

# The Portraitist

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*“I want to paint men and women with that something  
of the eternal which the halo used to represent.”*

Vincent Van Gogh

*“No artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.  
His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation  
to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone;  
you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.”*

T. S. Eliot

## **CHARACTERS**

FAY LOCKE, the portraitist; age 32, and her child-self from 14 to 17

MURIEL DAUBLER, Fay's tutor; age 48, and from 30 to 33

FRANCINE AMBLER, Fay's niece and apprentice; age 15

PHYLLIS GREEN, Fay's commissioned poser; age 40

LUCY GREEN, Phyllis's daughter; age 14

Note: The roles of Francine and Lucy are intended  
to be played by young adult women.

## **TIME**

The present summer and summers past

## **PLACE**

Dark Harbor, on the island of Islesboro, Maine, in a house by the sea.

A single set suggests an artist's studio with easels and stools for the painters,  
and chairs for their subjects. All the paintings referred to are represented by frames:  
ornate rectangles for Fay's paintings, oblique distortions for Francine's.

(FRANCINE AMBLER, the young apprentice, stands by her easel, painting. Although her brush is real, the painting is mimed, and the canvas represented by a frame. When FRANCINE lifts her brush, she does so to discordant rhythms, evoking the image of an inept conductor. When the music stops, FRANCINE puts down her brush, takes a smartphone from her pocket, snaps pictures of the studio, then begins recording.)

FRANCINE

Summer blog: day one. I'm supposed to be painting her portrait, but there's so many mirrors here I can't help looking at myself looking at her. Mom thinks I'm spending the summer with Aunt Fay so I can learn how to paint, but let's get factual: It doesn't look like her; it doesn't look like anybody.

(FAY LOCKE enters, having overheard.)

FAY

Yes, it does -- the curve of my chin, the slope of my nose.

FRANCINE

I'm better at fruit.

FAY

Were you calling home?

FRANCINE

Nope. I'm making a audio-blog for some friends.

FAY

Well, why don't you put the phone away, and I'll show you a trick for starting the head.

(A classical waltz fades in as FAY speaks, lifting her brush in swift, confident sweeps.)

FAY

First, draw an oval, and inside draw a triangle pointing up, then a triangle pointing down. The Egyptians used triangulation to calculate their distance from the stars. Now where the lines intersect is the approximate position of the mouth and eyes. Notice that your face is about one and a half times longer than it is wide; the length of your ear equal to that of your nose; and the width of an eye equal to the distance between both, and soon...

(FRANCINE stands agape until FAY ceases painting.)

FRANCINE

It's perfect, and you weren't even looking!

FAY

If the Egyptians could find the stars, I can certainly find one small face.

FRANCINE

I could never do that, never.

FAY

*(laughs!)*

FRANCINE

What's so funny?

FAY

I had a tutor when I was your age.

FRANCINE

Was she as good as you?

FAY

To me, she was the world's most inspired painter -- the High Priestess of Art preaching from her pulpit!

(Music as MURIEL DAUBLER, age 30, enters from the past as Francine imagines her: larger than life, with splotches of paint on her skin, hair, and clothing. SHE speaks with a British accent and holds some drawings.)

FAY

I remember showing her my first sketches.

MURIEL

Dear god.

FAY

All the nymphs and goddesses of fashion.

MURIEL

Typical of children your age. The onset of puberty has completely destroyed your instinctive sense of color and harmony. At best you'll be a portraitist.

(FAY'S voice and posture change as she becomes her shy, child-self.)

FAY

But isn't it too soon to tell? I've only had one lesson.

MURIEL

Titian and Raphael were infant prodigies; Miro showed promise at the age of eight; Rousseau at ten. How old are you -- fourteen? Nearly fifteen.

FAY

So why do you even bother with me?

MURIEL

Pity -- and your parents pay me very well.

FAY

Why do you pity me?

MURIEL

Because you're only painting to cover some vulgar panelling in a house completely devoid of taste -- never mind a library. Beside that, you're spoiled. You couldn't possibly make the necessary sacrifices.

FAY

But I'm just beginning.

MURIEL

The beginning is when you most need the courage to open those myopic little eyes. Later, the aesthetic impulses will have atrophied, and you'll only have a talent for mimicry.

FAY

I...I don't know what you mean.

MURIEL

Artists master many styles -- not to imitate but assimilate -- beginning with the earliest, most primitive, on through abstract expressionism. All great painters learned from the traditions that preceded their time. In other words, that little brain of yours has to fathom the entire history of civilization.

FAY

But I just want to paint. Look, that's my father with our cat in his lap. My mother says it looks exactly like him.

MURIEL

His head's a turnip and his mouth an amorphous sausage, but somehow it's...appropriate.

FAY

I know what you're saying; I'm not stupid.

MURIEL

You'll need some lessons in basic triangulation, and never forget: as a portraitist, it's your obligation to know your subject inside and out -- his moles and pockmarks, his habits and fixations. Take as long as you need. Remember: it took four years to paint the Mona Lisa.

FAY

But I just want it to look like him.

MURIEL

Not enough! Even the first painters on Earth knew that. When they drew bison on cave walls, they captured the harmonies of their bison souls -- that made them easier to kill. Their paintings were prayers for survival, and their paints were made from bones bound in oil. Now come here, to the window. Describe what you see.

FAY

Well, there's the ocean, and the beach, and a man fishing with a little girl. Maybe she's his daughter...?

MURIEL

If you become an artist, you'll see more than that. You'll see a spectrum of colors and myriad forms in every living thing. You'll see beauty and death and eternity.

FAY

I see beauty all right, but (*giggling*) where's death?

MURIEL

You want to see death? I'll show you death: death is when a studio becomes a nursery, when an artist becomes a baby-sitter! Do you think I enjoy this?!

FAY

No, ma'am. I mean, I...I'm sorry.

MURIEL

Death is the dominant antithesis between the dark water and the light sky. The fisherman and the child are bright, vertical slashes on an endless horizontal line that will remain long after they're gone, after I'm gone, even after *you're* gone.

(MURIEL retreats as FAY addresses Francine, returning to her adult-self.)

FAY

Francine, describe what you see, from the window.

FRANCINE

Well, the ocean, of course -- not at its best for painting -- but I like it when it's gray and angry and flashing its teeth -- reminds me of rabies.

FAY

Have you ever painted the sea?

FRANCINE

No, it's too big and besides, everybody paints it. Look, Aunt Fay, don't expect too much from me.

FAY

It's too late. You've already given me reason to expect a great deal.

FRANCINE

Do I have to call you "aunt"? I mean, you're a lot younger than mom, and it seems stupid.

FAY

Fine, call me Fay, and I'll think of you as my apprentice -- the way I was Muriel's apprentice. Now is there something you'd especially like to paint?

FRANCINE

*(pause)* Horses, I guess, and cats, and faces -- mostly faces.

FAY

Good. I've been commissioned to paint two portraits. We haven't met yet, but I'm confirming the arrangements tomorrow. The family's name is Green.

FRANCINE

That's the color I'm painting your eyes. I hope you don't mind.

FAY

Not at all. It's the color of hope and pride.

FRANCINE

And poison.

(FRANCINE turns aside and whispers into her smartphone as FAY stands motionless.)

FRANCINE

Green, green, every minute, every hour. Green suffocates, Fay suffocates, and I could scream at the thought of spending the rest of the day together much less the whole fucking summer. Mom said Fay's the only sister with talent, but she went round the bend and cried for six months running. She's insane all right. She hasn't even got a T V, never mind a computer. Thank Christ we'll have some company.

(As FRANCINE speaks, PHYLLIS GREEN, a striking woman of forty, enters and extends her hand.)

FRANCINE

Her name is...

FRANCINE

...Phyllis.

PHYLLIS

Phyllis...

PHYLLIS

...Green. As I mentioned, I'd like you to paint my daughter, Lucy and me to accommodate my husband. He'd like them completed by August tenth. Two portraits in six weeks doesn't sound unreasonable, or does it?

FAY

I'm sorry, I didn't realize your time constraints.

PHYLLIS

I'll make it worth your while.

FAY

I know my limitations.

PHYLLIS

Will twenty thousand dollars be incentive enough to reassess them?

FAY

That's very generous.

PHYLLIS

You'll deserve it if the portraits are completed to my stipulations: they can't be larger than thirty by thirty-five inches exclusive of their frames, and should be painted to an exact and agreeable likeness.

FAY

Why did you choose me?

PHYLLIS

Last April, Martin and I were touring the Deepings Gallery and saw “The Everly Eating Cheese,” such wonderfully traditional portraits. Frankly, I was expecting an older woman. Your paintings are more literal than most young artists whose work Martin finds abhorrent, but then he prefers Rembrandt to Picasso or anything post-Renoir.

FAY

And you? What do you prefer?

PHYLLIS

I tend to agree with Martin. *(pause)* Well, have you made a decision? I’m afraid I haven’t much time.

FAY

Yes. Yes, I’ll do it.

PHYLLIS

Good. I’d like my sittings to be brief and at my convenience. I’m very busy, and could bring a few photographs to expedite matters.

FAY

Well, I...I’d prefer not to rely on them.

PHYLLIS

Here’s a check for half your fee, and I’ve prepared a schedule. Please note whatever adjustments we need to make.

FAY

I hope you won’t mind if Francine observes during our sittings.

PHYLLIS

I have no objections.

FAY

Before you go, could you tell me a little more about Lucy -- and yourself?

PHYLLIS

Lucy’s a lovely girl, though she’s an uninspired student and compulsive texter, which no doubt means she’ll make a restless model. As for me, I’m an estate lawyer in Boston,

PHYLLIS (cont'd)

and occasionally write features for travel publications. The Greens have summered in Dark Harbor for nearly a century. As I said, the portraits are really for my husband. I'm sure you'll triumph.

(PHYLLIS departs as FAY turns to Francine.)

FAY

I'm a little apprehensive about painting them.

FRANCINE

Will you use the photographs?

FAY

No...

FAY

...photographers are thieves.

MURIEL

Photographers are thieves,...

(MURIEL emerges as FAY becomes her child self.)

MURIEL

....filchers from nature who rely entirely on the subject at hand. A painting can't lie the way a photograph can, and who wants to be preserved by a Cyclops retractable lens. Do you?

