sniffs every inch of the painting. He takes out a vial of coke and does a line on the frame of the painting.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

It's real.

ASH

It's real?!

GIUSEPPE

I give it Giuseppe's official "very rare and expensive" seal of approval.

Giuseppe humps the painting to "seal" it.

VICTOR

That's amazing! How much is it worth?

GIUSEPPE

The missing Painterino? This painting is nearly priceless. Personally, I would pay a few million. 5 million.

VICTOR

We're rich! We're rich! We're rich!

GIUSEPPE

Mmm. I do not like seeing this one so happy.

They collect themselves. Giuseppe hands back the painting and motions to someone offstage.

ASH

Sorry about him. Mr. Artolini, I accept your offer.

GIUSEPPE

What offer?

ASH

Your offer to buy the painting for millions of dollars.

GIUSEPPE

I did not make such an offer.

ASH

But you just said--

GIUSEPPE

I merely said I *would* pay millions. The painting is worth that much, yes. I want the painting, yes. But you see, I am no longer a mere art *buyer*...

The French Maid enters, handing Giuseppe a rifle.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

I am an art *hunter*.

ASH

Wait, what?

GIUSEPPE

When you are as rich and accomplished as I am, you need to find new things to excite you. Right now, it's hunting men for sport. Your friend makes an annoying squeaking noise- it would be satisfying to see his head mounted on a wall...

(beat)

Right next to Painterino Fakenami's missing painting!

He points the rifle at Ash and Victor.

VICTOR

Mr. Artolini, there's no need to hunt us. In fact, since you're so enamored with the painting, why don't we just give it to you for free? Actually, we'll pay you to take it.

GIUSEPPE

Foolish boy, look at my lavish mansion. Look at my pile of money! I have everything I need. I live only for the hunt!

Giuseppe fires off a warning shot.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

That was your official warning! You have a five-minute head start.

VICTOR

Mr. Artolini, please we--

GIUSEPPE

(blows dog whistle)

I'm calling my dogs.

VICTOR

No! I'm allergic to dogs!

Victor runs offstage with the painting. Ash stays.

GIUSEPPE

You do not wish to be hunted, tiny one?

ASH

I wasn't sure if you were hunting me too, or just Victor--

GIUSEPPE

Four minutes!

Ash runs out. Giuseppe laughs evilly.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

Ah ha ha ha ha! Ah Ha hA HAhahaHA!

(yelling to offstage)

Francesca, bring me my hunting hat.

(to self)

We have a painting to hunt.

LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE 3 - FRINGE REHEARSAL - THEATER

The set is now an unnecessarily detailed recreation of Shirley Dawn Studio that will probably not be worth the effort it takes to make. A pile of cardboard lays in the background. A diminutive stage manager (ZOË) furiously colors in a cardboard prop.

VICTOR (OFFSTAGE)

We should be safe to hide out here for a bit.

ASH (OFFSTAGE)

The appraiser guy won't find us here?

Ash and Victor appear from behind the cardboard curtain.

VICTOR

Ash, it's Shirley Dawn Studio. Nobody comes here if they can afford a better theater.

Zoë leaps into action, barely holding back their rage.

ZOË

Victor! Where have you been?! I have been holding this room for an hour. Do you know how much this space is to rent?!

VICTOR

Zoë, I don't have time for this! We're kinda being hunted for sport here.

ZOË

What?

ASH

I stole this very rare and expensive painting easily worth millions that many people would kill to get their hands on. Priceless really.

VICTOR

You really need to stop telling people about the painting.

ZOË

And you really need to be at rehearsal. I had to kiss so much ass during the meeting with the Fringe Festival organizer.

VICTOR

Wait, I scheduled a meeting for today?

ZOË

You didn't schedule it, I did. Things are not looking good. They might not be able to include your play in the lineup.

VICTOR

Zoë, what did you say to piss them off?!

ZOË

It wasn't me, it's you! They said they need to see a finished script before they can let you in to the festival.

VICTOR

Absolutely not. My script is still a work in progress. I need at least 12 more drafts before I am comfortable showing it to anyone, let alone the legendary figureheads and creative geniuses behind The Hollywood Fringe Festival!

ZOË

You're going to have to come up with something by Friday.

VICTOR

Oh, how am I supposed to sit down and figure out what the meaning of my life's work is at a time like this?

Victor drops his head and covers his face with his knees for an uncomfortable amount of time.

Zoë shakes their head. Ash approaches Victor.

ASH

Vicky, you doing alright over there?

(to Zoë)

I don't know what to do.

ZOË

He does this at every rehearsal. It's part of the "process".

(beat)

I'm gonna give you some space, Victor. Let me know when you need someone to blame when everything goes wrong.

Zoë exits. After a moment, Victor comes to.

VICTOR

Okay. I just need to work out the ending of my show, after that my script should be perfect.

ASH

You know, Vic, I don't want to interrupt your process either. You want anything from the vending machine while I'm out?

VICTOR

No Ash, I want you to stay. It's time for you to see the real me. This show is based on my life...a life full of pain and rejection.

Ash laughs.

ASH
 Oh, sorry. You're serious.
 (beat)
 Is it like...funny though?

VICTOR
 I don't write "comedies," I write manifestos.
 (beat)
 Look, I don't really have many people in my life I trust
 right now, and I would actually appreciate your feedback.
 Plus, this is the only safe place for us to hide right now.

ASH
 Alright, fine! Move me, o brilliant writer thee.

Ash takes a seat in the audience.

VICTOR
 (dramatic, in character)
 Without art, there is no heartbreak...and without heartbreak,
 there is no art...quote...me.

Victor takes a dramatic pause. Then:

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 Hello--

ASH
 Hi!

*Victor glares at Ash who zips her lips. He returns to
 his monologue:*

VICTOR
 My name is Victor. Tonight, I shall be your guide as I take
 you on a journey of pain and suffering, of success and
 failure, of artist...and art. Come with me as I reveal to
 you... *The Consequences of HeARTbreak.*

*Victor pulls out a remote and clicks it. A slideshow
 projects behind him. It reads: "the consequences of
 heARTbreak" in fancy, overly dramatic letters.*

ASH
 Woo! Great show! No notes.

Ash applauds and gets up to leave.

VICTOR
 (breaking character)
 Ash, sit back down, it's just starting.

*Next slide: A picture of Victor (age 6) sitting alone
 on the reading mat looking melancholy.*

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Age 6. My class was to put on a production of *Charlotte's Web*, and I was perfectly lined up to play my dream role: Wilbur... but alas, as always, life got in the way of my art.

Next slide: Victor (age 6) in a synagogue.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

On audition day, my mother forced me to attend my cousin David's bris, causing me to miss the audition. The ceremony was an apt metaphor- for as little David's foreskin was removed, so too were my dreams of a life of stardom. I never got to play Wilbur, and I never forgave my mom for that. Because of that, I swore off acting and decided to never let my mom schedule my life again.

Next slide: Victor (age 16) in a theater class where he is the only boy. Every student but him is onstage goofing around while he sulks in the audience.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Age 16. Freshman year theater class. While everyone else played Zip, Zap, Zop, I sat offstage, discovering the joys of writing. I wrote my first script in that class. A little one act play about gentrification. Childish stuff really. I showed the class my script and everyone loved it. I even had the prettiest girl in school vying for the lead...

