

Watercolors

A Play by

Philip Middleton Williams

Contact:

Philip Middleton Williams

16600 SW 77th Avenue

Palmetto Bay, FL 33157

pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com

www.pmwplaywright.com

CHARACTERS:

NICK CONNOLLY: mid-thirties, reserved but capable of emotional outbursts.

ERIC MCKAY: early twenties, a bit outgoing.

ED WICK: fifties, acts younger.

JACK PIERCE: forties.

PLACE and TIME:

A gallery in an artists' co-op in a town in Colorado. August.

Copyright © 2023 by Philip Middleton Williams

No part of this play may be produced or reproduced in whole or in part unless permission is granted by the playwright or his designated agents.

Watercolors

Scene 1

The setting is a gallery in a storefront artists' co-op in a town in Colorado. There are two entrances: Stage Left leads to the front of the gallery and other rooms, and Stage Right leads to the back room and restrooms. The white walls have a collection of twenty or so watercolors in a variety of styles ranging from Realist to Ash Can to Edward Hopper, Andrew Wyeth, and Georgia O'Keeffe. The subjects vary from still life to landscapes to buildings. On one side by themselves is a print of "The Treachery of Images" by Rene Magritte, and a black-and-white charcoal drawing of a man reclining nude on a chaise next to a pool in the tropics. The drawing is unfinished, so there are certain details missing or just sketched in. Each of the pieces has a small notecard next to it with a small dot sticker on them: most of them green but one or two with red dots. Neither the Magritte nor the charcoal has a dot on the notecard. To one side is a poster on an easel: "ERIC MICHAEL FOSTER – A Retrospective – Front Range Artists Co-Op – August 1-15." Next to it is a small desk with handouts, and there are several small cafe tables around the room. Some have plastic cups and paper plates with the remains of hors d'oeuvres on them.

At rise, it is early evening, soft light coming in from the other room, and hidden track lighting on the walls showing off the works. Soft cool jazz in the background. NICK enters. He is in his mid-thirties, wearing a nice shirt over jeans. He is carrying a trash bag and starts to collect the cups and plates from the tables. He looks around to see if there's any other litter, then stops at the charcoal drawing. He gazes at it, then chuckles slightly.

NICK: If only.

(NICK goes back to picking up, stopping at the desk and emptying the trash can next to it. As he does, ERIC enters. He is dressed business casual: button-down shirt, chinos, loafers.)

ERIC: Thanks.

NICK: Sure; happy to help.

ERIC: Kathy wants to talk to you.

NICK: Kathy...?

ERIC: From the Daily Camera.

NICK: Where is she?

ERIC: Out front talking to that guy from the Post. You mind?

NICK: What's she wanna know?

ERIC: I dunno, more about Eric, I guess.

NICK: Bio sheet's in the press packet.

ERIC: Yeah, well. I'll tell her to call you later if you want, but it'd be nice if she had something more than just his c.v. in the article.

NICK: Like what?

ERIC: I dunno; how you met, your life together, how you coped with.... Look, I'll tell her politely that it's not really something you want to talk about. How about that?

NICK: It's not that. I just can't imagine anyone would actually care.

ERIC: Okay.

(ERIC turns to go.)

NICK: Hon.

(ERIC stops.)

NICK *(sigh)*: Give me some time to finish this, and then I gotta check the bathrooms. If she's still here, then I'll see what she wants.

ERIC: Great. That'll make Jill happy, too. Any free press coverage we can get, y'know.

NICK: Any idea of the count?

ERIC: She said she stopped counting after fifty, here and in the other rooms.

NICK: Is that good?

ERIC: Well, yeah; that's more than we've had in here on one day since we opened. Hell, maybe more than altogether since June. And it looks like we some bids, too.

(NICK looks at the artwork with red dots.)

NICK: The more red dots, the better.

ERIC: Yep. Okay, I'll go talk to Kathy and –

NICK: Make shit up if you have to. He had sex with John Singer Sargent and did peyote with Georgia O'Keeffe.

ERIC: Or the other way around.

NICK: Whatever.

(ERIC exits SL. NICK goes to the desk, picks up one of the handouts, reads it silently, shakes his head, then stuffs it in the trash bag. He exits SR. The stage is empty for a few moments, then ED enters. He is wearing a loose-fitting workshirt over jeans and boots. He looks around the room, then goes to the artworks, stopping at each one, maybe reading the notecard, reacting with a nod or a chuckle at each one. Then he gets to the Magritte and the charcoal. He gazes at both of them, and we hear a sigh, and he shakes his head. ERIC enters and sees ED.)

