

Em

A One-Act Adaptation of Euripedes' *Medea* by Olivia Leslie

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CAST

- Em..... Graffiti artist, bent on righting wrongs. Mid-20's.
- Jay..... Pretentious, serves his own interests/survival. Mid 20's.
- Officer Chris..... Authorial. Any gender, any age.
- Adrienne Kozel..... An ad company exec, poised, cat-like in her language. 30's – 50's.
- G.G..... Sophisticated, plays the role of the cool girl but a flip can switch. 20's – 30's.
- Assistant/Person..... Any gender, any age, just an average person.

Playwright's note: some of the dialogue is meant to be treated as plain speech and other parts should be treated as spoken word. Music, rhythmic lines, sounds or silence can underscore spoken word.

Scene 1

At rise: the stage is bare save a large advertisement featuring a big, gaudy advertisement—three naked women draped across each other, trying to sell barely seen products. Enter EM dressed in all black carrying a bag. She walks over to the ad, puts the bag down and pulls out cans of spray paint. She shakes a bottle and stares at the ad for a moment. She paints over the advertisement.

EM

We met when we were eighteen,
just freed from our parents' homes
broken homes,
unfixable homes,
can't-don't-want-to-return-to homes,
not-much-of-a-home homes.

EM (cont.)

Me and my friends scavenging
looking for a building out of sight, out of mind
no one around to care or catch us.
Those places were few and far between where I came from.
But we got to a spot—
red bricks stacked into the sky
when I spotted this guy—more a shadow than a man,
with a can in hand, rattling it around
tick-tick-tick-tick-tick
while he tried to decide
where he would let his art take him that night.

My friends wanted to run but I stayed.
I was stupid and stayed.
I should have turned around but I stayed.
I should have followed my friends but I stayed and stepped closer
and closer
and watched him paint.
He turned the tall wall of brick into something beautiful,
meaningful.
He gave the wall purpose.
He gave the wall life.
I swear to God, on that night I decided he was a patron saint of street art.

But he wasn't saint.

Not a divine man,
not a good man,
not a fine man,
not even a man,
More a sneak painted gold—The glitter may distract you for a while, maybe a lifetime
but still,
underneath it all
a liar,
a con.

That night, I started painting beside him.
That night my art was no longer my own but ours.
We painted together,
as one, like one.
We lived together,
like one, as one.
He convinced me to leave my friends, my family, my home and move
with him.

EM (cont.)

He was heading out to a city he described like an open canvas
“Where street artists can become real artists,” he said.
As though our art was a dupe or a dream
A trick of the light.
I should have known right then and there to go.
Keep on until the pavement ran out.
Instead I said yes.
I followed him.
To a place where glass, metal and concrete replaced brick.
where
I would lose
everything.

Jay painted a pretty picture and I worked alongside him,
but just like graffiti, always painted over in time
Our work couldn't last.
We couldn't last.

And we didn't.

We fell apart when he met her,
“Gallery Girl”
Gallery Girl told Jay he was too good for the streets
Gallery Girl gave Jay connections and phone numbers
Gallery Girl gave Jay everything he'd hoped for when he moved to this city.
Jay grabbed it all,
joined Gallery Girl
and left me
and our art
behind.
For a while I was crushed.
For a while I was broken.
But a while ends now.

EM steps back to reveal her work: the women once joyful now mourn. Their skin once smooth and pale now varies in color and texture. Their bodies, once small and odd in their sameness now changed. They cry. The company logo, product, still visible.

EM (cont.)

He took me from my home
And I went.
He took my art

EM (cont.)

And I gave it to him.
He took my life
And I let him have it.
Thinking he would share his.
Ours.
But I'm done being sad.
I'm done being disappointed, sick with grief and shame and regret.
All those years I spent loving, fighting, compromising
I won't let them go
I won't let them get me down
I won't give up.

I'll get even.

We see and hear sirens from offstage. EM quickly signs her work with a signature—a serpentine figure. She packs up her paint as the sirens get closer. The sound of tires screeching, a door opening and closing. She runs offstage.

OFFICER (O.S)

Stop.

PERSON enters off to school or work, just an average someone. They see the work and take a photo with their phone.

Blackout.

Scene 2

EM is sitting at a large metal table inside a police station. She is drawing on the table with a pencil.

A door opens offstage.

OFFICER (O.S)

Five minutes.

JAY enters.

The door closes.

JAY swaggers over to the table, sits across from EM. He waits for her to explode but

she just keeps her head down, drawing.

JAY

If I'd just gotten picked up for putting up a burner, I wouldn't be doodling on the police station's property.

EM continues to draw, making broader strokes.

JAY (cont.)

Come on, Em. Don't be like that.

EM slams down her pencil and looks up at JAY.

EM

You the reason I'm here, Jay?

JAY

I'm not a rat.

EM

You're a weasel.

JAY

I'm not the bad guy. I'm not the reason you're in here—you are.

EM

You didn't call me in?

JAY

No.

EM

Then how'd you know I was here.

JAY

I tried calling you this morning. No answer—

EM

I never pick up when you call.

JAY

I went by your place, you weren't there—

I got evicted.

EM

I saw the ad. It looked like you. I called around and the station said they picked you up last night.

JAY

Bullshit.

EM

What?

JAY

I don't buy it.

EM

So you think, what? That I stayed out all night by that one ad in a city full of ads you hate? That I waited to see if you would come by a work over it so I could turn you in?

JAY

Something like that.

EM

You're crazy.

JAY

Am I right?

EM

You're crazy! I don't want to see you in trouble.