Next slide: Photo of Genevieve (age 16).

ASH

Kinda weird to have pics of these high school girls, man.

Victor pulls out some puppets.

VICTOR

Shush. I need to focus on this next part.

(as puppet "Genevieve")

"Oh Victor, you're so strong and handsome and such a smart writer. Won't you please let me star in your play? Please?"

(as puppet Victor)

"Genevieve, please, I would never sacrifice my artistic integrity over some petty crush."

(as puppet "Genevieve")

"I could totally be your muse, you know."

(addressing audience again)

I gave into my desires and cast her as the lead, but alas life would once again keep me from mounting my vision.

ASH

Let me guess, she dumped you?

VICTOR

She drowned!

Next slide: A hot tub with a body floating in it.

ASH

Oh shit. You got a photo of this?!

VICTOR

(as puppet "Genevieve")

"Wow. I can't believe we're in Adam Zabner's hot tub right now. This is so cool."

(as puppet "Adam")

"You know what would be cool? Is if we see how long we can hold our breath."

(as puppet "Victor")

"No, I don't think that'd be safe."

(as puppet "Genevieve")

"Come on Vic, you never have fun. I'm going to hold my breath until you come and join us! Come on, I double dog dare you!"

(as regular Victor)

I resisted the double dog dare, and she stayed underwater until she drowned. My dear Genevieve died, and because of it, the world never got to see how brilliant my play was.

ASH

Feel like one of those is maybe a bigger deal than the other.

VICTOR

After that artistic heartbreak, I decided to swear off love and all worldly distractions to devote myself solely to art. One year ago, I started preparing the very show you are watching now.

Next slide: A picture of Victor at his current age and exact same costume, onstage at Shirley Dawn. This will be a very funny visual gag I promise.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

It was the story of ME as told through my many failures. I made the mistake of casting my friend, Shaun, as the lead role of "Me".

Next slide: An actor dressed exactly like Victor reciting a monologue while Victor looks disgusted.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

We were the best of friends, we agreed on everything. Everything except for the ending of the play. He felt like my character was too shut off, and needed to accept the people around him. I rejected that instantly. Shaun refused to perform unless I changed the ending, so we had to postpone the show indefinitely.

Next slide: Victor's friend giving him the finger as he walks out.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

It was then I realized why everything always went wrong for me. It wasn't my fault at all! It was my collaborators! I swore off all of life's distractions and devoted myself solely to art, like my life model, the great Bob Fosse. I knew that my friends and family wouldn't understand until they saw the final result. Without this show...I'm nothing but a fraud. I guess that's the end, I don't know.

Victor drops his head and lets out an overly dramatic gasp. A long and uncomfortable pause follows. Then:

ASH

...So, what are you thinking the set's gonna look like?

VICTOR

What do you mean? This is the set.

ASH

You mean the chair?

VICTOR

Yeah.

ASH

The set is just one chair?!

VICTOR

I have been toying with adding a second chair. We're also making some cardboard props.

ASH

Victor, nobody's gonna wanna pay to see a show where the set is just two chairs and some props made out of cardboard. You know, sometimes you just don't have to make a play.

Two gruff men enter, one big (SMALLS), one small (BIGGY).

SMALLS

Jesus, what a dump. People actually come to see plays here?

VICTOR

Can I help you?

BIGGY

'Scuse me, my thespian friends, my associate and I would like to have a word with the two of you'se.

VICTOR

No, no, no. I have this space booked for at least 10 more minutes.

SMALLS

We'll be asking the questions from now on. Are either o' you'se a dumpsta diva by the name o' Ash?

ASH

(brushing garbage off)

Who wants to know?

BIGGY

We believe you may have somethin' dat belongs to our boss, Don Joey. He's not the kind of guy you cross if you value your life.

Ash lightly drops the painting behind them, then takes their jacket off and drops it on top of it.

BIGGY (CONT'D)

It's a very rare and priceless paintin'.

SMALLS

Looks like a little gremlin'. One real eye, one fake one.

ASH

I...don't know what you're talking about.

BIGGY

Don't play dumb, sweetheart. We seen you'se lurkin' in our dumpsta before.

SMALLS

You n' those no good hoodlums...the Trash Demons or whateva.

ASH

Trash Dragons.

SMALLS

Oh, so you do know what we're talkin' 'bout?

Smalls pulls out a snub nose pistol. Biggy pats his various pockets but can't seem to find his gun.

SMALLS (CONT'D)

(quietly, to Biggy)

Biggy, what're you doin'? Pull your gun out.

BIGGY

(quietly, to Smalls)

I can't find it. I think I left it back at their apartment.

SMALLS

(quietly, to Biggy)

For God's sake, Biggy, this is exactly what got us kicked out of the Chechen mob!

BIGGY

(quietly, to Smalls)

I know, I know, I'm sorry. I usually do my check before I leave: phone, keys, wallet, gun, but I was in such a rush I-

ASH

Do you want us to wait 'til you guys are done talking or--

Biggy points a finger gun at Ash and Victor.

BIGGY

Pipe down, sweetheart! Now, tell us: where'd ya stash the paintin'? 'Cause it wasn't at your little apartment.

SMALLS

Yeah! We searched that place high and low. I looked high and he looked low.

VICTOR

You were at our apartment?!

BIGGY

Oh yeah. We "dropped by" your place. We had a nice, "long chat" with that roommate o' yours, Ben, too.

ASH

NO!! What did you do to him?

SMALLS

What? We chatted. He's a pretty cool guy. Decent painter too! You shoulda just had Ben paint you something unique.

VICTOR

Huh. I actually didn't consider that.

Smalls cocks his gun and points it at Victor.

SMALLS

I think there's a lot of things you haven't considered. Like what might happen to you if you don't give us the painting.

ASH

I would rather DIE than give you the painting.

VICTOR

I wouldn't!

BIGGY

Alright, enough pleasantries! Give 'em all you got, Smalls!

Smalls clicks the trigger of his gun, but it doesn't go off. He waits a beat then tries again. No luck.

BIGGY (CONT'D)
 (quietly, to Smalls)
 What's the hold up?

SMALLS
 (quietly, to Biggy)
 My gun's jammed.

BIGGY
 (quietly, to Smalls)
 Well, un-jam it!

SMALLS
 (quietly, to Biggy)
 Oh, gee, didn't think o' that! Thanks for your input.

BIGGY
 (full volume)
 Don't yell at me during a shakedown! It makes us look unprofessional.

SMALLS
 (full volume)
 Don't talk to me about "unprofessional", Mr. Forgets-His-Gun!

BIGGY
 Okay now you're undercutting my authority. I'm supposed to be the one in charge here!

The two goons start fighting, blaming the other one for screwing up. In the midst of their fight, Zoë furiously enters and takes the gun from Smalls.

ZOË
 Excuse me, gentlemen! Prop guns have to be properly checked before they can be cleared for rehearsal use. I'll be taking that.

BIGGY
 Hey, that ain't a toy, doll face--

ZOË
 Darn right, it's not! It's a safety hazard, which is why we have protocols in place for where to properly store them.

VICTOR
 Zoë, seriously! You don't want to get involved with these guys. Get out of here while you still can!

