

A GRAPHIC
MYSTERY

Work of Art

Bambi Everson

WORK OF ART

One act, approximately 10 minutes.

CHARACTERS

EMILY TAYLOR (20s-30s) - Generally optimistic, kind and codependent. Presently unhappy with her relationship but trying to make the best of it.

TIM HALPERN (30s) - A zealous romantic. Emily's present boyfriend.

STEFAN DEGAS (any age) - a street portrait artist.

TIME: The Present.

PLACE: New York City, Central Park, 59th Street, between 5th and 6th Ave.

SYNOPSIS: Tim's desire to commemorate their 6th month anniversary with a portrait does not go as expected.

SCENE ONE

EMILY and TIM are walking in Central park..They spot a portrait artist. His displays are lovely. They stop and peruse them. STEFAN, the artist smiles at them.

TIM

They are pretty good.

EMILY

They look identical to the ones I see on 42nd St. Come on. Let's just get a Mr. Softee and call it a day.

TIM

It's our 6 month-aversary. I think we should do something special to commemorate this auspicious occasion.

EMILY

There is no such thing as a month-aversary.

TIM

I'm a romantic. Six months ago today, I met you right here. You texted me that you had torn your pants running for the train. I brought you flowers and safety pins. I wanted you to know you could count on me in any emergency.

EMILY

Yes. That was very thoughtful.

STEFAN

Hey, you are a lovely couple, How about a portrait? Special deal. \$10.

EMILY

What's so special? It says \$10 right on your sign.

STEFAN.

I joke. But I draw you two with my heart, because I see the truth. The love that is alive in this moment, I capture forever.

TIM

A fellow romantic. Come on Emster, what do you say?

EMILY

Are these drawings yours?

STEFAN

Of course they are mine. I am named after the great Edgar Degas. Some say he was the founder of Impressionism but he thought of himself as a realist, as do I. I draw what I see. 10 minutes of your time, now, a conversation piece for years to come.

EMILY

Well, Mr. Degas... you do know your art history.

STEFAN

Life is art. Art is life. Call me Stefan. So nice to meet you.

EMILY

Lots of tourists out today, I'm sure you'll do fine.

TIM

I walk past guys like you every day. Never stopped. I never had the inclination to own a portrait of myself, but now I have you, Emily. My picture perfect Emster. I am a changed man. I have gone through a metamorphosis. I'm generous, compassionate. In tune with the world around me. I walk around so full of joy, I keep a pile of ones in my pocket to give to all the homeless people I see.

EMILY

I hope you saved some for Mr. Softee, because that is what I really wanted today.

TIM

Yes. Of course. We have plenty of money. Today, lets use some to support a fellow artist.

STEFAN

Please. Have a seat. I will do my very best work today. \$10 up front. I use only the best Graphite drawing pencils. 17 grades for shading.

TIM

(to EMILY)

Mr. Softee isn't going anywhere.

TIM hands STEFAN the money

EMILY

Fine.

STEFAN begins to work studiously.

STEFAN

Don't speak. Miss... Turn a little to your right. Beautiful. I want to capture the light in your hair.

EMILY shifts and follows directions.

STEFAN

Beautiful. Now if you could just tilt your head upwards a little, no that's too much, down, But raise your eyes. Perfect. Stunning. And Mr...

TIM

Tim

STEFAN

Mr. Tim. You are fine. Just stay still. You have strange eyebrows. Ever thought of waxing them?

TIM

No, but thanks for the suggestion.

STEFAN

Scoot a little closer to your lady. That's right. Hold it. Is that the way you normally smile? You want teeth or no teeth? I think no teeth is better.

TIM

Sorry. Are you talking to me or her?

STEFAN

You. The lady is perfect. Exquisite. A profile like Grace Kelly. You are a lucky man.

TIM

Don't I know it. No teeth.

STEFAN

Yes. I got this. Nearly done. A little more around the eyes. Yes, and the number 6B for shading... The white for some highlights... Smooth the skin tones... Yes. A masterpiece if I say so myself. VOILA!

Stefan proudly displays his "portrait" It is two crudely drawn stick figures. TIM is drawn smiling but EMILY's stick figure is standing in a puddle of her own tears.

TIM

What? What the fuck is this?

STEFAN.

I draw what I see.

TIM

Are you blind? My dog could draw a better picture!

EMILY

Let me see.

TIM

Is this a joke? Are these other pictures even yours?

STEFAN

Yes. I bought them from my cousin Andre. He works Times Square.

TIM

I demand my money back.

EMILY

Let me see it.

TIM thrusts the portrait at EMILY. EMILY begins to laugh.

EMILY

I like it. Thank you, Stefan. It's perfect.

STEFAN

I told you. I draw what I see.

TIM

You're going to be seeing the front of my fist in about three seconds if you don't give me my money back.