ERIC: Hello.

(ED glances at him, nods and smiles, then goes back to looking at the works.)

ERIC: Any questions, just let me know.

ED: Thanks.

ERIC: Yessir.

(ERIC goes to the desk, picks up a handout as if to offer it to ED.)

ED: Did you know him?

ERIC: No, sir, I didn't. I just...

ED: He was one of my students. Back when he was an undergrad.

ERIC: Oh, that's great. Thanks for coming.

ED: I thought I knew most of his work. I remember he was really into realism, with oils and acrylics. Didn't know he was doing watercolors. *(Beat, then looks at ERIC and smiles.)* So, are you an artist yourself?

ERIC: Yeah, I do pen and ink. Art history.

ED: I see. So, you're working here to keep up with the latest trends.

ERIC: And they pay me. Part-time.

ED: Right. Those who can't draw, draw a salary. *(Soft chuckle.)* No offense intended.

ERIC: No, I get it.

ED: So, um...?

ERIC: Oh, sorry. I'm Eric.

ED: Oh. *(Indicating the poster on the easel.)* Like this Eric, but obviously not.

ERIC: No, sir.

(ED comes over and offers his hand. They shake.)

ED: I'm Ed Wick.

ERIC *(flash of recognition)*: Oh, yeah, Nick's mentioned you.

ED *(guardedly)*: You know Nick?

ERIC: Yessir, he's the one who's put this together with me.

ED: Is that how you met him? Through the co-op?

ERIC: No, actually he was my English teacher when I was in seventh grade.

ED: Oh, so you've kept in touch with him that long?

ERIC: Oh, no, I went off to boarding school and then college, and then moved back here. We reconnected back in June at the pool.

ED: And now you're ... together?

ERIC (*small grin*): Yeah.

ED: Well, that's nice. Is he here?

ERIC: Yeah, he was just here a minute ago. Should be back any time. Want me to get him?

ED: Oh, that's okay, I was just –

(*NICK enters SR.*)

ERIC: Oh, there you are.

NICK: Yeah. (*NICK sees ED and stops. He takes a deep breath.*)

ED: Hello, Nick.

(*NICK does not reply but crosses the stage to the other entrance. Exits for a moment, then comes back in.*)

NICK (*to ERIC*): Seen Jill?

ERIC: Probably in her office getting ready to close.

NICK: Yeah, it's about time. Looks like everyone else is gone.

ERIC: Probably.

NICK: Okay.

ED: Good to see you, Nick.

(*NICK stares at ED, unmoving, silent, for a long enough time for both ED and ERIC to get uncomfortable, unsure of what to do. Finally....*)

NICK (*still glaring*): Yeah. What the fuck are you doing here?

ERIC (*a whisper*): Whoa.

ED: Nick, I know –

ERIC: Hon...

NICK (*holding up his hand to stop ED*): Just... Let me start over. (*Deep breath, then forced smile.*) Thank you for coming, Professor Wick.

ED: Nick, come on. I know we didn't part on the best of terms.

NICK (*snort*): The last time I saw you, you were standing on the balcony of our apartment in Gunbarrel pounding on the sliding patio door at three o'clock in the morning, screaming "ERIC! ERIC!" (*To ERIC.*) Not you, obviously.

ERIC: Yeah, I get it.

NICK: What we never figured out was how you got there. Our apartment was on the second floor. What'd you do, shinny up the downspout?

ED: I don't remember.

NICK: Yeah, you were shitfaced. As usual.

ED: Nick, I know you're pissed. You have every right to be.

NICK: Damn right.

ED: I wanted to –

NICK: Tell me what the fuck you're doing here?

ED: I want to try to make amends.

NICK (*chuckles hollowly*): Oh, fuck me to tears. Step Nine: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

ED: You know the Twelve Steps.

NICK: Well, of course I do. Thanks to...

ED: Thanks to...?

NICK: Never mind. I'm not the one you should be making amends to. He's been dead for five years.

ED: I know, but I thought if I came, somehow, I could...

NICK: You didn't come to the memorial service. Everyone else was able to make it, and those that couldn't at least wrote a note or sent a card.