ZOË
 (points gun at Victor)
 No! I am sick of you telling me what to do, you minimally talented, overly confident, involuntarily celibate hack!

You blame me for everything that goes wrong, and I'm done with it! You are going to start treating me with respect or--

Zoë accidentally fires the gun towards Victor. The projected screen changes slides to show a bullet hole.

ZOË (CONT'D)

Holy shit!

VICTOR

(running away)

Why do people keep trying to kill me?!

ASH

Quick Vic, exit stage left.

Victor and Ash haul ass offstage. The two goons chase after them but trip over each other.

After a moment, they get up, looking dejected.

SMALLS

Well, Biggy, Don Joey's gonna kick us outta the mob for sure. That painting was our last chance at getting made.

BIGGY

What's-a-matter with us, Smalls? This is the fourth mob we been kicked outta this month.

ZOË

Um, excuse me, gentlemen... you're actually with the mob? I figured you were in a cheap production of *Guys and Dolls*. What family are you with, Gambino, Lucchese, Dolci?

SMALLS

Why is Italian everybody's go to? There's more than one kind of mob. We aren't in any of them okay, lady?!

BIGGY

Yeah... we tried them all. None of them let us stick around.

SMALLS

Don't tell her that!

BIGGY

Oops. I mean... None of them was tough enough for us two.

ZOË

Wait, nobody wanted you two? I mean you're not perfect, but with a bit of direction you could be real.....Hey...what if we started our own mob?! I think I've learned enough as a stage manager to make the jump to kingpin. I'm pretty good at intimidating people too, look!

(mimes stomping a fool)
 ARE YOU WEARING A FUCKING WIRE, YOU LITTLE RAT FUCK?!!

SMALLS
 (not having it)
 Thanks, toots, we appreciate the offer but we've actually got a callback with a super important mob boss to make, so just give me the gun or things are gonna get messy.

Zoë shoots Smalls in the foot. Smalls falls, wailing:

SMALLS (CONT'D)
 AH! HOLY MOTHER OF--

ZOË
 Listen, you mugs. I'm not some errand boy or stool pigeon. I am a stage manager, meaning I GET SHIT DONE. You wanna sit on your asses and hope the boss notices you? There's the door. You wanna actually make something of yourself? You follow me.

BIGGY
 It's not that easy! You gotta work your way up the ranks first! We've been putting in the time, you haven't.

ZOË
 In this life you can't just wait around for someone to make you a made man. You've got to make yourself a made man, man.

SMALLS
 Biggy, I think this is an offer we can't refuse.

ZOË
 Now, what's say we go get us that very rare and expensive painting?

Zoë puts the gun away.

ZOË (CONT'D)
 After we get the painting I think we should put Victor's balls in a vice and shove his mouth full of pages from his shit-ass script. And after we can--

The three exit as Zoë energetically listing off more gruesome torture tactics.

Giuseppe runs in, now dressed in fancy hunting gear.

GIUSEPPE
 Damn! Where are they? They still had this room booked for five minutes... What a waste of \$37 an hour.

Giuseppe hangs his head disappointed. Suddenly, he catches a whiff of something in the air.

He investigates the smell until he discovers a piece of Ash's trash on the ground.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

Yes! I knew it! A fresh clue. Now-a, to-a-read-a-clue-a!

(reading)

If found, please return to Ash at 8008 Less St.

(beat)

He he he. Boobless.

(quietly)

Oh ho ho, the hunt continues!

Giuseppe makes a bugle call and runs offstage.

LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE 4 - ON THE RUN - APARTMENT (RANSACKED)

The chairs have been tipped over and all of the cardboard props are upside down. Victor and Ash rush into the apartment. Ash holds the painting.

ASH

Phew, okay, I think we're safe for now.

VICTOR

No, we're not. Look, they turned this place upside down!

Victor fixes the cardboard furniture right side up.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

We're not even safe in our own house now thanks to that painting.

ASH

Ugh, I know. I can't even look at this thing right now.

Ash sets the painting down against the back wall, next to another canvas facing away from the audience. The backs of the paintings look identical. Wink wink.

Ben enters the room with a bowl of cereal.

BEN

Hey, did you guys invite the mob over? 'Cause if so, you just missed them.

VICTOR

They literally just tried to kill us!

BEN

Hm. That doesn't really sound like them. They seemed bummed that they missed you. They actually left you a gift.

Ben hands Victor a pipe bomb with a present bow on it. Victor stares at the bomb, shocked.

VICTOR

Is this a bomb?!

Victor freaks out and runs offstage with the bomb.

ASH

What's the big idea? You workin' with the mob? You didn't tell those goons where we were, did you, you little piggie?

Ash puts a knife up to Ben's throat.

BEN

Come on, I would never squeal!

Ash pulls their knife back. Victor enters.

VICTOR

Wait, how *did* the mob find out we'd be at rehearsal?

ASH

Yeah! Awfully suspicious, Ben! How do you explain that?

Ash puts their knife back up to Ben's throat.

BEN

It's literally the only thing written on Victor's wall calendar.

Ash pulls their blade back.

ASH

I knew you were a stand-up guy Ben.

BEN

Thanks. You guys sell that painting?

VICTOR

No! That art appraiser didn't want to buy the painting. He decided to hunt us for sport instead! Thanks again for the amazing recommendation!

ASH

And I thought you were a stand-up guy.

BEN

Oh my bad, I never met that appraiser. I passed the rec down from Quinn.

VICTOR

Who's Quinn??

BEN

Wait, you haven't met Quinn yet? HEY, Q!

A scruffy man wearing sunglasses, QUINN, walks in with a bowl of cereal.

QUINN

Sup.

BEN

Crazy you haven't seen him. He's been living here as long as I have.

ASH

Ooh! New roommate!

VICTOR

Great! Our apartment has now become a hostel filled with random guys.

BEN

Quinn's not a "random guy." He's my long term non-committal partner.

VICTOR

What's that mean?

QUINN

We do a beddy pod. People fall asleep to it.

ASH

(holding back tears)

That's so sweet.

QUINN

By the way, I think it's really dope you guys are squatting here. I'll help you hold down the fort, whatever it takes.

VICTOR

We are not squatting here! I don't know if it's even safe for us to stay here much longer. There's a ton of people coming after us and this painting. We've got to go on the run.

ASH

Oh, we're officially on the run?! I've always wanted to be on the run! Wait, lemme go put on my "on the run" jacket.

Ash runs offstage to their room.

BEN

I don't really see the need to leave to be honest. I actually hit it off with those mob guys. They were weirdly well versed in impressionist paintings.

(gesturing to the canvas)

Also, a few of my oil paintings are almost done, I gotta stick around to make sure they dry properly.

QUINN

Plus, no threat can stack up to the power of friendship!

Quinn gives Ben a high five.

VICTOR

Alright, stay here if you want. We just need to find a place to sell this thing quick.

QUINN

I might know a place.

Quinn pulls out a card and hands it to Victor.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Private Collector Con. It's going down right now. All the fanciest art collectors will be there.

VICTOR

Private Collector Con in Las Vegas?

QUINN

Yeah. How'd you know that?

VICTOR

I'm from Vegas.

BEN

You're from Vegas?

QUINN

I didn't know people could be from Vegas.