FAY

Well, no, not if you put it that way.

MURIEL

Of course I put it that way! Can machines create? Can they illuminate?

FAY

Well...

MURIEL

Can they ask questions that can't be answered?

FAY

I...I don't think...

MURIEL

Well, start thinking! Don't you want to know why you find something beautiful?

FAY

I guess...

MURIEL

Do you believe in universal principles of beauty?

FAY

I'm not sure what...

MURIEL

Do you believe that beauty stays the same and only styles change?

FAY

I...I don't know...

MURIEL

Do you know the difference between a man and a painting of a man?

FAY

Well, sure, I mean...

MURIEL

Art refuses to age! That's the difference! Artists free us from the curse of nature! They bless and liberate the soul! Now, isn't that why you want to paint?

FAY

Yes, ma'am.

MURIEL

Good! Is that the only reason?

FAY

Well, I also want to be able to...to do it.

MURIEL

Why?

FAY

I don't know. I...I guess to please my parents.

MURIEL

Never! Never put the sentiments of others in place of your own. Find yourself!

FAY

Yes, ma'am.

MURIEL

Please yourself! Untangle the knots in that dark little mind so it can begin to search for purity and principles! Do you understand what I'm saying?

FAY

I...I'm not sure.

MURIEL

Look, all you see are the objects in front of your nose. But they represent only small, stunted variations on the primal forms inherent in the structure of the entire universe! Those are what you have to find: every nuance, every symmetry-- in every face, every tree, every waterfall! And soon you won't need the face, the tree, the waterfall. Do you understand?

FAY

Well, no, not...not really.

MURIEL

*(sighs)* Pearls before swine.

FAY

I'm not a swine! Why do you keep shouting questions like I'm stupid?! I'm not! I do very well in school.

MURIEL

Bully for you! This isn't school; this is the universe! Right now you're standing in a vast barren desert, a jungle of pitch black ignorance and mediocrity, and you know what that makes you?

FAY

No.

MURIEL

Just another barbarian, a greedy little savage cooking her own pagan stew. Now ask me who I am! Go on!

FAY

Who...

MURIEL

I am the Missionary! The Apostle of Art! Conductor of Radiance! Composer to the Great Courts of Color that Make Life a Symphony!!

(MURIEL freezes in time as FRANCINE takes out her smartphone, takes a picture of herself, then speaks as FAY arranges a chair.)

FRANCINE

My face is red from the wine buzz I've got going for Lucy's arrival. Fay leaves bottles in the fridge so I help myself. Fay thinks Phyllis is ambitious, so I figure she fast tracked her kid into being a psycho. I can't wait to meet her!

FAY

From here the skylight will strike the top of her head with the noonday sun.

FRANCINE

Can you look at a painting and tell what time it was painted?

FAY

What time, what season, what the artist felt for the subject, what the subject felt for the artist.

(LUCY enters, wearing earbuds.)

FAY

Lucy, welcome. I'm Fay Locke, your portraitist, and this is my niece, Francine.

FRANCINE

Hi.

FAY

Francine is my apprentice. We'll both be painting you. Now, please sit right here.

LUCY

Do you mind if keep my earbuds on?

FAY

I don't see why not. *(pause)* You're so lovely from every side, I don't know where to position you.

LUCY

Anywhere's fine. It won't make any difference.

FAY

It will to me.

LUCY

Why? Nobody's going to see it.

FAY

What? The painting?

LUCY

It figures she wouldn't tell you.

FAY

Tell me what?

LUCY

They're going to be buried -- in the family vault. It's dad's idea. He wants us all immortalized before we croak.

FRANCINE

Jesus, are you sick?

LUCY

Yeah, the whole family's sick, but don't worry -- it's not contagious, and we haven't set a date or anything, but it's only a matter of months, maybe days. *(to Fay, adjusting her earbuds)* So you'd better get started.

FAY

Yes, well... *(to Francine)* Shall we?

*(FAY and FRANCINE start to paint: FAY sweeping her brush to measures of a waltz; then FRANCINE thrusting her brush to original rock music. After alternating back and forth, THEY paint simultaneously, overlapping their tunes to a crescendo, then cease abruptly.)*

FAY

Lucy! Can you hear me?

LUCY

*(removing her earbuds)* What?

FAY

I'm finished for now.

LUCY

Great. *(to Francine)* Can I see yours?

FRANCINE

Okay, but it's not finished.

(LUCY and FAY approach Francine's painting. FAY beams with admiration while LUCY backs away. )

FAY

Oh, Francine, it's wonderful!

LUCY

So how come my hair's purple?

FRANCINE

To match your shirt.

LUCY

Which is white.

FAY

Francine's a creator. She strives for more than an exact likeness.

LUCY

Whatever.

(FRANCINE approaches Fay's portrait.)

FRANCINE

Come look! It's awesome...

(LUCY struts to the portrait and appears unimpressed.)

FAY

Tell me, do you look more like your mother or your father?

LUCY

I don't look like anybody. You sure ask a lot of questions.

FRANCINE

It's a portraitist's obligation to know her subjects so she can capture your soul.

FAY

Well, I...I only try to capture your...character. Now here's a revised schedule for your mother, and I'll see you again on Saturday.

LUCY

What for? You've already captured me. Just color me in and you're done.

FAY

I'm glad you approve, but I need a few more sittings. They'll be short, I promise.

LUCY

They better be. My gums are starting to bleed. By Saturday my teeth could be gone. You've got to get me down while I'm still half human, and be careful with mom -- with her it's tumors on the brain.

FAY

I'm sorry. She looked so well.

LUCY

It's the wig, but she's vain about it, so don't let on you know. *(waving)* Bye!

*(LUCY exits.)*

FRANCINE

Do you really think she's dying?

FAY

I hope not. *(pause, staring at Francine's portrait)* Oh, Francine,...

FRANCINE

I hate it; Lucy hates it.

FAY

Your gift is your freedom with colors. They're so pure and perfectly balanced -- like Matisse. *(pause)* Would you like to see some portraits I painted when I was your age?

FRANCINE

Sure.

FAY

*(pointing)* See those paintings near the ceiling, the faces over there.

FRANCINE

They're Muriel.

FAY

How did you know?

FRANCINE

Easy. You talk about her nonstop.

*(Crossfade to MURIEL perched atop a stool.)*

MURIEL

Your métier is portraiture, so first draw me in profile as a sphinx, then as a Greek goddess, then on through the early Christians, the Romanesque, and Gothic! Then bring me into the Renaissance, the Baroque! Italy! Flanders! Spain! Well, go on, paint! Courage girl! Be brave; be proud! The canvas is a virgin that wants ravishing!

FAY

*(to Francine)* That's when I painted her in the Middle Ages.

MURIEL

Well, well, finally! I actually sense a vague resemblance, but where are my ears? And why is my mouth open when I posed with it shut?

FAY

*(becoming her child-self)* I...I don't know.

MURIEL

Why don't you say it? Because I'm always talking! Of course, ha, ha! This is the most presumptuous thing you've ever done, and certainly the most imaginative, but really, Fay, you've forgotten everything I told you about mixing flesh tones. Have I been wallowing in ashes? And why are my eyes the color of limes? You obviously haven't looked very closely. Go on, let me see you mix the proper color.

FAY

I...I can't.

MURIEL

Come on, now, dress your palette!

FAY

But I...I've already tried.

MURIEL

Oh, for godssake, stop whining! Look at my eyes. What color?

FAY

Blue.

MURIEL

Which blue?

FAY

Cobalt...?

MURIEL

Try again.

FAY

Cerulean...?

MURIEL

Don't be ridiculous! Look closely.

(FAY squints, then turns with a sniff.)

MURIEL

What in God's name is your problem?!

FAY

I...I can't paint you or anyone.

MURIEL

You can't? Then it's just as I thought: the only colors you'll ever mix are matched socks! (*she sighs*) Oh, Lord, if I have to teach, where are the great Tintoretos who never say can't? Where are the impatient, impassioned Gauguins? Where are the half-crazed Modiglianis who'd trade their last painting for a bottle of wine, and do you know why? Because they know they can never be bought by this selfish, grasping, Philistine world! They know life is too short to waste in the company of mediocre little girls who'll never create anything but brats like themselves!

FAY

Stop it! Stop! I made you all mouth and no ears 'cause you always yell and *never* listen!  
And your eyes are limes 'cause they're small and sour and full of hate! Hate! Hate!

MURIEL

Don't you dare run away from me! If what you say is true, then the eyes are the best thing  
about this painting.

FAY

No! Your skin's gray 'cause you're dying of plague! Isn't that what they died of in the  
Middle Ages? Let go of me!

MURIEL

Sit down! (*pause*) You really hate me?

FAY

Yesssssss.

MURIEL

Good, I'm glad! Because we've been thrown together for an insufferably hot summer.  
I should have evoked some feelings in you by now, and frankly, I prefer belligerence and  
loathing to your usual sniveling sulks. Now wipe your nose and get to work!

FAY

I'm sick of working with you. I can't anymore!

MURIEL

You mean you haven't learned anything from me?

FAY

Sure, but...

MURIEL

Then grow up and accept me as I am: a terrible fire breathing pedagogue, but devoted  
to you nevertheless.

FAY

That's a lie! You hate me! You hate being here with me!

MURIEL

I did, that's true, but I don't anymore. In fact, I haven't since last Thursday. I'm even  
thinking of painting your portrait. That way I can give you thicker skin -- so you'll learn  
to tolerate my temperament.

FAY

Then you'll have to tolerate me too, or else I'll...

MURIEL

You'll what?

FAY

I'll tell my parents you're making me sick, and you'll have to find somebody else to torture.

MURIEL

And just how am I making you sick?

FAY

My stomach's always nervous. Aunt Gertrude says I'm high strung.

MURIEL

That's better than being unstrung. Believe me, I know.

FAY

You're probably giving me ulcers!

MURIEL

At least I'm not blackmailing you, but if you do, I'll tell your mother to start looking for eligible bachelors with white canes because that's your only hope.

FAY

Liar! You told her I have promise!

MURIEL

Did I? I'll tell her I was wrong.