ED: I was on sabbatical that semester in Florence. By the time I heard, it was over.

NICK: Well, even if you had been here, would you have come?

ED: Of course, I would. Eric was very important to me. More than just a student.

NICK (*scoffing*): Right.

ED: He was.

NICK: He told me. First in your class, then as your model for drawing the human form, studying it in depth, and then after class, going for a cup of coffee, then a glass of wine, then back to the studio and more studying of the human form. Really in depth. Both of you.

ED: That's right. Both of us. It was like –

NICK: Despite the fact that he was your student, and you were twelve years older.

ED (*indicating ERIC*): How many years difference between you two?

NICK: He's not my student.

ED: Not now. But he told me you were his teacher once. Seventh grade.

NICK: Oh, nice deflection.

ERIC: He didn't know me then. He didn't –

NICK: The fact is, Ed, that you were fucking Eric when he was your student. He could have reported you to the dean and you'd have been out on your ass.

ED: We both could have been out on our asses. We both knew it.

NICK: And yet you still did it. Two, three times a week, in your office, at your farmhouse when your wife was at work and your son was in school. Going at it like the goats you raise in the field out back, or so he said.

ED: Until he met you.

NICK: Oh, yeah, I rescued him from a life of sin and debauchery.

ED: Look –

ERIC (*interrupting*): You said you wanted to make amends. For that? For seducing him?

ED: No, that was a mutual thing. Eric and I used to laugh about whose idea it was, who made the first move, who –

NICK (*interrupting*): He's trying to amends for screwing Eric over on the Judson Stevenson scholarship.

ERIC: He was up for the Stevenson?

NICK: Yeah. Fifty thousand dollars and a year residency at the art institute of his choice. He was gonna apply to the Pratt in New York. He had all the things he needed: a portfolio, an artistic statement that I proof-read within an inch of its life, a screening interview.... The only thing he needed was your recommendation, but you fucking ghosted him and when the time came to submit –

(*NICK stops, breathing heavily.*)

ERIC: What happened?

(Pause as ED looks at NICK.)

NICK: Go on, tell him.

ED: I told the review committee that I could not in good conscience recommend Eric Michael Foster for the scholarship.

NICK: All because he stopped having sex with you because he was with me.

ED: Jesus, give me a little more credit than that.

NICK: Why? You had a fresh new stock of eager students who would happily pose for your human form class at a hundred bucks a session. Wasn't that the going rate? You didn't need Eric anymore. He was getting a little long in the tooth, wasn't he? He was twenty-five, right? Fucking geezer.

ED: No. Listen to me. Going off to New York would have eaten him alive.

NICK: You don't know that.

ED: Yeah, I do.

ERIC: Why, he wasn't good enough? (*Beat.*) Tell me. You didn't think he was good enough.

ED: He's not – he wasn't ready for it. He never would have been. He didn't have the killer instinct to make it there. He would have been like some kid actor getting off the bus from Iowa and trying to get in a Broadway show. He'd have ended up like some beatnik in the Village waiting tables and drawing caricatures for the tourists on Times Square on weekends. It would have destroyed him.

NICK: Did you ever tell him?

ED: No.

ERIC: Why not?

ED: I was trying to help him.

NICK: Right. So instead of a chance for him to go to grad school and get a decent teaching job or work in a gallery or at a museum, he ended up answering phones for a real estate company until he dropped dead from an aortic aneurysm at the age of thirty. The only exhibit of his work is five years later in a storefront art co-op. He never had the fucking chance.

ED: Whoa. You can't lay that on me. And where would you have been if he'd gone off to New York? You'd never have met him and gotten to know him....

NICK: Oh, shit, another deflection. Christ, Ed, the world never got to know him. To see his art. To find out what he was really like as a man and an artist. He never lost his passion for it, but no one ever saw it. You took that away from him, and now the only thing that's left is what's on this wall. That's all that's left.

(ED is about to answer, but instead he begins to look at the artwork on the wall, then stops at the Magritte.)

ED: He loved this kind of work: surrealistic but done in a style that seemed perfectly ordinary. Everybody calls it the Pipe Painting, even though Magritte himself tells us quite clearly “Ceci n’est pas une pipe.”¹ “This is not a pipe.” Says it right there.

NICK: Always the professor, aren’t you? At least with your pants on.