BEN

A lot of bad people live in Vegas. You might need protection.

ASH (OFFSTAGE)

Did someone say protection?!

Ash somersaults onstage wearing broken sunglasses.

ASH (CONT'D)

I think I might I know someone who could help with that.

VICTOR

Oh lord, no! Please don't say the Trash Dragons.

ASH

You told me they were too tough! That hanging out with them would bring us no good! Well, look where we are now! Spit has hit the fan, my friend, and there's only one gang that can protect us. The Trash Dragons are our eyes and ears on the street, our muscle when we're in heat, our spirit that can't be beat, our--

VICTOR

Don't make me regret getting you that rhyming dictionary for Christmas, Ash. And I will not be going to The Trash Dragons for help. Aren't they the reason we're in this mess in the first place? Why get them involved?

ASH

The Trash Dragons have a history of fighting off the mob. It's how they gained control of the city's dumpsters.

VICTOR

Yeah. I'm sure there was a big fight over those dumpsters.

Victor picks up the wrong painting. It's almost identical to the famous Fakenami painting.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Look, let's just get in my car. Maybe we won't be followed if we move quick.

Ash snatches the painting from Victor.

ASH

No. The mob goons definitely have our plates down. We need protection.

(beat)

This painting may have started all our problems, but now it's gonna solve them. All we gotta do is find the Trash Dragons. Lights down!

(beat)

...Lights down!

LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE 5 - THE STREETS, TRASH DRAGON TERRITORY

The stage is bare except for a large cardboard dumpster. Written on the dumpster in spray paint is: "TRASH DRAGONS ONLY." Ash enters, Victor follows.

ASH

This is one of the usual spots The Trash Dragons and I kick it at when nothing's going on. Even the baddest of the baddest of the baddest of bad guys know not to step onto their turf.

VICTOR

(looking around)

Ash, there's clearly nobody here. Let's just go hide somewhere until the heat dies down.

ASH

We haven't even checked yet, silly! Haha- *snort*

(beat)

Don't ever tell anyone you heard me do that.

Ash walks up to the dumpster and does a secret knock.

We hear the secret Trash Dragon whistle. Behind the dumpster, synchronized snapping is heard.

One by one, a gang of juvenile delinquents leap out from behind the dumpster with a synchronized balletic grace. These are the TRASH DRAGONS.

The first member is SNEAKERS, the leader of the gang, who rolls onto the stage!

ASH (CONT'D)

Is that you Sneakers? Don't be sneaking up on me like you do!

Second is BOOMBOX, the tech expert.

ASH (CONT'D)

Boombox! I'd know your whistle from a mile away.

Last is CARSEAT, the youngest and most innocent member of the Dragons. Carseat does a small tap dance jig.

ASH (CONT'D)

Carseat! Oh my god! Hi!

CARSEAT

(sweetly)

Hi Ash!

(beat)

I mean, what're you doin' on our turf, buddy boy?

BOOMBOX

We warned you to stop snoopin' in our dumpsters.

ASH

I wasn't snooping! We need your help. It's a long story-

SNEAKERS

You got thoity seconds to explain yourself.

ASH

Okay! Carseat, remember how you told me not to go anywhere near that painting at Don Joey's Pizzeria because it was super valuable and super important to the mob or something?

CARSEAT

Yeah. I remember. How come?

ASH

Well, I stole that painting from Don Joey's Pizzeria, and now the mob is chasing after us because it's super valuable and super important to them or something.

SNEAKERS

Oof ba boof!

BOOMBOX

Zoom ba boom!

CARSEAT

Ash, you stole from the Dragons?

ASH

What? No! I stole that painting from the mob.

BOOMBOX

That painting was on Trash Dragon territory, makin' it Trash Dragon property. And you ain't a Trash Dragon, buddy boy.

CARSEAT

Hey, cool it, guys. Ash has always been good to us before. He's basically an honorary memba.

SNEAKERS

Honorary schmonorary. He took out our trash without askin' if it was okey dokey foist. That goes against our code.

BOOMBOX

He's bad news. We made peace with the mob and he goes and gets them all riled up like this? Over a painting?

ASH

The mob's the least of our problems. You should be worried about the rich psycho hunting us and the painting for sport.

CARSEAT

Boy!

BOOMBOX

Boy!

SNEAKERS

Crazy boy. See, this is precisely why we haven't let you into the gang yet, Ash. You're always making trouble. Well that, and you put your buggin' roommate down as a reference, and he did not have nice things to say about you.

ASH

Et tú, Vic-Tor?

VICTOR

What was I supposed to do, lie?!

SNEAKERS

Even now, you're blamin' somebody else for your own cruddy mistakes! And instead of trying to fix them on your own, you've come runnin' to us, crying all helpless-like.

ASH

Okay, yes, I messed up, but you're the only people I have. Every one of you joined this group because you didn't have anyone else in your life, either. I'm here because I need the help of you, my real family. I'd do the same for any of you!

Ash initiates the secret handshake with Carseat.

ASH (CONT'D)

Bust to dust?

CARSEAT

Spunk to junk.

They do the secret Trash Dragon handshake.

ASH

Alright, here's the plan. We'll need protection at Private Collector Con in Vegas. We'll grease up some high roller, sell this thing for a shit ton of money, and get everyone a nice payout.

BOOMBOX

Sorry, buddy boy. Our protection only extends to OFFICIAL members of the gang. And honorary schmonorary members don't count.

SNEAKERS

Yeah. I'm leader o' this gang, and I say no dice.

Sneakers pulls out a switchblade. Boombox pulls out a tire iron. The two inch closer to Ash. Just as they're about to rough them up, they are interrupted by the sound of Zoë, Biggy, and Smalls entering. Everyone ducks behind the dumpster to avoid being noticed.

BIGGY

I got a bad feelin' about dis part o' town, boss.

SMALLS

Yeah, it ain't safe here this time o' night, boss. Dumpsters are Trash Dragon territory.

ZOË

Remember: you're big scary goons. They live in the dumpsters. How tough can they be?

SNEAKERS

You're about to find out!

The Trash Dragons leap to center stage with a synchronized balletic grace. The mobsters tremble in fear. Zoë is unmoved.

CARSEAT

We're a gang, fruitcake.

SNEAKERS

With knives.

BOOMBOX

And tire irons.

SNEAKERS

And highly synchronized dance moves!

The Trash Dragons strike a highly synchronized move.

SNEAKERS (CONT'D)

We wanna know what you're doin' on our turf.

ZOË

We're chasing after a couple morons who stole these gentlemen's very rare and priceless painting.

SNEAKERS

(cracking knuckles)

You mean our very rare and priceless painting?

BIGGY

That paintin' belonged to our boss, Don Joey!

BOOMBOX

Then what was it doin' on Trash Dragon turf?

SMALLS

It wasn't s'posed t'be. Those lousy garbagemen threw it out!

CARSEAT

(holding up switchblade)

Don't go dissin' our garbagemen brethren unless you wanna dance.

BIGGY

We don't wanna dance! We don't wanna dance!

BOOMBOX

(pulling out tire iron)

I think they wanna dance.

SNEAKERS

Okay, Trash Dragons... Let's dance!

The Dragons circle the mobsters while striking different synchronized balletic poses to music.