EMILY

I like it. I'm keeping it. I'll give you the ten bucks.

TIM

Are you kidding me? Look how he drew you.

EMILY

Thin.

TIM

Oh, come off it! Look at your face. You are crying. You are standing in a puddle of your own tears for Christ's sake.

EMILY

I think our artist was very astute.

TIM

What are you telling me? Are you saying you are unhappy? Today? On our month-aversary? What's wrong? Is this about your Mr. Softee? The truck is still there. Can't you hear it? It's playing our song, baby.

EMILY

Yes. I'm unhappy. There is no such thing as a month-aversary!

STEFAN

The lady is right about that, sir. Anniversaries celebrate an annual recurrence of a notable date. If used broadly, you can measure in units as opposed to years, so in your case...

TIM

Shut up! This is all your fault anyway.

EMILY

Don't shoot the messenger. You asked for this, and I needed it. I needed a way to tell you.

TIM

Don't tell me you are breaking up with me? Not here in the spot where we first met. Not in Central Park. This place is a magical fairyland to me. I'll never be able to come here again. Why? What did I do wrong? If there is something you don't like, I'll change it.

EMILY

No. You can't change who you are. I was so grateful to get out of my last relationship. He was such a jerk. Abusive. You know all that. It was so nice to date a guy who put me first. Who seemed like a really genuinely nice guy.

TIM

I love you.

EMILY

I know. You tell me all the time. It's like a nail gun shooting into my head. I love you. I love you. I love you. Pow pow pow! No matter what I say or do. No matter what I look like.

TIM

You always look beautiful to me because...

EMILY

Because you love me! I know. God I know. It's relentless. You are so busy loving me that you never hear anything I say. But I feel like the world's biggest ass when I say no to you. Because to my friends and family, I hit the jackpot. Who wouldn't want to be unconditionally adored?

TIM

Oh, Emster....

EMILY

Nobody calls me Emster! That's a ridiculous term of endearment. I don't want to kiss every time the light turns red. I don't want little post-it notes on my computer in the morning, telling me that I am your heart's epic adventure! I hate that you always bring me coffee in the WORLD'S GREATEST GIRLFRIEND cup that you bought me after our SECOND DATE!. I have other coffee mugs. You know I collect coffee mugs.

TIM

You should have told me.

EMILY

I can't tell you. You get those mournful puppy dog eyes, like that animal cruelty video with Sarah McLachlan! And you know what I have recently learned about dogs? That they cultivated those sad eyes to manipulate their humans. It's an extra muscle in their eyebrows that wild dogs and wolves don't have. You do it. Oh my God! You're doing it now.

TIM tries to stop but winds up making stupid manly man listening faces.

EMILY

I can't take it. I don't want to talk about it. I just need this to be over. Just go.

TIM

But...

EMILY

There are no buts, and I won't change my mind once I've cooled down.

TIM

I can't just walk away from you.

EMILY

That's what I want. I will leave your toothbrush, spare socks and undies with my doorman. Please. If you really love me, leave!

TIM turns to say something to her, but respects what she is saying. He shakes his head and walks away. Maybe we hear some sobs or gasps for air as he exits.

EMILY turns and looks at STEFAN who has witnessed this whole thing. He is silently drawing while this was going on.

EMILY

(to STEFAN)

Oh my God. That was intense.

STEFAN

It needed to be said.

EMILY

I'm shaking.

STEFAN

Here. Sit here for a moment. Catch your breath.

EMILY

Are you sure? Your customers... Did I scare them away/?

STEFAN

Maybe. But I am sure the tourists were happy. Real life New York moment. Sit. I need a minute, anyway. Would you mind watching the store for me?

EMILY

Um... sure, I guess. You are coming back, right?

STEFAN

Literally two minutes. Thank you. Deep breaths.

STEFAN exits. EMILY sits for a moment and composes herself. She starts to feel better immediately. Her phone buzzes. It's TIM, obviously. EMILY smiles and declines the call. Then she happily deletes his number.

*She takes some deep breaths . She is happy.
STEFAN returns with a Mr. Softee ice cream.*

STEFAN

I didn't want this day to be a total waste. I didn't know which you would like, so it's a twist. Chocolate and vanilla with chocolate sprinkles.

EMILY

That's exactly what I always get. Thank you.

STEFAN goes back to his easel. He pulls out a drawing that he did while the couple was arguing. It is another stick figure drawing but this time "Emily" is smiling and holding an ice cream cone. He hands it to EMILY.

EMILY

I'll trade ya!

EMILY hands the first drawing back to STEFAN.

STEFAN

Have a good life, Emily.

EMILY

See you around, Stefan.

EMILY smiles and exits. STEFAN packs up his easel and pencils and walks off in the other direction.

END OF PLAY