

OFF CENTER

by Jacquelyn Priskorn

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A Dark Comedy Play

by Jacquelyn Priskorn

SYNOPSIS: Melody, a somewhat eccentric older woman, sits in front of her favorite painting at the art museum a white dot painted slightly off center on a black background. It's closing time and the new security guard, Lindsay, needs for her to clear out, but before she leaves, Melody will give a lesson on life, art and living while you still can appreciate the beauty in life.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 1 male, 1 either; gender flexible)

MELODY (f) 60-100 years old. A pleasant and quirky old lady. *(46 lines)*

LINDSAY (m/f)..... 20-40 years old. A tense security guard at an art gallery. *(47 lines)*

MARCO (m) 20-60 years old. A friendly, yet experienced security guard at an art gallery. *(22 lines)*

TIME: Present day.

SETTING: A bench in an art gallery.

PROPS

- ☐ 1 painting, black with a white dot slightly off center.
- ☐ 1 large handbag containing: plastic container full of cooked macaroni and cheese, small bottle of squeezable ketchup, fork, napkin, bottle of wine.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The painting prop can be as simple as hanging a frame on a black wall or curtain and taping a white dot within the frame. But making the actual painting could be a fun acting activity for the person playing Melody. Either way, it is important the audience can see the painting being referenced in the play.

AT RISE: *MELODY, an older woman, enters the art gallery carrying a very large bag. She approaches a canvas painted entirely black with a white dot slightly off center. She stands in front of the painting for a spell, emotionless. Eventually she makes her way over to a bench where she sits, her back to the painting. She reaches into her handbag and pulls out a napkin, which she opens over her lap. She then pulls out a plastic container full of cooked macaroni & cheese. Next she pulls out a bottle of ketchup. This causes her to smile for the first time. She squirts the ketchup on to the macaroni and pulls out a fork to start stirring her concoction. LINDSAY, the security guard enters.*

LINDSAY: Ma'am, the museum will be closing in... I'm... are you...?

MELODY: Would you like some mac & cheese?

LINDSAY: You can't be... with ketchup?

MELODY: I only have one fork, but we could share.

LINDSAY: I'm sorry, I can't... you can't eat that in here.

MELODY: You're new, aren't you?

LINDSAY: No.

MELODY: You are. I know all the security guards here. You're new.

LINDSAY: I've worked here for...you can't eat in here, ma'am.

MELODY: Maybe you're not new to the museum, but you're new to this part of the museum at least. I know.

LINDSAY: Do you also know the museum closes in 7 minutes? You're going to have to--

MELODY: I've been coming here since... oh, who knows? But this is my favorite spot. Do you have a favorite spot?

LINDSAY: I really need you to—

MELODY: You're new here. I can tell.

MARCO, another security guard, enters.

MARCO: Hey, Melody! Good to see you again!

MELODY: You, too...?

MARCO: Marco!

MELODY: Oh, yes. I remember now. Of course I remember you... uh...

MARCO: Marco.

MELODY: Yes.

MARCO: I see you've met Lindsay. Bet you're glad to be out of archive duty and up amongst the people, huh, Lindsay? How are you two getting on?

LINDSAY: She shouldn't be eating in here, Marco.

MARCO: Oh, she's fine.

MELODY: I'm fine.

LINDSAY: It's mac & cheese. With ketchup!

MARCO: Oh yum! Hey, Melody, I'll swing by before we close, okay?

MELODY: Fine. Fine.

LINDSAY: Wait, Marco!

MARCO: Linds, do me a favor? Keep an eye on her, would ya? She shouldn't be any trouble. She rarely is. I'll be right back. I need to make sure those shady looking teenagers left and I need to make a quick phone call.

LINDSAY: But what about—?

MARCO: She's fine.

MELODY: I'm fine.

MARCO: Just hang out with her. Chat with her. I'll be right back.

MELODY: I'll try to save you a couple of bites!

MARCO: You're an angel, Melody!

MARCO rushes off. There is an awkward silence as MELODY chews happily. MELODY considers LINDSAY for a moment before speaking.

MELODY: It bugs you, doesn't it?

LINDSAY: Yes. No. What?

MELODY: It's okay. It bugs me, too. But I think that's the point.

LINDSAY: Wait. What's the point?

MELODY: I can't look at it for too long. But, I love it for some reason.

LINDSAY: Are we... talking about the painting?

LINDSAY indicates the canvass behind MELODY.

MELODY: I mean, the artist must have put that dot just off center for a reason, but trying to figure out why...? Whoo! Darn near impossible, am I right?

LINDSAY: I try not to think too much about it.

MELODY: Exactly! Me too! Are you new here?

LINDSAY: I'd feel a lot better if you'd put your food away.

MELODY: What's the matter?

LINDSAY: You have food. In an art gallery.

MELODY: You seem tense.

LINDSAY: I am tense. You're squirting ketchup near priceless works of art!

MELODY: No one is squirting anything. Here, maybe you should sit down. Are you hungry?

LINDSAY: I'm not hungry. Look, as soon as Marco gets back you're going to have to leave, so—

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