ZOË

Alright boys. You wanna prove yourselves to the Dragons? Now's the time to show your stuff. Dance cue, go!

The mobsters retaliate with a more brutish style. There's a tap dance battle. Then everyone fights.

Ash and Victor come out from behind the dumpster. Ash hands Victor the painting.

ASH

Hold this!

VICTOR

What're you doing?!

ASH

I gotta get in there and save my friends!

Ash does a tap dance jig, and blindly stabs their switchblade into the middle of the fight circle. Everyone freezes as Boombox lets out a cry.

BOOMBOX

Oogily ooh!

The group backs away, revealing Boombox freezes, arms outstretched, life leaving his eyes.

CARSEAT

Ash...you sliced and diced Boombox!

SNEAKERS

Minced and mashed.

BOOMBOX

Over and out.

Boombox collapses into Carseat's arms, dead.

ASH

I'm sorry, it was an accident! I was trying to help, I--

VICTOR

Ash, we need to go!

Ash runs offstage with Victor. Everyone mourns the loss of Boombox. The goons remove their hats.

ZOË

I'm sorry about your friend. But they're up in that big dump up in the sky now.

CARSEAT

What are we s'posed to do? We can't be a gang with only two membas.

SNEAKERS

Plus, Boombox was our choreographer. We really don't got that many moves in our repertoire.

ZOË

I may have a proposition for you.

(beat)

You two are clearly capable in a fight. What if you tagged along with us while we try to get that painting? We'll need the extra muscle cause *these* two goons haven't exactly proven themselves the bravest fighters.

SMALLS

It's true. I got scared of a leaf earlier.

SNEAKERS

Are you saying you want us to join your crew? Cause I'm the leader here, and I ain't exactly ready to give this spot up.

ZOË

I see it more as our two crews merging to form one BIG crew.

SNEAKERS

Where I'm leader of the gang.

ZOË

We could be co-leaders. I handle the logistics, you act as the face of the organization.

SNEAKERS

I can dig that.

CARSEAT

I dig it, too, daddy-o.

ZOË

Dig, uh diggity that sounds great.

(beat)

Boys, take care of Boombox. We have to get back on the trail.
Where did those two dingbats say they were going?

SNEAKERS

They said they was goin' to Las Vegas to unload the painting
at Private Collector Con.

*Biggy and Smalls pick up Boombox's body as they say
their next lines.*

BIGGY

How're we s'posed to get to Las Vegas?

SMALLS

Yeah, my Volvo only fits four comfortably.

SNEAKERS

We have something that might help.

*Sneakers and Carseat turn the dumpster around,
revealing the Trash Wagon.*

SNEAKERS (CONT'D)

We call it the Trash Wagon.

CARSEAT

It's our gang's preferred mode of transport.

Biggy and Smalls pause centerstage with the body.

SMALLS

You mean we're gonna be drivin' around in a dumpster?

SNEAKERS

Not just any old ordinary dumpster. Boombox, RIP, tricked
this baby out with alla the finest modern conveniences.

*On "RIP", Biggy and Smalls drop the body and everyone
observers a moment of respect before moving on.*

ZOË

Well, you heard 'em, boys. Pile in.

*They all pile into the dumpster. It's a tight squeeze
but they make it work.*

SNEAKERS

Hit it, Carseat.

The engine revs as the Trash Wagon rolls offstage.

SMALLS

Woo, Vegas baby!!

LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE 6 - LAS VEGAS CONVENTION CENTER

LIGHTS UP ON:

*A nice looking CONVENTION WORKER holds a clipboard while standing in front of a sign that reads:
"PRIVATE COLLECTOR CONVENTION 2024"*

The gang (Smalls, Sneakers, Carseat, Biggy, and Zoe) run up to the Convention Worker.

EVERYONE

We're here for the convention!/Where's the painting at?/Checking in for the convention, here./This is a stick up.

CONVENTION WORKER

One at a time! Let's start with you, big guy. Did you say this was a stick up?

SMALLS

Yeah, I'm sorry. Force o' habit. We're just here for the convention. I wouldn't harm you. You seem like a good fella.

CONVENTION WORKER

Oh, thank you. Can I get your name please?

SMALLS

Smalls.

CONVENTION WORKER

... just Smalls?

(beat)

Okay, Smalls. Well, I'm not seeing you on my list here-

SMALLS

Dat's okay, I'll just buy one regular day pass.

CONVENTION WORKER

Unfortunately, only guests who have registered are able to buy passes, and the registration deadline was three days ago.

SMALLS

Oh, alright.

(to group)

Okay, everybody. Da guy said we all need to steal someone else's badge to get in to the convention.

CONVENTION WORKER

Excuse me, no, I did not say that!

SNEAKERS

We're the best at staying undetected. They don't call me SNEAKers for nothin, you know.

CONVENTION WORKER

Even if you come back with badges, I'll still recognize you!
Don't think I won't remember you!

BIGGY

Sounds like we need some disguises too.

CARSEAT

Quick! Before he gets to burning us into his memory!

SNEAKERS

Scatter!

The gang (minus Zoe and Biggy) runs off stage.

ZOË

Wait, we haven't even come up with a plan yet!

BIGGY

Don't worry about the plan! Just grab whatever ya can to make
ya yaself look like ya not yaself no more.

Biggy runs for the exit. Zoe sighs and follows.

CONVENTION WORKER

What a pleasant bunch.

Ash and Victor enter with the painting.

ASH

I can't believe that Volvo still had the keys in it.

CONVENTION WORKER

Hi! Let me guess, checking in for Private Collector Con?

ASH

Oh my gosh, how did you know?!

CONVENTION WORKER

Haha, you are too cute. Name please.

ASH

Ash. But it might be under Thrash... Or Trash.

CONVENTION WORKER

Hm. I don't see your name. Unfortunately, we are only able to
admit people already on our list or new paintings to be sold.

VICTOR

Well that's just great! We drove all this way only to get
turned around at--

ASH

Shhhbbbddtt! Hold the painting, Victor. I have an idea.

Ash walks into the crowd and chats up an audience member who happens to be sitting next to a trench coat and hat that have been preset. They makes pleasantries with the audience member, then viciously snatch the jacket and hat and goes back onstage.

VICTOR

That's a terrible disguise. Everybody's gonna know it's us.

ASH

The disguise isn't for us, silly. It's for the painting.

Ash drapes the trench coat over the 'shoulders' of the painting and places the cap on top. Now it looks like the figure on the painting is wearing clothes.

VICTOR

You can't be serious.

ASH

Have a failed us yet, Victor? This is totally going to work, just you wait and see. Come on, get under!

Ash lifts the coat up so her and Victor can slide underneath. They approach the convention worker again, pretending to be the sentient painting.

ASH (CONT'D)

(Painting voice:)

Hello, I'm here for the convention. My name's not on the list, but as you can see, I am a painting.

CONVENTION WORKER

Yes. Of course, sir, please right this way.

The convention worker leads them to the side of the stage, and notices the time.

CONVENTION WORKER (CONT'D)

Oh great, it's time for my break! Hopefully nobody tries to sneak in while I'm gone.

The convention worker exits. Ash and Victor drop the disguise.

ASH

Yes! I knew that would work! Victor, how many times have I told you? We should be using trench coat trick everywhere!