FAY

She'll never believe you, and neither will my father! He says you're strange.

MURIEL

Coming from him, that can only be taken as a compliment.

FAY

If I told him all the mean things you say, he'd stop my lessons in a minute!

MURIEL

Then I'd be out of a job, wouldn't I? Of course, before I go...

FAY

What...?

MURIEL

I'd paint your head on the body of a fat, yellow pig for all the world to see.

FAY

You wouldn't!

MURIEL

Ha, ha! Yes, I would! Then I'd paint your parents as two stopped clocks under a piss green umbrella.

FAY

You don't find their money "piss green"!

MURIEL

Ooooooh, what a little shrew you can be.

FAY

My father says if you were any good, you'd be in New York!

MURIEL

Ha! I was in New York! And Paris and Rome, and I was born in London.

FAY

Then *go back*!

MURIEL

Cities are too vertical; I need longer horizons.

FAY

You think you're God's gift! You're not considered an artist by anyone but yourself!

MURIEL

Nonsense! I admit one critic called my paintings "obscene little daubs," but another said I'd found an entirely original correlative for my regressions. Unfortunately, the latter wasn't influential enough to keep me from teaching. That's what you wanted to hear, wasn't it? What a pity you can't throw those daggers into your art.

FAY

I'm leaving!

MURIEL

No, no, don't! Please, Fay, don't go. I...I suppose I ought to explain. *(pause, she sighs)* I came to Dark Harbor five years ago. Some friends and I decided to form a commune of artists, but I'm the only survivor. My father still sends money to pay the rent, but not enough to...to live. I can't sustain myself on art, but I've tried. *(drifting, closing her eyes)* If only we could cut our paintings into pieces, then pass them through our lips, melting them with our tongues, swallowing their colors, savoring their textures till they're thoroughly digested and flowing through our...

FAY

Can I go now?!

MURIEL

No, wait! *(pause)* I...I just want you to know that I'm struggling and a little discouraged, but I shouldn't discourage you, and I shouldn't say such spiteful things. My other students don't take me so seriously. Of course, they're older, full of unbreakable habits and beyond redemption, but you -- you have talent.

FAY

I do...?

MURIEL

Oh, yes.

FAY

Really...?

MURIEL

Really.

FAY

Then why can't you be more...patient?

MURIEL

I'm only patient with students I pity. I think of you as a disciple. In fact, none of my students is as gifted as you, and you really can capture an incredible likeness.

FAY

I knew it! Why didn't you say so?

MURIEL

Oh, you want flattery?

FAY

Well...

MURIEL

Flattery leads to sterility. You want sterility?

FAY

No.

MURIEL

You want to be corrupted? Secularized?

FAY

What...?

MURIEL

Art isn't just a vocation: it's a whole way of life!

(FAY sniffs, then MURIEL embraces her.)

MURIEL

Oh, my poor darling, my dear little Fay, please, please, forgive me.

FRANCINE

Are you crying, Fay?

(MURIEL releases FAY as she returns to her adult-self.)

FAY

No, no I'm fine.

FRANCINE

Do you still see Muriel?

FAY

Not until you came.

FRANCINE

You mean I remind you of her?

FAY

Oh, god, no, she was so...moody, unpredictable. No, no, you remind me of myself.

FRANCINE

Really? Then why don't you paint our portraits -- together!

FAY

I'm afraid it would be too conventional -- no purple hair.

FRANCINE

I don't care. You could sit here and I'll sit next to you, and we'll wear black velvet gowns,...

(MURIEL and FRANCINE overlap each other's final words.)

MURIEL

You've developed a penchant for the Grand Style of portraiture.

FRANCINE

...and matching lace gloves!

MURIEL

There's an air of distinction reminiscent of Van Dyck,...

FRANCINE

We'll have ivory complexions and breasts like balloons!

MURIEL

...yet there's a Reubenesque robustness.

FRANCINE

We'll wear sapphires and pearls...

MURIEL

For godssake, Fay, it's time you left the seventeenth century!

FRANCINE

...and be framed in solid gold!

MURIEL

Oh, I know you like the Grand Style, and it was all very well for reporting the classical traditions, but an artist must break free, reflect her own time,...

FAY

I...

MURIEL

...cross the threshold to her own reality!

FAY

I...I...

MURIEL

Otherwise, you'll be a common copyist.

FAY

Oh...

MURIEL

A common copyist!

(MURIEL departs as PHYLLIS appears, posing while  
FAY prepares her palette, and FRANCINE stands aside  
speaking into her smartphone.)

FRANCINE

The sun's turning me into a boiled crab and Fay doesn't mind me staring into mirrors, but the phone's off limits in the studio. The trouble is she has a tendency to inflict her education on me, but I'm adjusting, even starting to enjoy myself, and today Phyllis Green is at the mercy of my brush!

PHYLLIS

I hope we Greens are worthy subjects and you're not too disappointed with Martin for wanting us buried.

FRANCINE

You mean it's true?!

PHYLLIS

I'm afraid so. Lucy said she told you, and I would have mentioned it myself, but didn't want to discourage you from taking us on. You see, Martin's a catastrophist. He's convinced our days are numbered and insists on leaving proof of our existence entombed in his underground mausoleum. He's also instructed me to write our history and diagram the Family Tree to be buried with the portraits and various artifacts.

FRANCINE

Sort of like King Tut?

PHYLLIS

Well, yes. Martin's quite a collector. In his own inimitable way, he's come to the conclusion that art's the only thing worth salvaging. Frankly, I'd prefer he spent his money more expediently or even more charitably. You can't feed paintings to the homeless or use them to cure disease.

FAY

And they don't inspire governments to end wars and protect their resources.

PHYLLIS

My point, precisely.

FAY

If only we had more art in our lives, then we'd have ideals, real ideals to live for -- instead of ideologies to kill for.

PHYLLIS

"Real" ideals?

FAY

I mean values, what's good and true and...beautiful.

PHYLLIS

Oh, Martin would love you. Well, I've just been to Central Africa where I saw hundreds of people living in squalor. How could your paintings possibly help them? Really, I'd like to know.

FAY

Apparently, you don't think art's very important.

PHYLLIS

Practically speaking, no. I mean, no matter how aesthetic or valuable I might claim a painting to be, it's still one of the most trivial things in the world. And it's supercilious to claim there's a natural connection between virtue and art, or worse, that art is a fundamental necessity.

FAY

For me art is the greatest fundamental necessity, the imagination the most sacred gift a human being has.

PHYLLIS

Only if you're nourished enough to use it.

FAY

Without it, why be nourished at all? I'd rather be dead.

PHYLLIS

You would be. You can't eat art; you can't drink it. Does it provide shelter or clothing?

FAY

Yes, yes, maybe it does.

PHYLLIS

Really? How?

FRANCINE

How?

FAY

I'm showing you. My lines and colors express how I see you, and your watching how I see you evokes in you a thought, and that thought -- whatever it is...

PHYLLIS

Shall I tell you?

FAY

No. Whatever it is will be mixed with all the thoughts and images inside you since birth. Even my voice speaking these words is part of your mind, of what you have to choose from to make every decision you'll ever make. So my painting affects you, and through you, it affects your friends and your friends' friends, and on and on until the populations of the entire world are affected. Even at subatomic levels, a person observing an object influences the essence of that object -- so everything we do colors reality; everything we think and feel has power over history.

PHYLLIS

So you paint my face and destitute beggars will be fed and clothed?

FAY

It's possible.

PHYLLIS

With the strokes of your brush, you could save the world?

FAY

Yes!

FRANCINE

Jesus.

PHYLLIS

What an awesome responsibility. Frankly, I think you're mad.

FAY

It's the world that's mad -- from us, from all that's dark inside and around us. At least if we take the darkness into ourselves and give it new shapes and sounds and colors, if we make it into poetry and music and art...

PHYLLIS

Ah! So art saves the world from madness?!

FAY

It transforms the madness or it slips back into more hatred, more wars.

PHYLLIS

So paintings stop wars? What about my portrait? Which war is it stopping? *(pause)* Well, I certainly hope you're right because I've seen a great deal of our so-called civilized world, and I'm afraid it may someday look a like frozen moon.

FRANCINE

Shit...

PHYLLIS

Go to the Somalia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, or sail down the Yangtze -- there's where you'll see the future.

FRANCINE

You think the world's going to end?

PHYLLIS

It already has -- for thousands of species. Martin thinks we're next. He's convinced we'll annihilate ourselves with nuclear weapons, but failing that we'll do it through lethal germs, global warming, or overconsumption. *(pause)* I'm afraid I've been talking too much.

FRANCINE

That's okay. Fay says we should know our subjects inside and out.

PHYLLIS

Really? I hope I haven't changed my position.

FRANCINE

It doesn't matter. She can paint exact portraits from memory.

PHYLLIS

She's quite remarkable, your Fay. Tell me, is the subject entitled to know her portraitist?

FAY

Could you please close your mouth and turn your head slightly to the right? Yes, that's perfect.

(The lighting alters and waltz music swells as FAY makes grandiose gestures that are soon defeated by FRANCINE'S clangorous slashes. THEY alternate, then cease.)

FAY

Your session is over for today. Lucy's scheduled to come again Friday.

PHYLLIS

Fine. Good afternoon, ladies.

FRANCINE

Don't you want to see your portrait?

PHYLLIS

No, thanks, I'll wait till the unveiling.

FRANCINE

Oh, please, look at mine!

PHYLLIS

All right, if you insist. *(pause as she stares, frowning)* What's that? A...a dunce cap?

FRANCINE

No, it's a veil, a nun's veil. On this side I'm painting your past. When that's done, I'll paint your future.

PHYLLIS

You're very perceptive. I went to a Catholic boarding school and thought I'd become a missionary. But what's my future?

FRANCINE

I'm not sure yet, but Lucy says you're dying.

PHYLLIS

*(laughing)* Oh, Lucy, Lucy! That's her perverse sense of humor. Her therapist says it's her way of coping with Martin's doomsday prophecies. He was recently diagnosed with inoperable tumors, and medicates himself with bourbon which only makes things worse, so you see how its all too depressing.

FAY

I...I'm so sorry...

PHYLLIS

The truth is we've been separated for years, and Lucy and I have come to nurse and keep him company. He's moody, mostly miserable, but looking forward to seeing our portraits.

