

BEAUTY

by

Allan Baker

Copyright © 2010

4711 Spicewood Springs Rd.  
#159  
Austin, Texas 78759  
(512) 345-4437  
email: arbaustx@aol.com

BEAUTYCAST OF CHARACTERS

THE DEALER	Male, forties
THE COLLECTOR	Male, late seventies
THE BUYER	Male, thirties

BEAUTY

AT RISE      *The lights come up to half. There are two men on the stage, separately lighted, seated on stools with their backs turned to the audience. The DEALER sits stage right and the COLLECTOR stage left. Upstage center will be a large, empty frame, mounted on an easel, on which they seem to be focused. The COLLECTOR's shoulders slump and he looks down as lights go out on the COLLECTOR and up to full on the DEALER as the DEALER turns to face the audience.*

## THE DEALER

It was delightful! He went totally pale. I thought he was having a heart attack. I watched. Waited. Then he said yes.

It was only my second time at their place on Central Park. I had never *actually* been invited there before. He and his crowd were...well...I had never been invited. My first visit, I had simply *bought* my way in...an opera guild fundraising event they hosted three years ago. A year before his wife died. They were selective in their philanthropies and quite selective in their friends. Two hundred years of intermarried money will do that to families.

Lovely place. Magnificent. Pre-war building, of course. Old money elegant. They've been there...decades. The top three floors. I think Lauder is a neighbor.

Three years...(pause). I do remember they spent their time that evening not talking to me, though everyone else wanted to. It was just after I'd signed the new Turner Prize winner and made those rather huge buys in conceptual art at the Christie's auction. Opened the new London and Shanghai galleries. Quite a hit, I was...but, not so much with...them. Or their friends.

(CONT'D)

Of course I spent part of the evening discretely *roaming*...my tiny camera and I...just to see what was on their walls. Always good to know what's out there...what might be *had*. They had been collecting forever, of course.

I found it on a restricted floor...their bedroom suite, actually.

It was stunning. Absolutely...stunning. Jackson Pollock's finest work and it's *never* been on the market. They say he bought it for his wife as a first anniversary present more than fifty years ago. First and only owners. A work like that...well, it was a legend...mythic. Never exhibited. Something few had seen...only their...friends. His wife loved it dearly, they say. (*Pause*) Quite dearly.

So sad...her dying suddenly...after all those years together. Hmm...

I sat with it a time. Just... (*sighs*) In that...quiet...private...*forbidden*...place. So much Pollock is... But this was... (*quickly wipes his eyes*).

Later they thanked me politely when I handed them my check for the fundraiser, then quickly returned to their conversation, turning their backs on me. Cold. That unique, old-money New York...cold.

I'd thought about the Pollock. Since. Wondered...

I got the call last week. I knew he was having some problems. In this market, so many are. His were...well, my sources said...quite serious. Quite, quite serious. The foundation...*her* foundation, might actually, possibly... Hmm.

I knew what he wanted. A private sale. The notoriety of an auction...well, we wouldn't want that. I have a reputation for arranging quiet, important

(CONT'D)

transactions. I prepared. Discreetly. Sent round my photos. Caught up with some old clients...and a few possibles.

So, my first *actual* invitation! He was certainly affable, quite charming. The butler served tea. We chatted. Then, casually, what I knew had been coming. He showed me some things...wonderful, major pieces that would make any Christie's evening show a night to remember. I knew, of course, what he would be showing me and I knew I wouldn't touch them. He was not to get off that easily. It was to be something...*precious* to him.

Casual was done. Charming was done. I told him it would be the Pollock...and nothing...*nothing* else. And the offer was...*overwhelming*. My client had set no limit...the money did not matter to him, at all. He simply...would have it. That painting. So I chose. For the effect it would have...there...in that place. And, of course, I would never give you the client's name or name the amount. But...no more has *ever* been paid. Ever.

When I said the number...perfection! Seeing his reaction. Agony. Then bereft. For me it was...delicious. I waited for what I knew that arrogant, crushed old man would say. *There*.

Then it was done and I stepped out of that sad, privileged old building, into the sunlight. (*Smiles*) I sent my driver away, crossed the street to the park. I would *walk!*

It was such a very beautiful day!

*The lights go to half on the DEALER and come up to half on the COLLECTOR. The DEALER stands and turns toward the empty frame on the easel. The DEALER walks to the easel, removes the*

*empty frame and exits, stage right as the lights come up to full on the COLLECTOR, who turns toward the audience.*

### THE COLLECTOR

I remember the day so well. It was beautiful. And her eyes...when she saw it!  
Her *eyes!*

No gift has ever made her happier. And it would be our bedroom...nowhere else. She wanted it to be the first thing we saw in the morning and the last thing at night. And it was. It was...

It was the last thing she saw as she died...and her eyes...

They'd always danced! As those incredible colors danced. As we...danced...through all our years. All our many...lovely...years.