VICTOR

Did you see that dude? He looked like a nutcase! He would've let anybody through!

ASH

Whatever. Painting!! Painting! Who wants to buy a famously missing super expensive painting!

VICTOR

I thought Private Collector Con would've been full of buyers, not people who want to show off their private collections.

Zoe, disguised as a Cowboy, leans against the wall.

ZOE

(as Cowboy)

Pardon me, gentlemen. I couldn't help noticin' that nice paintin' o' yours. Is that a Painterino Fakenami?! Why that feller's one of my favorite dang artists there is, I reckon.

(spits)

Would ya mind if I took a closer look, there?

ASH

Not a problem!

ZOE

(as Cowboy)

That's a genuine paintin' if I ever saw one. Yes, sir! Well, whatdya say we strike a deal? This paintin' would look mighty fine hanging up in my... my barn. My cattle love lookin' at fine art, ya see.

VICTOR

Wait, your cattle like fine art?

ZOE

(as Cowboy)

They've got real sophisticated taste, it drives me buck wild.

ASH

Right. Well, it is an expensive painting you know...

ZOE

(as Cowboy)

Of course! I'll sell as many cattle as I need to afford it!

VICTOR

Wait, if you sell your cattle, who'll look at it in the barn?

ZOE

(as Cowboy)

Yeah, I- Darn. That don't make much sense.

(as Zoe)

I told them we should've made a plan!

Biggy, disguised as a pirate, steps in.

BIGGY

(as Pirate)

Yo Ho Ho! Ahoy, Me Hearties! Weigh Anchor and Hoist the Mizzen. I've made it to the land of treasure. Private Collector Con.

ASH

Woah! You're like a real pirate! Wanna buy this cool rare painting we found next to a dumpster?

Ash holds out the painting, facing Biggy.

BIGGY

(as Pirate)

Shiver me timbers! What a painting. Say ye landlubber, would ye consider making a trade?

VICTOR

Not unless you've got a treasure chest full of gems and golden doubloons.

BIGGY

(as Pirate)

Alas, I spent me last doubloon on a clap of thunder at the Treasure Island casino last night. But worry not me hearties, for I have a special treasure map, guaranteed to bring ye at least... three chests full of.. luxury pirate treasure. Yarg!

ASH

Haha! We're gonna be rich AND we get to go on a treasure hunt! This is going to be so much fun.

VICTOR

No, we are not going on a treasure hunt! Thank you for your interest but we're only accepting cash offers at this time.

Smalls, as a robot spirals through the room screaming.

SMALLS

(As R2-D2, to Ash)

WHHHAAAAA OOOOOOOO.... paintin'.

ASH

R2?! What are you doing outside of Disneyland's Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge™?!

SMALLS

(as R2-D2)

Beep da da da beep boop dooot. Paintin'.

ASH

Really? You want to help me sell the painting?

SMALLS

(as R2-D2)

Oooooooooo- clu-clu- clu-clu-clu- clu!

ASH

(blushing)

Haha R2-D2, not right now!

Sneakers, dressed as a clown, cartwheels onstage.

SNEAKERS

(as Clown)

Hey! I hoid there's a very special private collector in the room. Could that be you?

VICTOR

Oh god, Ash. Please get this thing away from me. I am not good around clowns.

ASH

Vic, not right now. I'm hanging out with R2-D2!

(whisper)

He might know a buyer.

SNEAKERS

(as Clown)

Aww shucks, is somebody scared? Do you need a hug?

VICTOR

Ah! Get away! AHHHH!

Victor cowers behind Ash. Ash hands over the painting.

ASH

Here, hold this.

(beat)

No! Bad clown. Bad!

Ash punches the clown in the stomach, and takes the painting back from Victor. Carseat enters, dressed like an old person.

ASH (CONT'D)

I'm telling you, that's the only way to take care of a clown.

CARSEAT

(as Oldie)

Say there, you young whippersnappers. That painting reminds me of something I once saw as a young child. Don't mind me, I'm just gonna help myself to taking a closer look now.

Carseat slowly approaches the painting.

ASH

Oh please, take as much time as you need to get over here...

(beat)

It must've been so tough growing up when you did. Was everything just like super boring back then?

CARSEAT

(as Oldie)

No no! My memories are all pleasant. Too pleasant. I can't think of my childhood anymore. Not since...the accident...

VICTOR

Maybe we should get this painting away from you, then!

Victor puts his hands on the painting. Carseat grabs the painting as well, refusing to move.

CARSEAT

(as Oldie)

Don't take my childhood away from me!

Everyone else comes up to grab the painting in a rush.

VICTOR

Woah, hey! We're happy to show all of you the painting, just one at a time please!

ASH

Let go! We need to sell this for a shit ton of cash. R2-D2, help me please!

SMALLS

I'm sorry for deceiving you, Ash. I'm actually Smalls.

ZOË

(as Cowboy)

I came here for that painting and I'm not leaving without it!

Zoë cocks their gun.

BIGGY

(as Pirate)

Don't think you're the only one here with a gun, cowboy.

Biggy cocks their gun.

ASH

Let go of the painting or I swear I'll--

Ash pulls out their knife. Almost immediately, Sneakers falls on the blade. His clown nose rolls off.

CARSEAT

That's two in one day!

ASH
Sneakers?!

SNEAKERS
Ash?

Sneakers dies a dramatic but quiet death in Carseat's arms. Carseat removes their disguise in their grief.

ZOË
Carseat?

CARSEAT
Zoë?

SMALLS
Biggy?

BIGGY
Smalls?

A shot rings out. Giuseppe enters, rifle in hand.

GIUSEPPE
Giuseppe!

He runs up to the group.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)
Finally, the hunt is over. I would have found you sooner, but I got caught up talking with your roommate, Ben. Wonderful painter. Almost as good as the real Painterino Fakenami.

Giuseppe grabs the painting. Now, every character tugs at the painting in a different direction.

The Convention Worker runs up to the group.

CONVENTION WORKER
Stop! Stop! You're destroying the art!

THEN--they all lose their grip on the painting causing it to smash down on the convention worker, his head going straight through the center.

All of the characters pause and stare in disbelief at the destroyed painting. A moment of silence. Then--

CONVENTION WORKER (CONT'D)
Get out! You're all a disgrace to the Private Collector Convention!

He takes the painting off of his head, rips it up and throws it at the characters as they walk out.

BIGGY

What do we do now, Smalls?

SMALLS

I don't know, Biggy. Don Joey ain't gonna pleased we lost his paintin' and then destroyed it.

ZOË

Boys, forget about Don Joey. You got Don Zoë right here. Come here, I'll treat you good.

(beat)

As long as you remember whose in charge.

(to Victor)

Oh, Victor. I quit your stupid play. Have a good life, dick.

Zoë, Biggy, Smalls Exit.

CARSEAT

I guess the least I could do is take out the trash. Best of luck, Ash... Spunk to junk.

ASH

Bust to dust.

Carseat drags Sneaker's lifeless body offstage.

GIUSEPPE

Eh, no big loss for Giuseppe. I am still obscenely wealthy.

Giuseppe picks up one of the torn pieces of the painting and sniffs it.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

Hmmmm... could this be a clue to my next hunt?