FRANCINE

I figured you weren't dying.

PHYLLIS

Believe me, if I were, I wouldn't waste so much time. *(to Fay)* I'd just tell you outright how beautiful you are. And how incredibly naive.

*(PHYLLIS exits.)*

FRANCINE

She called us naive.

FAY

She means we believe in art. She means our purpose in life is to enrich the world with paintings, no matter who tries to ridicule or belittle us.

FRANCINE

She said you were beautiful.

FAY

She meant both of us.

FRANCINE

She was looking at you.

FAY

Let's evaluate your progress. *(pause)* You have such a brave approach to color, combinations I haven't used since childhood. There's much more of you in these paintings than there is of me in mine.

FRANCINE

But you can't tell who they are!

FAY

I can, and what's more I know exactly what you think of them. Can you tell what I think?

FRANCINE

No, but they're so...perfect.

FAY

Perfect little deceptions, like perfectly round potatoes.

FRANCINE

Doesn't it bother you that nobody'll see them?

FAY

Yes, but I still want them to be as good as I can make them. I mean, suppose Martin Green is right, and we're really threatened with extinction? Suppose there's a horrible war and his tomb's the only evidence of life left on earth? Then we'd be preserving the memory of civilization, and the Greens would represent the entire human race.

FRANCINE

Not me they wouldn't.

FAY

You could pretend. You could use this as an opportunity to sketch and paint in different ways,...

(MURIEL appears again, mimicking Fay's gestures.)

FAY

...beginning with the earliest....

MURIEL

Beginning with the earliest...

MURIEL

...most primitive, then draw me in the spirit of ancient Egypt!

FAY

The Greens as frescoes! The Greens on horseback! The Greens at sunrise! At sea!

FRANCINE

You're fucking crazy.

FAY

The Greens as Fantasy! As Fission! Fusion! You could combine all your sketches into an apocalyptic mural. I'll help! We'll use a wall in the spare room!

FRANCINE

A whole wall?

FAY

Yes! This gives us a strategy for your lessons, a mission for the millennium!

MURIEL

I am the Missionary!...

FAY

But first you must finish my portrait.

MURIEL

...The Apostle of Art!...

FAY

Paint all my virtues;...

MURIEL

...Conductor of Radiance!...

FAY

...all my faults.

MURIEL

...Composer to the Great Courts of Color that proclaim:

"So long as men can breathe and eyes can see,  
So long lives this and this gives life to thee!"

(FRANCINE takes a quick photo of FAY and speaks into her smartphone.)

FRANCINE

Fuck! Why didn't I'd inherit Fay's genes? Her nose, hair and height are perfect, but I see her weakness, so I'm showing what I know in the portrait, adding daggers dripping blood from the pupils of her eyes. Of course, she's not there for me. She's posing in the present, but she's thinking of...

FRANCINE  
...Muriel.

FAY  
Muriel,...

FAY  
...turn me into a masterpiece!

(Now FAY poses for both MURIEL in the past and  
FRANCINE in the present.)

MURIEL  
Anything less is irreverent. Now, relax, dear heart. I'm not sketching the Cavalier Courts,  
just an exquisite young girl. *(pause, she sighs)* Yours is a beauty that will break hearts.  
Be grateful you live by the sea.

FAY  
Why?

MURIEL  
Because the sea makes you hungry and wild and strong, especially your calves. They're  
wonderfully curved, like Victorine Meurent's when she posed as a bullfighter for Manet.

FAY  
I can't wait to see what you've done!

MURIEL  
No one sees my work till it's finished, till the last instrument is tuned and ready to play.

FAY  
But it's just a sketch.

MURIEL  
"Just a sketch?!" You think Raphael said, "just a sketch" when he drew Saint Placidus?

FAY  
No.

MURIEL  
Did Ingres say "just a sketch" when he drew Paganini?

FAY  
No.

MURIEL

Well, then. *(pause)* Someday soon we'll progress to nude studies.

FAY

Really? You mean get real models? My father would have a fit.

MURIEL

I'll be your model.

FAY

You?!

MURIEL

Why not?

FAY

You mean you'd really do it? Take off your clothes and just stand there -- naked?

MURIEL

"Nude" is the word.

FAY

I...I don't think I could paint like that.

MURIEL

Thank God Michelangelo didn't feel that way. What a prudish little frump you are.

*(FAY unpins her hair.)*

MURIEL

It's time you let down your...

MURIEL

...your hair.

FRANCINE

Your hair!

FRANCINE

...looks great that way!

MURIEL

There! Now you're my own little Menina.

FRANCINE

Now you're more like my painting!

FRANCINE  
Don't move!

MURIEL  
Don't move.

MURIEL  
I'm thinking of turning this into a painting. If I'm lucky, I'll sell it to your parents. Just one of my paintings in the house and their entire lives would change. Of course, I'm much too prestissimo for their taste. Humph! What taste? Triple masted schooners and dun cows under trees. Ohhh, such elegant cheek bones, such delicate skin. You see, my little Fay, by painting you, I'm able to explore every nuance of your body. This way I don't just know you, I fathom and divine you.

FAY  
Will you paint me full figured?

MURIEL  
Yes!

FRANCINE  
Yes!

FAY  
In the Grand Style?

MURIEL  
In *my* style.

FRANCINE  
In *my* style.

MURIEL  
I'm a tachiste, a rhapsodist, whisking quick slivers of color through spiralling beams. My own teacher was taught by a student of the great Kandinsky who believed that every color had its own instrument.

FRANCINE  
What color should I paint your dress?

FAY  
First unlock...

FAY  
... the secret of the color keys.

MURIEL  
The secret of the color keys...

MURIEL  
...belonged to a band of primordial jugglers. Each color had its own sound and was locked with its sound in...

MURIEL  
...red, yellow, and blue balls.

FAY  
Red, yellow, blue balls.

MURIEL

One day, God, who was deaf and blind, sensed the movements in the air and decided to make himself...

MURIEL

...an eye, an ear, and a hand.

FAY

An eye, an ear, and a hand.

MURIEL

The eye was for seeing colors, the ear for hearing their corresponding melodies, and the hand was for stealing the balls from the jugglers. Later, God made a mouth and called forth the universe! As time passes, He throws down new balls of color, releasing them to Earth through the palettes of artists.

FAY

What happened to the jugglers?

MURIEL

They're devils now, groping in the hell between conception and reality. Darkness came before light, and when God said, "Let there be light," he really meant let there be green and blue and rainbows and spectrums. Now I want light streaming down your hair like a bright fountain, trickling down your back, past your thighs, your knees, straight through to the core of the Earth! (*embracing Fay*) Oh, you're really such a sweet girl. (*pause*) What's wrong? You're trembling.

FAY

I...I don't know what...what you want.

MURIEL

Salvation! So do you! And I can save you -- from becoming mediocre. And do you know why? Because you have music! Music! Oh, right now you're content to play monkey see, monkey do...

FAY

You said I was exceptional!

MURIEL

An exceptional mechanic -- not an inventor. But when you're ready, when you break away and leave for Parnassus! Oh, the wonders you'll create!

FAY

You mean I...I'll be on my own? I...I can't imagine painting without you. I mean, everything I paint is for...well, I know you'll be seeing it, and...

MURIEL

Yes, for now.

FAY

And next summer and the summer after that! Forever!

MURIEL

Oh, you're such a baby.

FAY

Please, Muriel, can't we always be close? Always!

MURIEL

Of course, but you'll grow up someday -- or one can only hope.

FAY

I wish this summer would never end. (*embracing Muriel*) Never! Never! Never!

MURIEL

"I wish, I wish, but I wish in vain..."

MURIEL

...that I could once be a child again."

FAY

That I could once be a child again.

(THEY kiss each other gently.)

FRANCINE

Fay? Are you alright?

(FRANCINE steps aside, pulling out her phone.)

FRANCINE

Sometimes she drifts and I wonder if she'll ever beam back down. There's scars on her wrists which I'm putting in her portrait so she'll know I know, but don't mind. Sometimes I get tired of painting, and go swimming. The beaches are full of kids smoking and skimming frisbees, but soon I start missing Fay, and sometimes I go back, sneak up the stairs, and listen while she's painting the Greens.

(Lights reveal PHYLLIS then LUCY, their poses changing to indicate conversations occurring at different sessions while FAY paints and FRANCINE eavesdrops.)

PHYLLIS

I don't understand why you're having me pose in so many positions.

LUCY

Didn't Phyl say only the face?

FAY

Yes, but yours looks less bored when you're facing east.

PHYLLIS

*(changing her pose)* Now that you've seen me from every conceivable angle, surely you've found one that will suffice?

LUCY

*(in a different pose)* They're going to be buried for chrissake!

PHYLLIS

*(changing her pose)* You're certainly taking this seriously.

LUCY

Just get us down the way Rembrandt would do it!

*(LUCY departs, and FAY focuses on Phyllis.)*

PHYLLIS

At least we can be grateful you're not one of those dilettantes competing to see how many ways there are of saying absolutely nothing.

FAY

Sometimes paintings say things beyond logic, beyond words or images.

PHYLLIS

That seems irresponsible, and what's the point?

FAY

The point is the painting, the colors and lines. Why do you always need to recognize things?

PHYLLIS

Because I don't like riddles -- except for you.

FAY

If you don't know what a painting means, why can't you just stand still and let it affect you? If you have to judge it, then judge it by reference to itself, and only itself -- because there's nothing like it in the entire world.

PHYLLIS

Judge a black blot in a mustard yellow smudge? Then I judge it to be grotesque, besides being a waste of time -- for me and the charlatan who painted it. Now you! You have talent! You're an artist!

FAY

I'm afraid I'm only a painter.

MURIEL

A copyist!

FAY

It's true, I...I try to be an artist,...

MURIEL

A common copyist!

FAY

...but I'm tied to my reputation, my portraits, because I...I don't know. There's something in me that can't,...

MURIEL

Leap out of the canvas!

FAY

...that can't...

MURIEL

Be heroic! Be proud!

FAY

I can't explain really, but at least I can earn a living, at least I can do that.

PHYLLIS

That's economics: the fruits of your labor for their cash value, but first we must accept the fruits.