ED: Eric never did anything in that style, but he was drawn to it. Did you ever wonder why?

ERIC: Because he called it by its title: “The Treachery of Images.” What you see isn’t what you get. Nothing in art is. Novels, movies, plays, poetry, music; to Eric it was just an attempt to create something that doesn’t exist in real life.

ED: How do you know? You never met him.

ERIC: I’ve seen his work. It tells me everything about him. What mattered to him and what didn’t. When he started, he tried to copy other painters, but as he got older, he stopped getting all wrapped up in the intricacies of perfection. He moved away from the strict rules of oil on canvas and imitating others and moved to watercolors because there was room for shading and fluidity. He stopped thinking literally because like what Magritte was doing, he knew that nothing he drew or sketched or painted was real, just like the words on the page of a novel – or the instructions for an Ikea table – aren’t real things. Numbers don’t exist; they’re just symbols. That’s not a pipe. It’s not even a painting of a pipe. It’s what you think it is. For all we know, it’s an enchilada combo platter from Casa Bonita.

ED: You *were* an art history major, weren’t you.

ERIC: Yeah. B.A. from Kenyon.

NICK: Not that it matters. Eric told me that you didn’t need a degree to look at a painting or a drawing to understand what it meant.

ED: Which Eric?

ERIC: Me.

NICK: But it could have been Eric Foster. He once told me that wisdom wasn’t measured by degrees. He told me that the night after I defended my PhD thesis. After we’d had really great sex, by the way. (*Beat.*) So. How do you propose to do it?

ED: Sorry?

NICK: Make amends. You said you’re here to make amends.

ED: I thought by seeing you and his work it might –

¹ Pronounced “suh si ne pah zun peep.”

NICK: No, no. No-no-no. That's not how it works. You can't just waltz in here and say you're sorry. And you actually haven't even said that. You're not sorry he didn't get the Stevenson. Said it yourself. So, if you're really going to make amends, you're going to have to do something that really shows it. Not just words. All that does is ease your guilt – if you're capable of that – and lets you off the hook. No. It's gotta be something more.

ED: Such as?

NICK: Nice try. It's up to you. *(To ERIC.)* You agree?

ED: Wait, why are you asking him?

NICK: Because as he just showed you, he knows Eric the Artist. He knows what mattered to him on paper and canvas. I knew him as my lover, my partner, the man I still ... remember. *(Beat.)* So, the ball's in your court, Ed. If you're really serious about making amends, you're gonna have to do it for all three of us: me, Eric, and Eric.

ED: I get it. All right. Good to see you, Nick. Nice to meet you, Eric.

(ED exits SL as NICK and ERIC watch him go.)

NICK: I'm sorry you had to see that.

ERIC: It's okay.

(ERIC goes to NICK and offers a hug, and they gently embrace.)

ERIC: You think he'll actually do it? Something more than just "I'm sorry"?

NICK: I don't know. If the past is any guide, the first sign will be him pounding on the patio door at three o'clock in the morning. *(They both laugh.)* Okay, you're done here?

ERIC: Yep. Jill will lock up.

NICK: Good. I feel like spaghetti marinara.

ERIC: Funny, you don't look like it.

(ERIC goes to a switch on the wall. The track lights on the artworks go out.)

NICK: Good one.

(They start to exit SL, then NICK turns and looks back at the artwork.)

NICK: Good night, Eric.

End of Scene 1.

Scene 2

The next morning around ten a.m. The cafe tables have been removed and replaced by a small bench or two. The track lights are on. ERIC is at the desk, working on a laptop, reading.

ERIC (*to himself*): Wow, that's great. (*He reads on, then laughs.*) Sweet.

(ED enters SL. He is wearing work clothes, and they are a bit dusty with traces of mud on them. He sees ERIC on the computer.)

ED: Good morning.

ERIC (*getting up*): Good morning, professor.

ED: C'mon, it's just Ed.

ERIC: Okay. Ed.

ED: I was over at Tractor Supply picking up some goat chow; thought I'd stop by and see how it's going.

ERIC: Nick was right; you *do* raise goats.

ED: Yeah, well, someone has to. Kind of a hobby of mine. Actually, my wife's. She grew up on a goat farm. Contrary to popular belief, they don't eat tin cans.

ERIC: Thanks for coming by again.

ED: Sure. So, tell me about Nick. What was he like as your teacher?