Giuseppe exits, sniffing the painting piece all over. Victor scrambles down to the painting, trying to put it back together.

ASH

Uh, Vic. What are you doing?

VICTOR

I'm putting the painting back together. It may not be worth a few million anymore, but I'm sure someone here will buy the scraps for enough to cover our rent!

ASH

Victor. The painting is gone. I think we lost. There's not really anything else we can do.

VICTOR

We're going to have to do something, Ash. I cannot lose our apartment. Not when I'm this close to finishing and performing *The Consequences of HeARTbreak*!

ASH

You need to move on from your play! You've been "almost about to perform it" for two years now! How much longer are you going to be shut away in your room, writing about writing? Go experience life for a while! Don't you want to see the world? You know, every city has a dumpster you can sleep in.

VICTOR

No, no, no. You may be okay with sleeping in dumpsters, but I am not. I'm done listening to your ideas. I probably could've come up with rent somehow if I didn't let myself get so caught up in this stupid plan of yours to sell this painting.

ASH

It was your stupid plan too! You were practically foaming at the mouth when you found out how much that painting was worth. And by the way, I've seen your room. You basically live in a dumpster already with the amount of fast food wrappers and dirty laundry you have all over the place.

VICTOR

At least I know what I'm working towards. Your life doesn't have structure. It has no purpose. You don't have a burning need inside of you, there's nothing you want to accomplish. Your life is simple, without interiority. Like a dog.

ASH

Excuse me! Dogs have great lives! You could stand to learn a thing or two from dogs. Sure, they have to be taught how to sit and shake paws, and maybe they run into oncoming traffic sometimes but they're loyal! They stick around in your life when nobody else will!

VICTOR

I don't need a dog in my life. I'm more of a cat person.

ASH

Face it, Victor. It's just us. I'm your only friend. You don't have anybody else to go to but me.

VICTOR

It's just us... How could I be so stupid? I've been betrayed so many times by my collaborators. I swore off every toxic relationship in order to focus on my art. Every single one but you, Ash. You were always so inconsequential. I never considered you a friend, more of a situational acquaintance. But this explains everything. You've been disrupting my art. You're the reason why I can't finish my damn play!

ASH

Where are you going?

VICTOR

I'm going back to LA. On my own. I'm gonna get my stuff out of the apartment before they change the locks on us.

Victor exits. Ash stands on stage, unsure what to say for the first time in the play.

ASH

What are you going on foot?

(beat)

Don't you want to try putting the painting back together?

BLACK OUT.

SCENE 7 - SIDE OF THE HIGHWAY / THE DESERT

LIGHTS UP.

Victor holds his thumb out towards the audience, trying to get picked up as a hitchhiker.

VICTOR

Come on! What do I have to do to get picked up, hang dong?

Ash, out of breath, yells from off stage.

ASH

Victor! Wait up!

VICTOR

Ash? You seriously chased after me instead of driving home?

ASH

I had no choice. You have the keys.

VICTOR

Well, walk on the other side of the road at least. I can't walk with you when I'm mad at you.

Victor moves to a new spot, looking for a ride. Ash enters towards Victor.

ASH

I don't get it. You won't give up on a play for over two years, but you give up on a person after one altercation?

VICTOR

Seriously, stay away from me. There's nothing you can say that will change my mind!

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

(offstage/behind curtain)

Well then, perhaps, there's something I can say.

ASH

Who was that? Reveal yourself! I know martial arts.

A weathered looking man with a bowler hat, beard, and a lit cigarette hanging out of his mouth emerges from behind a curtain, as if he's been standing behind it the entire show. This is THE GHOST OF BOB FOSSE.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

(coughing)

There's no business like show business!

Fosse kicks his leg up on one of the chairs.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE (CONT'D)

Hi, Ash & Victor. It's me, The Ghost of Bob Fosse. I'll be your spirit counselor this evening, so the two of you can finally hash it out.

ASH

Finally, A well-defined format we can feel safe to express our emotions.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

What are you some kind of mirage?

(To Ash)

How is this normal to you?

ASH (CONT'D)

I guess I just need a conversation of closure that bad. You can't just ghost me.

(beat)

Oh, sorry. Is that offensive?

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

No, that's okay. Now, tell me, why are you two breaking up?

ASH

Oh no, we're not dating.

VICTOR

You have the wrong idea.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

Riiiiight. So then what's your problem?

VICTOR

Every time I open myself up to somebody, it ends horribly. Ash is just another in the long line of tragic heartbreaks that have defined my life. I need to focus on my writing.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

What, you think art's gonna treat you any better?

VICTOR

It couldn't be any worse than this.

ASH

That's our problem right there. His entire disposition. Any time I try to have any fun, this guy has to come along and spoil the party.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

Parties aren't meant to last forever, ya know.

ASH

Yeah, but this guy can't even let loose a little!

Fosse sits down in the chair like a cool youth pastor.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

I see your problem now. You two are living a classic co-dependent lifestyle.

ASH

That was quick.

VICTOR

We are?

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

The two of you need each other more than you know. Ash, you need Victor to keep you from going off the deep end.

ASH

I do not go off the deep end. I merely like to peer into the infinite void from time to time.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

Let me tell you what that lookin into the void for too long will get ya: Two heart attacks, three ex-wives, and a case of gonorrhea so bad it makes Jessica Lange vomit in the dressing room of the Tony's.

ASH

Feel like that last one doesn't really apply to me.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

It could easily apply to anyone living in LA.

(beat)

Now Victor, you need Ash to help socialize ya, and keep ya from being such a shut in.

VICTOR

I am not a shut in. I am merely in the midst of creating bold works of art. Surely you would understand that, Bob Fosse.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

That's Ghost of Bob Fosse to you. When was the last time these bold works of art brought you any joy?

VICTOR

I'm sacrificing joy for the sake of my art! If I want my art to mean something it has to come from a place of pain.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

That's your problem, you've got to find joy in the whole process. Collaborating with others should be the most joyful part. I wouldn't wish a night of sitting alone in front of a blank page at the typewriter on my worst enemy. But you've got to find the joy in that, too. Even if joy is a whiskey, a pack of cigarettes and a crushed up Adderall.

ASH

Are you really the best person we could've got for a role model? Was nobody else available?

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

Look, you get the role model you need, not the one you deserve.

(beat)

I know I'm not the best role model for how you should live your life. I drank, smoked, and screwed like a Santa Barbara co-ed until the day I died. I also put so much of myself into my work that I ended up shutting out some of my best friends. What I do know is that once you've passed on from this mortal coil, you don't think about the critically acclaimed movies you made or iconic shows you choreographed or the countless awards you won--

VICTOR

We get it, you were very successful.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

And you certainly don't think about all the pills you popped, parties you crashed, or freaky sex you had.

ASH

Wow, how did you not die younger?

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

You think about the friends who you don't get to see anymore. Trust me, all the awards, and all the good reviews, and all the chorus girl tail in the world can't compare to a road trip with your best friend. You want my advice? Live your life while you can, but don't be afraid to take it easy now and then. Who knows, maybe you'll even get inspired by something in life that you can use in one of your stupid shows.

VICTOR

Maybe I have been getting too caught up in my stupid play.