FAY

As long as they're edible, but it takes imagination to be reached by symbols.

PHYLLIS

I want to be reached -- by you. You're quite exciting, you know, even when you're condescending.

FAY

I don't mean to be. It's just that to me art is...sacred.

PHYLLIS

"Sacred?" But didn't you say you're "only a painter?"

FAY

Yes, but at least I know the difference. I pity people who don't.

PHYLLIS

And I pity you. What you need is to fall in love -- you'd be a much happier woman.

FAY

How dare you?! You know nothing about my happiness, my life! Nothing!

PHYLLIS

I know how alone you are, how wistful, yet so...alive. Don't you know I come here for the sheer joy of sparring with someone still willing to believe in the human race? You know what you are: a champion of the irrational. The trouble is you're not irrational enough. If you were, you might not be afraid.

FAY

Afraid...? Of what?

PHYLLIS

Of me, my dear. You say I should let things affect me, to go beyond logic, but when I do, where do I find myself? *(pause)* At the door to my heart. *(approaching Fay)* Please, Fay...

FAY

*(retreating)* Don't...

PHYLLIS

What do you find in your heart?

FAY

Nothing! Believe me, nothing.

PHYLLIS

Won't you kiss me?

FAY

No.

PHYLLIS

Then hold my hand.

FAY

I...I can't. You...you're making our sessions very...difficult. It's time for you to leave.

PHYLLIS

Are you sure...?

FAY

Yes! Now go! Go!

(PHYLLIS exits as FRANCINE enters.)

FAY

Where have you been?! From now on, I want you present at every sitting!

FRANCINE

Sure. Are you okay?

FAY

Yes, yes I'm fine.

FRANCINE

*(pause, picking up her brush)* I think I'll paint Phyllis in red.

FAY

In music, red's the color of trumpets.

FRANCINE

Blood's red; anger's red.

FAY

So is wine and pimento.

FRANCINE

Cherries are red.

FAY

Rubies and roses.

FRANCINE

And rashes.

FAY

And raspberries, lobsters, lipsticks;...

(FAY'S voice drops to a whisper as FRANCINE overlaps her litany, grasping her phone.)

FRANCINE

Devils are red. Fever is red. Fay's burning for Muriel is red. She burns for her all day, all night, wherever she goes, whatever she does. A heat rises from her body that makes the hairs on my neck stand up and march. It's contagious. We all feel the heat, especially Phyllis. Phyllis is in fucking flames!

FAY

...cardinals and peppers;  
radishes and rust;  
tomatoes and poppies;  
sunsets and jello;  
bricks and barns;  
rouges and blush;  
crab claws and clay;  
sports cars and Mars...

(Now LUCY appears, posing for FAY and FRANCINE, while MURIEL stands in the background.)

LUCY

So when are you going to finish?

FAY

When the last instrument is tuned and ready to play.

LUCY

Right.

FAY

Did you know that Francine's composing a mural? She's using her sketches to paint you through history.

FRANCINE

I'm starting with an Egyptian mummy.

LUCY

Look, it's *my* face, and *you're* not being paid to paint it. (*to Fay*) How long is this going to take?

FAY

I'm not sure. After all, I'm immortalizing civilization through these portraits.

LUCY

It figures Phyl would hire a flake.

FRANCINE

Fuck you!

FAY

Francine!

LUCY

Dipshit!

MURIEL

Never mind what anyone says!

LUCY

Look, I don't mean to be rude.

MURIEL

On one side stand the clock-punching, power-obsessed vulgarians.

LUCY

I've got better things to do!

MURIEL

They'll subsidize wars, but resist new music, new drama, new art!

LUCY

Can't you get a fan to cool the place off?

MURIEL

On our side stand the artists: fearless, intuitive, sensational!

FRANCINE

We like the heat.

LUCY

What do you do here all day? You can't *always* be painting?

MURIEL

Oh, the crudity! The ignorance! The greed!

LUCY

Christ, you don't even have a TV.

MURIEL

Reject their values!

LUCY

It's like you're living...

MURIEL

Despise their ideologies!

LUCY

...in the stone age!

MURIEL

What have they wrought but centuries of bloodshed?!

FAY

I know what you're saying, Lucy;...

FAY

...you think we're...

MURIEL

They think we're...

MURIEL

...dangerous, subversive,...

MURIEL

...inferior!

FAY

...inferior.

FAY

But at least we're not perpetually distracted,...

FAY

...consumers...

MURIEL

Cosumers!

FAY

...who will never produce a single inferential thought much less...

FAY

...a work of art!

MURIEL

A work of art!

FAY

Francine's going to paint more life into you than you ever dreamed of having. But don't worry, we'll continue to tolerate your presence even if you're not worthy of our "Lucy Athena" or our "Odalisque in Leotards."

LUCY

*(on the verge of tears)* You think it's easy sitting here day after day?!

FAY

Which extremity are you straining?

FRANCINE

*(gasps)*

LUCY

Sitting here makes me think of my dad weirding out, waiting for the whole world to fuck off and die!

FRANCINE

Jesus.

LUCY

There's maps with flags all over the fucking place!

FRANCINE

Flags?

LUCY

On the maps!

LUCY

Red...

MURIEL

Red!

LUCY

...flags for terrorist bombs and...

LUCY MURIEL  
...blue... Blue!

LUCY  
...flags for places wiped out by plagues and...

LUCY MURIEL  
...green... Green!

LUCY  
...flags for natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes.

FRANCINE  
Holy shit...

FAY  
*(pause, approaching Lucy)* Oh, Lucy, please, please, forgive me. I don't know what to say except that sometimes it helps to make something of your own that can't be taken away. That's what Francine and I are doing.

LUCY  
I can't make anything.

FAY  
Of course you can.

LUCY  
Bullshit, and I don't need you feeling sorry for me!

FAY  
I don't! Of course I...I feel sorry about your father, and the truth is, I'm growing fond of you -- so is Francine.

LUCY  
You said I was nothing!

FAY  
I regret what I said. Sometimes I get angry and say things I don't mean...

LUCY  
Yeah. *(stomping off)* You're all so full of crap!

FRANCINE

Wait! Don't go! She's right -- we really like you; we think you're funny.

LUCY

Yeah, hysterical. A retard with a psycho dad and dyke-o mom.

FAY

Who gives a shit?

LUCY

*(to Fay)* They think you're a retard too -- 'cause your house looks like shit.

FAY

Well, yes, it does need paint and a...a new roof. Listen, Lucy, would...would you like to stay for dinner?

FRANCINE

Yeah!

LUCY

No thanks. I have to go home. I promised my dad I'd read to him. He's going blind.

FRANCINE

Shit...

LUCY

That's why you've got to paint faster!

FAY

Yes, yes, of course, I will, I promise.

LUCY

Thanks. Bye.

FRANCINE

Bye.

FAY

Good bye, Lucy.

*(LUCY leaves.)*

FRANCINE

Poor kid. When her dad croaks, all she's got is Phyl, and all Phyl wants is you. *(pause)*  
Fay, do you think I could come back next summer?

FAY

I don't see why not.

FRANCINE

I thought I'd hate it here, but I'm getting used to it, and you're nothing like mom says.

FAY

Oh, really? So what does "mom" say?

FRANCINE

That you're depressed. She says you don't eat and dress like a bum, and you're wasting your life.

FAY

Really? Then why did she entrust me with you?

FRANCINE

'Cause she wants to get rid of me, and dad says I'm precocious like you used to be. Anyway, I really like learning to paint, and the things you talk about like art and ideas; it's like you're speaking a language I never hear at home. Did Muriel teach you everything you're teaching me?

FAY

Oh, more, much more...

(Music as MURIEL appears with a cassette recorder, and FAY becomes her child-self.)

MURIEL

I'm playing this symphony so you'll be affected in the same way that color harmonies affect you. Now dip your brush into the colors you hear! Spread them into shapes that create vibrations in your soul, making you desperate to create! And that, my dear, is joy! Is ecstasy! Is delirium!

FAY

I feel stupid.

MURIEL

The spirit, like the body, will perish if left unattended. I'm teaching you to tend the spirit through color, through form! We are the color musicians! We hold our brush batons!

FAY

I'm not in the mood. I feel...

MURIEL

Fuchsia! Feel fuchsia! Feeeeeeel it! Oh, let's paint everything in fuchsia! Let's dispense with canvases and boundaries altogether! Let's paint the world in never ending spans of fuchsia, fuchsia, fuchsia! Don't you feel it?

FAY

No.

MURIEL

Then dance till you do! Come on, dear, dance with me! Dance! Dance! Dance with fuchsian feet to the flaming fuchsian beat, while drinking fuchsian wines, in fuchsian times, in fuchsian times.

(FAY releases herself, turning towards Francine as MURIEL dances around them.)

FAY

Francine, do you ever feel such...

MURIEL

Fuchsia!

FAY

...freedom, such exhilaration, you could paint the world in...

FAY

....fuchsia!

MURIEL

Fuchisa!

(MURIEL dances off as FAY turns to Francine.)

FAY

Right now I'd like to take a clean canvas and paint exactly what I feel! Help me! There! Take the largest!

(FRANCINE retrieves a large frame, and FAY begins to paint with increasing fury to discordant sounds.)

FAY

I feel her dark eyes on fire with animal greed, and her hands with vulture's claws, and look at her mouth: an open purse with a tongue rolled out like a register receipt! She's proclaiming what we're worth per color, per stroke! And there's Lucy, a frail, angry bird who pecks at her ear!

FRANCINE

Make her yellow! A canary!

FAY

Yes!

FRANCINE

Put Phyllis on a throne!

FAY

“The Queen of Fundamental Necessities!”

(Vibrant music is heard as FAY paints in a frenzy.  
PHYLLIS appears, discoursing to wildly exaggerated  
poses and flashing colored lights.)

PHYLLIS

Saw “Miss Everly Eating...

PHYLLIS

...portraits,...

FAY

Portraits!

PHYLLIS

...a wonderfully traditional...

PHYLLIS

...Cheese.

FAY

Cheese!

PHYLLIS

I was expecting a much older...

PHYLLIS

...Rembrandt,...

FAY

Rembrandt!