Until that moment I had thought it would be the last thing I saw, as well.

I saw him then, this small *person*. *Who?* How was he here? *Here?* How could he think he...*could*...be allowed here. So out of place. Beyond his...*place*.

The number was absurd. I knew that. I wonder, did he? I don't know. It made the moment...*crude*. But he now had my attention and I would have to deal with him. As I've had to deal with so many others this past year.

Her eyes were always lovely...though, in truth, they did *not* always dance. Not when our daughter died...so young...or when she, too, was so ill...there at the last.

And not when she came back from her volunteer work at the hospital...early in the plague...back in the 80's, when that disease was so devastating and when no one...*no one*...would even dare to...*touch* them...those desperately sick men. She did. She would. Gently. Lovingly. And her eyes danced for them...*had* to dance

(CONT'D)

for them. But when she returned here there would be such sadness and her eyes would not dance. Not then. Not even for me.

None of our friends could understand why she would do that, for them...though I could. I always understood. It's not only money that comes down the generations...it's responsibility, as well. And caring. Too few today know that. *(Pause)* Much has been lost.

Oh, but she annoyed our friends *no end* and she moved them and so they gave...in this city, at least. She was just implacable through the dozen years of *that* mayor, who *of all people*, should have helped them and a governor and the bureaucracy came round. Finally. So very many were helped...and would continue to be helped...through those horrible years and the shameful indifference of so very many others. She loathed the indifference.

Then it was my turn and *my* responsibility and nothing...*nothing* would threaten her legacy and what had meant so much to her. Even if it meant...

Did he know that? I wonder. Not that it matters. He's a clown and not all that far from where he started...on the sidewalk, selling posters to tourists outside the Met. *(Indicating)* Just down the street. *(Pause)* He was useful to me...though never to those for whom he, *of all people*, should have been...never to those for whom *she* cared. Well, now he *has* been useful to them. *Finally*. Her work will go on.

I don't care where it goes or who has it now. That painting brought us beauty and delight for a time far longer than the many sad lifetimes that callous disease cut short.

*The COLLECTOR stands, strong, tall, smiling into the light.*

She would be smiling now...and her eyes...they *are* dancing!

*The COLLECTOR exits briskly stage left as the BUYER enters stage right with the empty frame, replaces it on the easel and goes to stand in front of the stools.*

*THE BUYER*

*(Indicating himself)* Mark Brofsky. One hundred seventy-five million dollars, with the clown's commission. Our place in Greenwich. Over the sofa in the great room. My wife thinks it matches the sofa. You know, the best way to increase the market for art in this country is just for people to buy more sofas.

Not an amount to be sneezed at...but, let's face it. For me that's maybe...at most...two month's income. And, it's not even an extravagance for me. Not really.

*The BUYER sits on one of the stools and leans toward the audience.*

OK. This is how it works. A short lesson in the art market here. I've got the six finest Pollocks in private hands and when the price for *this one* gets around, *their* value goes up about fifty-percent and I've just recovered twice my cost. *(Pause)* Well, now there *was* this "non-disclosure agreement"...but you know things get around. It happens. *(Smiles)* I don't worry. I have some really good lawyers and the clown's are, appropriately, a joke.

So now I lend my six...now *seven* Pollocks to the MOMA retrospective next year and *magic!* The group's value is up another...oh, twenty-five percent. The MOMA show, then the tour to Chicago, Dallas and San Francisco...in two years they're back at my Greenwich place and I've got one *hell* of a lot of art equity. One hell of a lot.

(CONT'D)

And *that's* when they start to hit the market. One, maybe two at a time, so as not to challenge the pricing. A few years of good auctions...a few private sales. And I've made some good money. A better return than I could get in, say, buying up an undervalued company, taking it private, loading it with debt and selling off the pieces. Easier. And just so much more *fun!* (*Smiles*)

Of course, the guys at MOMA may be upset I won't be donating the Pollocks to them. After the retrospective. I can't imagine *where* they got the idea that might happen. Can't imagine at all. (*Smiles*)

*He stands, stretches, turns to look at the empty frame for a moment.*

This one though...(*thoughtful*)...this one. Yeah.

*Turns back to the audience.*

After the others are sold and I've got my money, it *will* go to MOMA. As my gift. In her memory. (*Long pause*). My old man...that crazy welder from the Bronx...he... (*Pause*) He never said much about my uncle. Except that he was handsome and got really sick and died young and it was sad. But once he did talk about *her*. The woman who came to the hospital and held my uncle's hand a couple of times a week. With her furs and elegant gold jewelry and Boston accent and her comforting, sweet voice. And, at the end, her tears. (*Indicating the picture frame*) Yeah. This one will be for *her*.

*Turns to leave the stage, stops, turns back to the audience.*

Oh...and the tax write-off.

BLACKOUT  
END OF PLAY