ASH

You know what, I think I see it now. I really cannot end up burning out like you did, Fosse.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

See? You guys get it. Well, that's all the spirit counseling I got in me. If you want, I can call up the ghost of Leonard Bernstein, and we could get a little freaky. No?

(beat)

Either of you smoke? No?

Fosse offers the two a cigarette. They decline, so Fosse lights up both and smokes them himself.

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE (CONT'D)

Well, I'll leave you with this advice. Don't bring home any East German call girls or forget your wife's birthday. I made both mistakes the same night, and it was not pretty.

ASH

Okay, bye! You can stop haunting us now!

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

I'll be with you, always. All you have to do is--

Fosse backs up while doing jazz hands.

ASH

Well I'm glad that creep is gone. Are we friends again?

VICTOR

Maybe not "again". Maybe we're friends for the first time.

ASH

Does this mean you'll move into a dumpster with me?

VICTOR

Don't push it.

A bugle calls from offstage. Giuseppe runs in.

GIUSEPPE

What's the meaning of this?!

VICTOR

What?

Giuseppe waves the torn painting around.

GIUSEPPE

THIIIIIIIIIIsssss!!!

ASH

Is that the torn Fakenami painting? You can keep it, man, we're past that point in our arc.

GIUSEPPE

This is not the real Fakenami! I put the pieces back together, this is a fake! Where is the real painting?!

VICTOR

Dude, we don't know what you're talking about.

ASH

Oh yeah!

(beat)

I think Ben had something to do with it...

VICTOR

Huh?

ASH

You know how Ben is a painter? And how he said he could paint this painting? And then there was a painting the exact same size as this one when we went back to the apartment?

VICTOR

You think he painted an exact copy of our painting?

ASH

It would explain why the signature on this torn piece of the painting says "Ben."

Ash shows the torn piece of painting with Ben's signature written on it. Giuseppe raises his rifle.

GIUSEPPE

The painting is still yet to be found? Haha! Now, you two! Lead Giuseppe to the painting.

VICTOR

How are we gonna get home in time? We don't have a car, and in less than two hours, they're gonna change the locks on us.

GIUSEPPE

Damn. Even I can't make the drive that fast!

Ash backs up while doing jazz hands.

ASH

I think I know someone who can help!

(beat)

Bob Fosse! Bob Fosse! Come on out!

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE (OFFSTAGE)

It's showtime, folks!.

Fosse enters while doing jazz hands.

GIUSEPPE

Is that--

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

The Ghost of Bob Fosse? Yeah. And I can get you home in a matter of seconds.

GIUSEPPE

How?

GHOST OF BOB FOSSE

I'll use my theatrical ghost powers to cause a scene change.

A musical riff on "HOT HONEY RAG" starts up as The Ghost of Bob Fosse as he hits several iconic Fosse poses. The set and lights change around him.

SCENE 8 - THE FINAL SCENE - APARTMENT.

As Fosse hits his finishing pose, lights come up to reveal our apartment set, now with more of Ben's paintings lying around, including a nude portrait of Quinn. Ben is sketching.

BEN

Hey, when'd you get here? Giuseppe, nice to see you again.

GIUSEPPE

A pleasure as always, Ben.

Giuseppe raises his rifle at Ash and Victor.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

Now, hand over the painting!

ASH

Ben, do you know where the Painterino Fakenami is?

BEN

I thought you had it.

ASH

No, I did a switcheroo and accidentally took your recreation.

BEN

Ah, I was wondering where that went. No sweat, I can always whip up another one. Lemme go see if Quinn has the original.

Ben walks offstage. Ash awkwardly tries to make small-talk with Giuseppe while they wait.

Then, Ben re-enters without the painting.

BEN (CONT'D)

Hey, yeah, sorry. Quinn's gotten attached to the painting and doesn't really wanna give it up.

VICTOR

Can you tell him that we're being trophy hunted for it?

BEN

I told him, but he got kinda weird about it so I'm just giving him some space.

GIUSEPPE

Enough games! Bring out the painting now before I go shooty shooty.

BEN

Alright, man, whatever you say. Hey, Quinn, some dude with a gun wants to see the painting.

QUINN (OFFSTAGE)

One sec.

After a moment, Quinn enters with the painting. He stops when he sees Giuseppe.

GIUSEPPE

Quinnito?!

QUINN

Dad?! What're you doing here?

VICTOR

Giuseppe Artolini is your dad?

QUINN

Yeah, duh, why do you think I recommended him to you guys.

Quinn turns back to Giuseppe.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Dad, are you trophy hunting these guys?

GIUSEPPE

Eh...maybe a little...

QUINN

Dad, we talked about this.

GIUSEPPE

I know, I know, I just get carried away with my hobbies.

Giuseppe sets his gun down.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

Look, I never actually wanted to kill you. I merely live for the hunt! And seeing as how the hunt has come to its end, I think we can all be friends. And if my little Quinnito wants the painting, then it's yours to keep.

Giuseppe extends his hands to Ash and Victor. Victor is still in shock, but Ash gladly shakes his hand.

ASH

Thanks for not mounting us on your wall, Mr. Artolini.

GIUSEPPE

My pleasure.

Giuseppe pulls out a wad of cash and starts counting.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

Now, how much did I say I would pay for the painting?

VICTOR

\$5000.

ASH

Actually, for a painting as priceless as this, certainly it's not unreasonable to ask for a few million.

Victor gives Ash an impressed look.

GIUSEPPE

(handing them cash)

Here you go. And as an extra gift for being such good sports.

Giuseppe hands Ash the rifle.

GIUSEPPE (CONT'D)

It's not even a real gun. It's made out of cardboard.

Ash plays around with the rifle prop.

VICTOR

Well, I guess that wraps everything up nicely.

ASH

Yep. No more plot lines to amend.

Ash swings around the rifle, accidentally firing it offstage. Carseat staggers on, clutching their chest. And eventually collapsing into Ash's arms.

CARSEAT

I wasn't even in this scene, buddy boy.

ASH

Carseat! I'm so sorry, I didn't know I--

CARSEAT

Nothin' doin', boyo. I was bound to get licked one o' these days. I'm just happy it was by an official member of the gang.

ASH

You mean?

CARSEAT

You're what's left of the Dragons, Ash. Look after our turf.
(weakly extending hand)
Spunk to junk.

ASH

(returning the handshake)

Bust to dust.

*Carseat dies. Ash cries over their lifeless body.
Giuseppe removes his hunting hat out of respect.*

*A light shines from offstage. The ghosts of SNEAKERS
and BOOMBOX enter, wearing angel wings and halos.*

CARSEAT
(entering in the spirit realm)
Sneakers? Boombox?

SNEAKERS
Welcome to Heaven, daddy-o.

Carseat hugs Sneakers and Boombox.

CARSEAT
I've missed you both so much.

BOOMBOX
Us too, buddy boy.

*Boombox hands Carseat their own halo and angel wings.
The Trash Dragons hit one final synchronized dance
move before ascending to Heaven offstage.*

ASH
Can we end this thing now or what?

VICTOR
Yeah. I'm ready to move on to a new play. I think I've got a
great idea. I'm gonna do a comedy for once.

ASH
What's it about?

VICTOR
Something stupid based on the adventure we had.

ASH
Wait...say that again.

LIGHTS DOWN.

THE END.