PHYLLIS

...but then I prefer...

PHYLLIS

...beggars...

FAY

Beggars!

PHYLLIS

...to...

PHYLLIS	FAY
...blots!	Blots!

PHYLLIS  
Now you! You have talent! You're a...

PHYLLIS	FAY
...fruit!	Fruit!

PHYLLIS  
Kiss me!

FAY  
The good!

PHYLLIS  
Kiss me!

FAY  
The true!

PHYLLIS  
Kiss me!

FAY  
The beautiful!

(LUCY enters the portrait. SHE and PHYLLIS speak quickly, simultaneously, waving colorful scarves.)

LUCY  
Look, it's *my* flag, and you're not being payed to face it in green plagues, in blue deaths, hurricanes and earthquakes!

PHYLLIS  
I don't understand why you're posing my dilettantes in fruits for Martin at the Deepings cash value my missions in wonder!

(Rhapsodic music is heard as MURIEL enters the portrait, flourishing a fuchisa colored scarf.)

MURIEL  
The sea makes you hungry and wild and strong, the sea...

LUCY  
We have flags who painted my deaths and plagued my...

PHYLLIS  
I don't understand why you're posing my blots for their cash value missions...

(MURIEL, LUCY, and PHYLLIS cease their chanting as FRANCINE points to Fay's canvas.)

FRANCINE

Who's that face? In the corner.

(MURIEL reaches out of the portrait, grasping Fay and sweeping her around the stage.)

MURIEL

Fathom and divine you, fathom and divine...

PHYLLIS, LUCY, MURIEL

Fathom and divine you, fathom and divine; fathom and divine you, fathom and divine; fathom and divine you, fathom and divine...

(PHYLLIS, LUCY, and MURIEL reach an operatic crescendo, then MURIEL breaks free, and THEY all depart, leaving FAY spinning.)

FRANCINE

Aunt Fay?! Fay! Stop, stop! Please, stop!

(The music ceases and FAY stops spinning.)

FRANCINE

Fay...? Are you all right?

FAY

*(pause, whispering)* Shhhhhh, Francine, silence has a color too.

(The lights fade to darkness, then brighten to the following morning. FRANCINE speaks to her reflection in her phone, as FAY stands by her easel, judging her new painting.)

FRANCINE

I watch my lips pout when I say the word "blue." My lips form a kiss, and I kiss the mirror. Blue, blue...

FRANCINE

...blue.

FAY

Blue.

FRANCINE

It's cool how Fay freaked, how she waved her brush like some wigged out conductor. She has some kind of turmoil inside her that makes her do weird things like paint Phyllis Green in sixty shades of...

FRANCINE

...blue.

FAY

Blue!

FAY

There aren't enough words for all these blues. Now please, put the phone away and look. For once you can see my brush strokes. Usually I smooth away my tracks and tricks. Do you like it?

FRANCINE

Sure. I mean, I guess, but she's all crooked and naked, and her back's her front.

FAY

If only Muriel could see it!

FRANCINE

I'll take a picture, and you can send it to her.

FAY

Why not? She's having an exhibit at the Gibbons Gallery in New York. I could....call. No, I'll write a letter -- yes, yes, I'll write a note!

FRANCINE

Will she come here?

FAY

I don't know. It's been fifteen years, yet here she is.

FRANCINE

You really had a thing for her, didn't you? *(pause)* Sorry, it's none of my business, but I...I found a painting in my room. I put it over there.

*(Pause as FRANCINE retrieves a large frame, and FAY stares, approaching with trepidation.)*

FRANCINE

It's you and Muriel, right? *(pause)* It was in the back of the closet.

FAY

*(pause, remembering)* We had to move; my father found another job.

*(FRANCINE fades into the shadows as FAY'S child-self strikes a dramatic pose, and MURIEL paints.)*

FAY

I'll stay here; we'll start a gallery of our own; we'll paint together.

MURIEL

Don't be silly. A new environment, a new school, they'll inspire you. Stand still!

FAY

But no one can teach me what you have! I've already got four commissions! Oh, Muriel, stop painting! How can we ever leave each other? Let's live together, here in your house.

MURIEL

Your parents wouldn't approve.

FAY

Who cares what they think?! Remember when you said that artists have to make every sacrifice -- so they can live where they can grow?

MURIEL

Yes, and I have to live alone.

FAY

But why?

MURIEL

Because I do. It's my way; I need my space -- for my paintings, my habits, and moods.  
*(making a final stroke)* There, I'm finished: "My Flypaper Clown."

FAY

What do you mean?

MURIEL

Relax. You can go home now.

FAY

What do you mean, "My Flypaper Clown?"

MURIEL

Nothing. It's just my title for the painting.

FAY

I'm not a clown!

MURIEL

I never said you were.

FAY

Please, Muriel, don't make me leave.

MURIEL

It's not my decision. You're still dependent on your parents, and you have to finish school, and Fay, darling, I'm afraid you've become too dependent on me. It's not at all uncommon in young girls. I didn't discourage you, of course, but we've been together three summers now. You're seventeen, nearly eighteen. It's time to move on, go to college, cultivate new friends. These are crucial growing years.

FAY

But don't you want to watch me?

MURIEL

No, no, I don't; I want to watch myself. Besides, I've seen how you've grown. You seem bent on continuing the academic traditions...

FAY

Which *you* taught me! You taught but *I* sell!

MURIEL

Yes. Who'd have thought I'd produce a commercial commodity?

FAY

You used to love my paintings! I was painting in the Grand Style when you said you adored me. You said it, you did! Adored, adored, adored!

MURIEL

Oh, so it's my fault that you're fixated there? That's ridiculous! Your problem is you love flattery. (*mimicking Fay's mother*) "Oh, thank you, Miss Daubler. Everyone's so impressed with Fay's technique."

FAY

It's better than yours! My father says I could earn my own living!

MURIEL

Frankly, your earlier work was better. At least it wasn't so vain, so competent.

FAY

You think I'm nothing!

MURIEL

To be an artist, a real artist, it's not enough to be vain. You have to be selfish...

FAY

Like you!

MURIEL

We both have a duty to fulfill our purpose, which means going away and becoming women of the world. I admit you've been an educational experiment, and perhaps I've gone too far...

FAY

No, no, give me another chance! (*embracing her*) I still need you. Please!

MURIEL

I don't want to be needed. It's too much responsibility. I can't handle it; you're too...too passionate.

FAY

Yes! As passionate as Tintoretto! As Gauguin! (*kissing her feverishly*) Love me, Muriel, love me. I'll never leave you, never! Never! Never!

MURIEL

(*releasing herself*) Oh, darling, please stop.

FAY

Is there someone else?

MURIEL

No, now leave me alone, please!

FAY

(*pause, trembling*) If that's how you feel...

MURIEL

Yes.

FAY

Would you give me something? A present before I go?

MURIEL

Of course, anything.

FAY

“Anything!” Listen to you! You’re so glad to get rid of me, you can’t even hide it!

MURIEL

Don’t be silly. You can have whatever you want, Fay, you know that.

FAY

Anything?

MURIEL

I just told you, yes. What is it?

FAY

That painting of us, the mock Reubens, the one you call “Sapphisto Summer.”

MURIEL

*(pause)* It’s very precious to me, but if you want it, it’s yours. You can be its secret guardian.

FAY

Yes, we wouldn’t want anyone to see it, would we? But don’t worry, I know just where to hang it.

MURIEL

Where?

FAY

On the stake in my heart!

(FAY and MURIEL depart as FRANCINE speaks into her phone.)

FRANCINE

Fay says I’ve grown ‘cause I swim and take walks, and last night when she put her hand on my shoulder, my chest swelled with a weird kind of happiness. I’m even looking forward to seeing Lucy who’s early for her sitting.

(FRANCINE pockets her phone as LUCY enters.)

FRANCINE

Hi. Fay's not here yet, but would you sit for me?

LUCY

Okay. (*posing on a stool*) Like this?

FRANCINE

Yeah, but could you smile?

LUCY

(*pause*) Eight more days till the unveiling; guess you'll be glad to get rid of us.

FRANCINE

Not really. Besides, I'm leaving too.

LUCY

Yeah? Where?

FRANCINE

Home to Newark. That's where my dad has his practice.

LUCY

He's a doctor?

FRANCINE

A pediatrician -- which is why he only had one kid. (*pause*) How long have your parents been separated?

LUCY

They divorced when I was five.

FRANCINE

How come?

LUCY

Why do you think?

FRANCINE

Yeah, right. (*pause*) So you usually live in Boston...?

LUCY

Yeah, but we'll stick around awhile. Anyway, Phyl likes it here.

FRANCINE

And she likes my aunt, but it's not mutual.

LUCY

Not yet.

FRANCINE

Not ever. She's hung up on a creepy teacher who dumped her. See those paintings near the ceiling? That's her.

LUCY

Awesome. They're all the same person...?

FRANCINE

In different styles. *(pause as they stare)* So can we watch you bury the paintings?

LUCY

There's nothing to see; it's just a giant metal box full of stuff he collects.

FRANCINE

How is he?

LUCY

Either sleeping or half in the bag. He can hardly walk, so we had to hire a nurse.

FRANCINE

Sorry...

LUCY

It bites big time. He's the one your aunt should be painting -- while he's still...

*(LUCY starts to cry and FRANCINE strokes her shoulder.)*

FRANCINE

Lucy...? Are you...are you okay?

LUCY

Look, tell your aunt I'm sick; I'll be back tomorrow.

FRANCINE

Okay, but can I help...?

(LUCY shakes her head and runs off.)

FRANCINE

Fuck.

(Music as FRANCINE picks up her brush and paints.  
The lighting alters and FAY enters to prepare her palette,  
followed by PHYLLIS toting a video camera.)

PHYLLIS

I'm rather enjoying my role as archivist. I'm giving everyone -- living and dead -- a complete chapter. I'm also making a film of our quotidian lives, all the things we do from morning to night. It's tedious since we're usually staring at screens which is why I'd like to include our portraitists.

FAY

I'd rather not.