ERIC: Um, he was great. I mean, he wasn't like the others, just teaching out of a textbook. He really seemed to want to teach, if you know what I mean.

ED: I do. Were you close?

ERIC: Oh, no. I mean, I liked him a lot, but we never really got to know each other all that well. I didn't think he noticed me, just another kid in the class. Besides, it was ten years ago, and I was about a foot shorter and a hundred pounds heavier.

ED: Really?

ERIC: Yeah. I was known as Ricky back then. Kids called me "Not-So-Little Ricky."

ED: That must have been rough.

ERIC (*shrug*): I was used to it.

ED: Did Nick do anything about it?

ERIC: Oh, he had no idea. I never told him.

ED: Why not?

ERIC: Nothing he could've done about it. And I didn't wanna, y'know...

ED: Come across like the teacher's pet.

ERIC: Yeah.

ED: That was it, that one class?

ERIC: He taught senior English the next year, and then left for grad school.

ED: Well, I must say, you don't look like "Not-So-Little Ricky" anymore.

ERIC: Thanks.

ED: How'd you transform yourself into Eric?

ERIC: My parents sent me off to boarding school freshman year. Dropped the nickname and joined the swim team and weight room. By the time I was a sophomore, I'd grown six more inches and dropped fifty pounds. When I graduated, I'd lost almost a hundred and held the team record for the five hundred meters freestyle.

ED: Hell of a diet plan.

ERIC: It worked.

ED: I'd say so. How did you reconnect with Nick?

ERIC: I moved back home after college last June. I went over to the public pool one morning, and there he was. He didn't recognize me, but I introduced myself again and we became...friends.

ED: Did you ever tell him you had a crush on him in seventh grade?

(Beat.)

ERIC: How'd you know?

ED: You just told me.

ERIC (*chuckle*): Oh. Yeah, well, I told him, and we ... I needed to move out of my folks' place anyway.

ED: Say no more. That's great. I've wondered what his life was like after Eric died.

ERIC: You'd have to ask him.

(ED goes back to look at the paintings.)

ED: I've been thinking about what you said yesterday about Eric's paintings, how he evolved from oils to watercolors. You're right about one thing: there's more room for shading and fluidity, but there's something else, more emphatic.

ERIC: Emphatic?

ED: With oils or chalk, you can go back and fix something if you get it wrong. Paint or color over it or erase it; even start over. You can't do that with watercolors. You make a commitment and you're stuck with it. That's kind of how Eric was. I don't ever remember him second-guessing anything: a drawing, a painting, even a pose. *(Chuckle.)* He did crossword puzzles in ink, for god's sake. And when we were... together ... he never did anything halfway. It's probably why he gave up on me and ended up with Nick. He knew that there wasn't going to be anything like what you have with him now.

ERIC: He knew you were married.

ED: Yes.

ERIC: Has there been anybody else since?

ED: No, Eric was it. My one indulgence. So far.

ERIC: Indulgence?

ED: I didn't mean that. Forget I said that. He did mean something to me.

ERIC *(a tad skeptical)*: Really?

ED: Really. *(Eager to change the subject.)* What about you? Is Nick your first?

(Beat as ERIC adjusts to this sudden course change.)

ERIC: Uh, well, yeah. I mean, there was the usual horsing around in boarding school, y'know, in the dorms and locker rooms. But Nick's my first ... uh, boyfriend.

ED: And last, I hope.

ERIC: Yeah, me too.

ED: He's lucky to have you. You're a smart and good-looking man. *(Long beat as ED gazes at ERIC.)* So, where is Nick?

ERIC: He's at work. At home. He works from home.

ED: What's he do?

ERIC: Uh, he's a consultant. Grant writing. That sort of thing.

ED: Oh. That's nice.

(Another long beat, ED still gazing, making ERIC aware of ED's subtle attempt at cruising, if he wasn't already.)

ERIC: Yeah, he, um.... He likes it. He started doing it while working his way through grad school, and when he couldn't land a teaching job, he went out on his own – Connolly and Associates – setting up an office in the house. Except there's no associates, just the cat...

ED: I get it. I do some of my best work from home. I have a little studio out back. Goats don't seem to mind.

(ERIC chuckles, then laughs, and after a moment, so does ED, breaking the mood.)

ED: So, tell me, Eric, you're the historian. What's your favorite period? Ancient? Medieval? Italian Renaissance? Impressionism? Modern? What inspired you to study art history?