PHYLLIS

That's too bad. (*turning to Francine, ignoring Fay*) I wanted to capture your aunt's intensity, that fierce look she gets when she's squeezing the tubes, liberating the paint, then mixing the colors. She seems to drink them in because they leap to her eyes and make them sparkle. (*pause, to Fay*) Well, at least let me take some pictures of the house. I was wondering if you've lived here long?

FAY

Ten years -- since I graduated from college. I used to come here for art lessons.

FRANCINE

This house belonged to Muriel?! You never told me that!

FAY

She rented it, but it's mine now.

FRANCINE

Holy Shit! This is Muriel's house!

PHYLLIS

Who's Muriel?

FRANCINE

Fay's tutor. She painted her through history. We're doing the same with you and Lucy .

PHYLLIS

Oh, I've heard all about your famous mural, so tell me, has it affected our portraits?  
I mean, suppose someone digs us up -- when will they think we were living?

FAY

In the seventeenth century, of course.

FRANCINE

Fay's even painted you in our time -- naked!

FAY

Francine!

PHYLLIS

Really? May I see it?

FRANCINE

Yes!

FAY

No!

FAY

It's not finished, and it's...it's not in my usual style.

PHYLLIS

Well, I wouldn't judge a work I haven't seen.

FRANCINE

I'll get it!

FAY

Francine! I thought we agreed that Phyllis wouldn't care for it.

PHYLLIS

Let me decide for myself.

FAY

I'd rather not.

PHYLLIS

Why?

FAY

Because it's none of the things you like. It requires a more open, unorthodox mind.

PHYLLIS

Oh, I can be pretty unorthodox, don't you think? Please, Fay, let me see it.

FAY

No.

PHYLLIS

Afraid?

FAY

No!

PHYLLIS

Why then? Does it show you actually harbor some...feelings?

FAY

None that you'd appreciate.

PHYLLIS

I'm desperate; I'll take anything. *(pause)* Coward.

FAY

Alright, Francine, go ahead, show her.

*(Pause as FRANCINE retrieves the painting, propping it on an easel. PHYLLIS stares.)*

FAY

Look, it...it's only an interpretation. You don't understand, and neither do I really, but it seemed to paint itself.

PHYLLIS

*(pause)* I find it...repulsive.

FAY

This is the first thing I've ever painted that anyone's ever -- even Francine hates it.

FRANCINE

No, I don't!

PHYLLIS

You feel proud that we hate it?

FAY

Yes, yes! Don't you see? Everyone's always admired my gilded nobility with their flawless features, but this! This has the chords of color in your voice, the rhythms of your...

PHYLLIS

I'm grotesque! A naked gargoyle with a greedy sneer! Is this what you think of me?!

FAY

Yes! No! I mean. I...I was just trying to...to defy your opinion of art.

PHYLLIS

You thought I was being vindictive? Well, you're wrong! You've obscured me with something inside you, not me. *(pause)* How paradoxical that you've had the opposite effect on Lucy and me. Haven't I told you how magnificent you are? Both of you. It's true I find your paintings irrelevant, but don't you see? They're wonderful for that very reason.

FAY

They're *not* irrelevant! My paintings...

MURIEL

...feed God's eyes with the beauty of his image.

FAY

*(echoing Muriel)* ...feed God's eyes with the beauty of his image.

PHYLLIS

What beauty is there in this?

MURIEL

You'll see a spectrum of colors and forms in every living thing.

FAY

*(echoing)* You'll see colors and forms...

MURIEL

You'll see...

MURIEL  
...life and death.

FAY  
...life and death.

PHYLLIS  
If you see so much, how is it that you missed seeing me? How is it you see only evil,  
twisted things!

FAY  
Maybe I have to see them before I see...

PHYLLIS  
What?

MURIEL  
Every nuance,...

PHYLLIS  
What?!

MURIEL  
...every symmetry,...

FAY  
Before I see...

MURIEL  
...inherent in...

MURIEL  
...the entire universe!

FAY  
...the entire universe!

PHYLLIS  
If this is the universe, then it deserves annihilation!

(PHYLLIS storms off.)

FAY  
Wait, wait! Please don't...

FRANCINE  
(pause) I'm sorry.

FAY

No, no you're not! *(pause)* I finally paint something unlike anything ever painted, and look at it! Paintings can be dangerous, Francine, especially if the forms aren't pure and obscure, especially if they're still recognizable.

(MURIEL appears enraged as FRANCINE retreats and  
FAY'S child self emerges.)

MURIEL

What in God's name made you do it?!

FAY

*(to herself)* What made me do it?

MURIEL

You knew damn well how they'd react! You stupid little fool! You've ruined my career here which was your intention, wasn't it? Do you really think I deserve that? Do you?!

FAY

*(as her child-self)* Yes! Yes, I do!

MURIEL

I took your talents and molded them to perfection!

FAY

Perfection!? You said I was vain! Competent!

MURIEL

You are! Nevertheless, hardly anyone can do what you do. I can't even do what you do!

FAY

I admit you've given me a direction...

MURIEL

A livelihood, a career!

FAY

And a perversion! A perversion! Everyone who sees it says so, Muriel. That's the truth, Muriel! Truth revealed by art!

MURIEL

Your bigoted father's truth isn't the same as mine and you damn well know it! If I wasn't so amused by even the cruelest of ironies, you'd be nursing a very sound slap! Oh, stop

MURIEL (cont'd)

looking so wounded. You've got the last laugh. I'm high-tailing it back to New York before they tar and feather me here.

FAY

That shouldn't bother you! You're always bragging about how you'll die in disgrace -- all that good company in the gutter. You're so full of shit!

MURIEL

I'm warning you, Fay.

FAY

You've ruined my life! They're making me see a psychiatrist!

MURIEL

Good, I'm glad! You need one!

FAY

They say you seduced me, not just my body, my mind! You made me paint you so much, I can't stop thinking about you! *(starting to cry)* I can't, I can't...

MURIEL

*(pause)* Oh, Fay, oh, my dear, darling Fay. Please, come here, come here. *(pause, embracing her)* Listen, Fay, I've thought about this a great deal. I suppose I gave you more of myself than I should have. I certainly gave you everything I know about painting.

FAY

I can't believe you're leaving...

MURIEL

You'll get over it. Someday -- sooner than you think -- you'll look back on me as an adolescent crush. You'll change...

FAY

I don't want to change; I only want...

MURIEL

I know... In fact, it's possible I'll never be loved as much as you love me now.

FAY

When are you...?

MURIEL

Your father says if I'm not gone by Thursday, he'll put me behind bars! Ha! To think a painting can still cause a scandal. Well, who knows? Maybe after this bloodletting, you'll learn to take the giant leap -- to wherever Fay Locke is meant to go.

FAY

But what if I'm already there?

MURIEL

You're not. You're still renting your palette. An artist, a real artist, doesn't just paint; she *is* her art. She works very very hard, then one day -- miracle of miracles! -- her own private deus flashes forth. And there in the flames she finds bright new images.

FAY

When? How will I know?!

MURIEL

You'll *feel* it -- bleeding upwards through layers and layers, embodying your very soul! But you'll pay a price: Van Gogh paid with his life, so did Munch, Pollock, Utrillo, and Rothko slashed the veins in his arms.

FAY

(*covering her ears*) Noooooo...

MURIEL

It's a terrible freedom, all this subjectivity. The trouble is you want order, standards, common sense!

FAY

No, no! I want you!

MURIEL

Stop it! Now listen! Remember triangulation? One point is the subject, one the artist, and the third is the art. But you can't have the art unless you have the courage to intervene, and you can't intervene unless you face up to the world and realize it can be a savage snake pit of torments and despair. There's only your experience, and you can't be afraid to live it, suffer the consequence, and paint it, paint it!

FAY

Even when it destroys other people?

MURIEL

That depends on how selfish you are.

FAY

How *cruel* you are!

MURIEL

Yes.

FAY

Then do it! Paint how I can't stop crying; paint how my heart's racing so fast I can't breathe; paint how I never knew I could hurt this much! Paint me, Muriel, paint me till I die!!!

(Lights fade to black, then slowly LUCY and PHYLLIS are revealed posing in the studio as FAY prepares her palette, and FRANCINE stares into her phone.)

FRANCINE

Last night I dreamed I walked into a museum with red walls where the guide was explaining how the first paintings of Fay Locke's career were of a cold blooded bitch named Muriel. I was going to tell Fay about the dream but noticed she'd been crying, so I hugged her, and for the first time in my miserable life I felt really close to someone. The trouble is, it's almost time to leave. Fay called the Greens...

FAY

(*to Phyllis and Lucy*) I asked you together...

FAY

...for the final sitting.

FRANCINE

...for the final sitting.

(FRANCINE snaps a picture much to Fay's annoyance.)

FAY

Please, Francine! (*pause*) There might be some harmony that joins the paintings in ways I might not have noticed in separate sittings.

FRANCINE

They're perfect! They look like you, only better. It sucks that they have to be buried.

LUCY

Phyl was wondering if you'd paint us again, both of us together, in the same painting.

FRANCINE

Yessssss! Fantastic!

PHYLLIS

I'd like you to start as soon as these are entombed.

FAY

Aren't you afraid I'll turn you into gargoyles?

PHYLLIS

No, and I don't care how long it takes.

LUCY

She hopes it takes forever.

FAY

You're very generous, but I...I don't know.

PHYLLIS

Why do I feel I'm lost on you?

FAY

Maybe because I'm lost on myself.

PHYLLIS

That could be quite a treasure hunt.

FAY

But one I have to make alone, in my own time. Otherwise, I'll continue to be...

FAY

...a common copyist.

MURIEL

A common copyist!

FAY

I'll never learn to take...

FAY

...the giant leap.

MURIEL

The giant leap!

PHYLLIS

To where?

FAY

I don't know.

PHYLLIS

Have you ever painted yourself?

FAY

No, but Francine has. Show them, Francine.

FRANCINE

Okay, but it's not finished.

(Pause as FRANCINE displays her portrait.)

PHYLLIS

It's remarkable, Francine. I'm glad you see it too.

FRANCINE

See what?

PHYLLIS

The mystery, the mask.

(PHYLLIS and LUCY depart as FRANCINE continues her blog.)

FRANCINE

Behind the mask lies Muriel who's coming to visit tomorrow. Fay sent my picture of her painting, and she's really coming! I'm supposed to get lost, but wouldn't miss this reunion for the world.