ERIC: I like the illustrators: J.C. Leyendecker and Norman Rockwell. I know it was pretty much commercial stuff --

ED: Nothing wrong with that. It's a great way for people to see your work even if all you're doing is selling shirts or insurance. It's one way to make a living out of art. Maybe the only way. As Al Hirschfeld said, "Making art isn't about making money. If you want to make money, open a delicatessen."

ERIC: I love Hirschfeld's drawings. I used to hunt for all the "Ninas." He's the reason I started doing pen and ink. Nowhere near his level, of course.

ED: Do you have some?

ERIC: Yeah, I have a few.

ED: I'd like to see them.

ERIC: Oh, they're nothing... just doodles, really.

ED: Let me be the judge of that.

ERIC (*shrug*): Yeah, sure.

ED: Well, anyway, I've been giving a lot of thought to what Nick said yesterday about making amends. To actually do something to patch things up between us... and Eric Foster.

ERIC: Good.

ED: Next spring the department is planning a big exhibition of works by students and teachers, past and present, and some will be rather well known, including pieces on loan from museums and galleries all over the country. It's going to take over an entire wing of the museum. I am sure that

we can put up one or two of Eric's works; give him the exhibit and the audience he deserved... deserves.

ERIC: Wow, that sounds ... great.

ED: Do you think Nick will go for it?

ERIC: Well... sure, I guess so. I mean, I don't know. You're gonna have to ask him.

ED: Well, I was hoping you could perhaps feel him out on it. Test the waters. (*Reaches in a pocket, pulls out a business card.*) Here's my contact information.

(*ED hands the card to ERIC, who looks at it.*)

ED (*cont'd*): My cell phone's on there, too, in case you want to give me a call. About the exhibit.

ERIC: Thank you. I'll...um...I'll talk to him and have him get in touch.

ED: Great. I look forward to hearing from you.

(*ED smiles, then goes over to the charcoal drawing of the nude. He looks at it for a moment, ERIC watching.*)

ED: What's the story on this one? The card just says, "Key West January."

ERIC: According to Nick, that was the last piece that Eric was working on before he.... They went on vacation to the Keys. He never finished it.

(*Pause as ED gazes at it.*)

ED: What a shame. He really knew how to draw the human form. Look at the way he's captured the shading, the textures, even the dimensions of the muscles and the details on the hand. Hands are so hard to do, but Eric knew how to do them almost by instinct. Imagine what it would have looked like if he'd been able to complete it. (*Beat.*) Did he ever tell you who the model was?

ERIC: It's Nick.

ED: Really?

ERIC: Yes.

(*ED shakes his head in wonder, unable to take his eyes off the drawing.*)

ED (*softly, to himself*): Beautiful. (*A moment passes, then ED seems to snap out of his trance.*) Well. I'd better be going. Goats get cranky if they don't get their lunch. Thanks again, and I look forward to hearing from you about my proposal.

ERIC (*holding up the card*): Yeah, I'll have Nick get in touch with you about it.

ED: Good. We'll talk.

(ED starts to exit SL and nearly bumps into NICK, who is entering carrying a picnic cooler.)

ED: Oh, hello, we were just talking about you.

NICK: Hi. *(To ERIC.)* I brought some leftover pasta from last night. Figured we'd nuke it in Jill's microwave and....

ED: Have a little picnic.

NICK *(barely tolerant)*: Yeah. So, you came back.

ED: Yeah, just in town doing some errands. Goat chow.

NICK: Right.

(Beat.)

ED: I'm sorry about yesterday. I didn't mean to bring up bad memories.

(NICK looks at him for a long moment, then at ERIC. He shakes his head.)

NICK: Me too. You just caught me by surprise, is all. I'm... glad you came.

ED *(relieved)*: Same. Look, I thought about what you said. About making it up to you and Eric. Eric Foster. Next spring the department is planning a big gala exhibit for some of our better-known alumni and their work. I'd like to have some of his paintings on display. Let the world see what he was creating.

NICK: Really.

ED: He'll be in there with some works that are in museums and galleries all over the world. New York, Miami, Chicago, Toledo –

NICK: Toledo?

ED: Yes. They have a great collection of contemporary art.

ERIC: Yeah, I've seen it. It's really good.

NICK: Huh.

(NICK goes over to the wall, looking at the works.)

NICK *(cont'd)*: So, you think we can do this there, then?

ED: Well, not the whole thing, but –

NICK: How many?

ED: Well, one or two, at least.

NICK: One or two?

ED: At least. Maybe more. It depends on who else we're going to have. There will only be so much space and we want to make sure that each piece is properly displayed. So, there's a limit....

(Beat as NICK thinks it over, then looks at ERIC.)

NICK: What do you think?

ERIC: Yeah, I think it could... work.

NICK: Yeah, it could, I guess. Which ones?

ERIC: You mean, which pieces?

NICK: Yeah. I'll let you choose. You're the art historian, after all. You'd know best which would represent him. *(Turning to ED.)* Or you can.

ED: I suppose, but –

NICK: Problem is, I don't think just one or two is gonna do it. I think the world needs to see as much as we can show it. Oils, charcoals, watercolors, all of it.

ED: Aw, c'mon, Nick, be reasonable. I can't just turn over an entire gallery to just one artist. Wouldn't be fair.

ERIC: Hon....

NICK: All right, all right. We'll let you know.

(ED visibly relaxes, maybe even smiles.)

ED: Good. Well, I will be in touch. You guys enjoy your lunch, and Eric, give me a call sometime so we can talk more about illustrators.

ERIC: Uh, sure.

(ED is about to leave; gets to the exit.)

NICK: Oh, I meant to ask, Ed. How much?

(ED stops.)

ED: Beg pardon?

NICK: How much are you going to pay me to show Eric's work?

ED: That's not how it works. Museums don't pay artists for an exhibit.

NICK: Really? I didn't know that.

ED: I'm sorry.

NICK: Well, that sucks. (*To ERIC.*) Did you know that?

ERIC: Yeah, it's kinda the way it goes.

NICK: Don't theatres pay for the rights to do a play? Doesn't the playwright get some kind of royalty?

ED: Well, many do, but some do it to help the writer – or the artist – get some exposure.

NICK (*snort*): Wow. How the hell is an artist supposed to make a living? How much "exposure" does it take to pay the rent or make car payments?

ED: It's different with theatre. Plays are licensed; the theatres get the rights to perform the play, so they pay royalties. Works of art are sold. Once they're sold, they're... sold. That's how it works.

NICK: Oh, okay, well, then, how about I license you to exhibit Eric Michael Foster's work, and you pay me for the privilege. Call it an exhibition fee, call it a royalty. Not a lot, but something, okay?

ED: Look, Nick, I get it, but if we did that for you, we'd have to do it for everyone else, including the works on loan from the other galleries. We just can't afford it. We'll already be on the hook for transportation, security, insurance, not to mention the opening night reception....

NICK: Okay, okay, I get it. (*Beat.*) Nice idea while it lasted, right.

ERIC: Yeah.

ED: All right. Well, see you later. Again.

(*ED stars to exit.*)

NICK: Oh, Ed, one more thing.

(*ED stops, his shoulders sagging, clearly exasperated.*)

ED: What.

NICK: You're hoping to attract the art world on the scale of the Denver Arts Festival, right?

ED: Well, not quite.

NICK: Whatever. (*Beat.*) It wouldn't have anything to do with the fact that Dr. Gorell, the chairman of the department, announced his retirement last May and that this coming year will be his last. There's a search on now to find his replacement. This gala exhibit that you're planning to set up and get your name all over the papers would be quite a feather in your cap, wouldn't it?

(*ED slowly turns and gazes at NICK, who returns the gaze. Finally....*)

ED (*icily*): No. The search committee is doing a nationwide search. It's a requirement.

NICK (*unfazed*): Oh, okay. So, they never promote from within.

ED: On very rare occasions. When the right candidate doesn't meet the needs of the ... criteria.

NICK: But you're applying, right? I mean, you've got all the cred, you've got tenure, you're well-known in the art world, right? You're even published, right? (*To ERIC.*) Isn't that what's required?

ERIC: Yeah, publish or perish.

NICK: Even in the art world.

ED: The exhibit has nothing to do with it.

NICK: Okay, if you say so.

ED: I do. Now, I really have to go. I've got other things to do, and I thought that... Look, if you want to do the exhibit, we'll... find some way of... I don't know. We'll see.

ERIC: Thank you.

NICK: Yeah, thank you. Go feed your goats.

The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com.