(The lighting dims to evening as MURIEL enters. SHE is fifteen years older, elegantly dressed, her hair pulled back, the splotches of paint gone. SHE confronts FAY with a small painting while FRANCINE stands aside, eavesdropping.)

MURIEL

I've brought you a present. I call it "Seagull Through a Shark's Eye in Fuchsia."

FAY

Oh, thank you. It's wonderful, so...vivid.

MURIEL

Hmmmm, the old place is looking very...(noticing Fay's portraits of herself) Good god! You kept all those paintings!

FAY

Yes. *(pause)* You're still so...beautiful. Are you teaching?

MURIEL

No, never. You?

FAY

Well, my niece, Francine, is with me this summer. *(pause)* I've painted hundreds of portraits since you left.

MURIEL

*(assessing the Green portraits)* Quite a handsome pair -- mother and daughter?

FAY

Yes. They're going to be buried.

MURIEL

Good. Where's the painting in the photograph? That's the one I came to see.

FAY

Would you like a drink first? I...I have some wine.

MURIEL

Yes, thank you.

FAY

*(pouring the wine)* I...I missed you. I wish you'd written.

MURIEL

Your parents would have confiscated the letters. Frankly, I'm grateful to you -- for getting me out of this dismal place.

FAY

What did you do when you left?

MURIEL

Well, let's see: first I fell into what I called my hysterical heliotrope phase -- mostly woodwinds and harps. Then I succumbed to the catharsis of crimson. Finally, I developed an entirely new style, and -- ha, ha! -- I've given up theorizing altogether. Dear God, what an insufferable bore; what bullshit you had to endure!

FAY

Oh, no, I...I loved it. I'm always quoting you.

MURIEL

Oh, don't! Don't! I've been responsible for corrupting more innocent minds than I care to remember. I'm sure to burn in hell for it.

FAY

*(pause)* Are you...happy?

MURIEL

Oh, Christ, no. I finally fessed up: my gift's very limited. I use it discreetly, with few variations, and the result is a very profitable reputation.

FAY

*(pause)* Are you...seeing anyone?

MURIEL

No one you'd know. What about you?

FAY

No, there's no one. Not since...

MURIEL

*(pause)* Fay...? You're not still...? *(pause; no response)* God, incredible. But how...? How could you have sustained...?

FAY

How could I not? The paintings, my Muriels. *(gesturing to the walls)* The portraits you made me paint and the ones you left behind.

MURIEL

*(pause, chilled)* I...I'm sorry, it never occurred to me...

FAY

Three rooms, twelve walls!

MURIEL

Oh, Fay, you're still so sensitive, so fragile. Believe me, I would have burned them if I thought they'd hurt you.

FAY

Burn them? But they're...beautiful. *(holding up a painting)* Look, don't you remember "Sapphisto Summer?"

MURIEL

Oh, God, we're naked as twin Galateas, little cherubs in the Garden of Love! How whimsical, ha, ha! Our rhapsodic period! Oh, dear, I sense I'm disillusioning you.

FAY

I thought I'd grow tired of them, see their flaws and forget, but it's their flaws that make them beautiful. They're so rough, yet full of hope -- like Francine's. Look, aren't they marvelous? They're better than mine. I use up all my lines and colors in the subject; there's nothing of myself, not a single visible brushstroke.

MURIEL

A shame your art doesn't feed on self-pity. Mondrian employed his neurosis and invented neoplasticism. You stop in your tracks and make forgeries -- until now. Show me the painting.

(Pause as FAY retrieves her new portrait of PHYLLIS.)

FAY

I...I could hear it. I mean, I could feel what you told me to feel: the colors, the vibrations.

MURIEL

Oh, stop! Stop! Don't cheapen your work with rhetoric. You got it on canvas -- that's what counts.

FAY

(*indicating her realistic portrait of Phyllis*) That's the same woman, and that face on her shoulder is her daughter, Lucy.

MURIEL

Yes, I see. (*turning to the modern painting*) Now this is real portraiture. You either love her or hate her, and you put it in the painting.

FAY

Her name is Phyllis. She...she's so...persistent, and I find I'm thinking about her, but it...it's not the same...

MURIEL

You're just afraid -- don't be. Don't cheat yourself of everything important.

FAY

You said only art was important.

MURIEL

Did I? I'm full of contradictions! Besides, I'm older now, a bit wiser, and you've made me more than a little depressed. I've never made anything this original, so indelibly my own. But tell me, Fay, in the shadow there -- that's me, isn't it?

(FAY nods.)

MURIEL

Blacken me out! Otherwise, it's the most original work I've seen in years. Maybe now you'll stop acting like the hand of fate is holding you back, and take some of that pity and passion and put it into the subject.

FAY

But you said put it into the art.

MURIEL

I didn't though, did I? I put it into you.

FAY

And I loved it. *(pause)* I...I can't seem to feel for anyone what I felt then. Could you ever...?

MURIEL

Sorry. *(pause)* Now! About these these paintings -- you shouldn't be hoarding them here. Why don't you give them to me?

FAY

No! I mean, no, you...you can't have them.

MURIEL

I'll pay you, of course.

FAY

No!

MURIEL

Why not? They'd look wonderful in my brownstone.

FAY

They're mine. I...I need them.

MURIEL

Grow up, Fay!

(MURIEL drains her wine, then starts to leave.)

FAY

Wait! Please, don't go. I...I'd like to write.

MURIEL

Don't!

FAY

Please.

MURIEL

Thanks for the wine.

(MURIEL marches off, then FAY turns to scrutinize her portrait. SHE picks up her palette and dips her brush as a fast-paced litany of voices is heard, rising in intensity with music.)

PHYLLIS'S VOICE

I'm a naked gargoyle.

LUCY'S VOICE

*(overlapping)* An Egyptian mummy!

MURIEL'S VOICE

*(overlapping)* Blacken me out!

PHYLLIS'S VOICE

*(overlapping)* Naked gargoyles!

LUCY'S VOICE

*(overlapping)* Egyptian mummies!

MURIEL'S VOICE

Blacken me out!

PHYLLIS'S VOICE

Gargoyles!

LUCY'S VOICE

Mummies!

MURIEL'S VOICE

Out!

PHYLLIS'S VOICE

Gargoyles!

LUCY'S VOICE

Mummies!

MURIEL'S VOICE

Out!

VOICES of MURIEL, PHYLLIS and LUCY

Out! Out!

(On the final "Out!" FAY sweeps her brush over Muriel's face in the portrait as the litany ceases and FRANCINE enters.)

FRANCINE

Fay...? How was Muriel?

FAY

I've rubbed her out!

FRANCINE

What...?

FAY

Of the painting -- she's out! Muriel's gone; she had other...commitments.

(FAY begins gathering her childhood paintings, yanking them off the walls and stacking them in a heap.)

FRANCINE

What are you doing?

FAY

Burying the dead! Filling whole crypts full of paintings, entombing my Muriels...

FRANCINE

But...

FAY

Don't look! They're blinding! They'll burn your eyes and scorch your heart.

FRANCINE

Jesus...

FAY

They're painted in vermillion and vermillion has the charm of flame, and flame has the charm of blood, fuchsia blood...

(FAY strikes a match, but FRANCINE blows it out.)

FRANCINE

Christ! Are you fucking nuts?!

FAY

*(pause, shaken)* Oh, God, I...I feel terrible. I never had a talent for anger or...hate.

FRANCINE

I do, it's great; hate the bitch -- just don't torch the place!

FAY

I want to hurt her now as much as I did when she left me. *(pause)* Francine, don't ever believe that art redeems you. The devil's always there.

FRANCINE

Maybe you should lie down.

FAY

Be glad you're young, Francine. You have so many paintings ahead of you.

FRANCINE

So do you.

FAY

Yes, yes, I do. *(embracing her)* Oh, thank you, thank you for saying that. *(pause)* There's so much that gets lost in life, so many canvases that are never quite finished enough to sign. *(pause)* But maybe...maybe it's better to let them go, send them back to their source, the source of their inspiration -- even if they've become a part of you. Do you know what I mean? Do you?

FRANCINE

Yeah, I...I guess.

(Lights dim as FAY turns away and FRANCINE speaks into her phone.)

FRANCINE

Today I helped Fay pack and mail the paintings to Muriel in New York. Fay gave me six of her favorites which I'm planning to give to a museum someday. They're so powerful, they'll have to hang in sealed rooms one at a time 'cause they'll make people want to do something crazy like kiss her all over -- even her feet.

(FAY retrieves two new canvas frames, placing one on her own easel, the other on Francine's.)

FAY

Francine! I think it's time we painted our self-portraits.

FRANCINE

What about my mural?

FAY

That wall isn't going anywhere.

FRANCINE

Well, should I paint myself like this?

FAY

Not if you don't want to. That's the advantage of being both artist and subject.

FRANCINE

But when I look in a mirror, that's not really me; it's my face reversed. Who are you going to be?

FAY

Just myself. I'll need a full palette. Which color should I start with? You choose.

FRANCINE

Blue. Azure blue.

FAY

Violas: my serenity.

FRANCINE

Mix it with green -- viridian.

FAY

Spinets. My obsessions...

(FAY paints quickly, sweeping her brush-baton to an original phrase of music.)

FRANCINE

Jesus, Fay, you look like a...a clown.

FAY

A flypaper clown!

(FAY laughs, painting furiously, until the music fades and FRANCINE steps forward, finishing her blog.)

FRANCINE

Someday in the future I'll hear the museum guide talk about the second phase of Fay Locke's career, how she painted a self-portrait and gave it to her apprentice, Francine. The portrait's so special, it defies the laws of chemistry and transforms itself into a living, breathing life that can be touched. People will have to wear sunglasses because it has eyes piercing to the core of every human heart. Two perfectly formed ears hear all laughter, all sorrow, and the flaming fuchsia lips liquefy their bodies in all the right places. There's something insane about fuchsia. If they stare long enough they'll go blind with burning, and they'll never never forget...

(FAY makes a final flamboyant stroke of her brush as FRANCINE flashes a picture with her phone and FAY freezes in time and memory. Lights shimmer with colors, then fade to blackness.)

*End of Play*