JAY

Then close your eyes cause I'm in deep shit.

EM

... I can pay bail.

JAY

No.

EM

Get you a lawyer.

JAY

Stop!

EM

JAY

I'm trying to help.

EM

Help? I don't want your fucking help!

JAY

You need it.

EM

No, you need it!

You think throwing money at my problems,
getting me a lawyer will fix anything?

Make me hate you any less?

You think I'll just forget about everything?

You think I'll actually believe you give a shit about me?

I know you, Jay.

Don't fucking lie to me.

You might need to be adored, for me to forgive and forget

But you know what I need?

I need my time back.

My love, my life, I want that back too.

My fucking family.

My trust—how about that?

JAY

This is serious, Em.

EM

I'm being serious, Jay. I need you and that girl—

JAY

Don't bring G.G. into this.

EM

You're the one who brought G.G. into this.

JAY

I didn't bring G.G. into anything.

When you and I met, yes, it was great.

But I was young.

Yes, I loved you.

You were on fire.

EM
And you kept trying to douse the flames.

JAY
To save you.

EM
To ruin me.

JAY
To save you.
Em, you have an unending
ungodly
unmanageable
appetite for destruction.
The graffiti—

EM
What about it?
Don't get all high and mighty.
You started on the streets just like me.
You painted over just as many buildings and billboards as me.
Hell, you were worse!
You painted over storefronts
Places owned by people who couldn't afford security
so they couldn't catch you.

JAY
I grew up.

EM
And what, I'm a child?

JAY
I'm an artist

EM
And what am I?

JAY
It's not that you're not good. It's just... your art disappears before the week is up,
sweetheart.

EM
And your art sits in a museum
Gets seen by the snobs of the art world

EM (cont.)

Gets paid for by them too.
Gets edited and controlled by their taste, their ideals, how they define art.
Maybe my art can never last but at least it's mine.
At least my art gets shown to the public,
to the people who walk down sidewalks at six in the morning
The people who haven't been told what art should be
We, the people
More people than will ever set foot into that gallery
where your paintings collect dust.

JAY

And cash.
Your art gets a bigger audience?
Has a greater purpose?
That's fine,
that's great.
My art gets seen by the people that will pay hundreds to call it their own.
I can paint as much as I like,
I can work night and day on piece after piece after piece
And I won't get arrested for it—I'll be applauded.
I won't be a vandal—
I'll be praised.
My work will never be an afterthought,
It will be remembered.
It will always be art to whoever sees it.
And I'll be...

I don't care if I have to gentrify
to conform
or confine my art to a this-by-that canvas
if it means my art will help me pay my rent, my bills,
survive.

Silence lingers between the two.

EM

That's fucked up.

JAY

So be it.

EM

You've changed.

JAY

I know... you can too.

EM

Fuck you.

JAY

Jesus Em, when are you just gonna let all that anger go?

A moment.

EM

You take.

You take, you take, you take.

But now?

You don't get to take anything else away from me.

You don't get to take away my anger.

I'm gonna be pissed.

I'm gonna yell and shout and paint in reds

And if that makes you upset or uncomfortable or inconvenienced

I'm not sorry.

JAY

I'm tired of fighting with you. I didn't come here to wage war.

EM

Why the hell are you here?

JAY

I wanted to find you. Give you this. Consider it a final peace offering.

JAY slides over a card. EM opens it.

EM

You have a show tomorrow.

JAY

A big one.

Filled with artists and agents and gallery owners and art collectors.

I wanted to invite you.

Thought if you came you could see it wasn't so bad

Thought I could introduce you to some of these people

maybe you could get your foot in the door.

get you into something good,

save you before—

EM

I don't need to be saved. And if I did, I could do it myself.
I don't need you.

JAY

Em...

*EM looks over the invitation for a moment.
She crumples it up and throws it away.*

JAY (cont.)

... Fine.

*JAY gets up and exits as OFFICER comes
back, sits where JAY once was.*

*OFFICER begins leafing through a file they
brought in.*

EM is quiet.

OFFICER

There are clerks bein' held up
People callin' in afraid
that their spouse or
girlfriend or
boyfriend
or whoever is gonna hurt 'em
or their friend
or their kid.

There's kids needin' to be taken away from parents too strung out to see straight.
Kids livin' on the streets liftin' packets of gun from gas stations so they can get taken in
stay somewhere warm for the night.

There's cops gettin' shot
citizens gettin' shot
real bad shit goin' down in the world
and I'm here talkin' to some girl
because she painted a picture
on a damn billboard.

A moment.

EM

Proud?

OFFICER

I do my job. If this is how I protect and serve today well... that's what I do.

EM

That's all I'm doing too.

OFFICER

Excuse me?

EM

That ad I painted over, like most other ads in this world, was shit. I paint over it and protect people from lies, serve them the truth.

Those ads aren't so innocent
they're not just selling us stuff,
they're selling us a lifestyle.

A cultural landscape decorated with ignorance, ageism, sexism, racism
fueled by capitalism, commercialism, and appropriation.

You tweak the ads, try to mend a broken system
but the system was fucked up in the first place.

So I paint over it. I replace it with something better. I protect and serve with paint.

OFFICER

That's beautiful, really is, but what you did's a crime, plain and simple. Impressive? Hell yeah. But illegal.

EM

Yeah, I get that. Look, I've been through this before. Could you just tell me what I'm dealing with this time?

OFFICER

Prosecution ain't holdin' back. You're lookin' at a 2000\$ fine.

EM nods her head. Bites her lips.

OFFICER (cont.)

Plus jail time.

EM

... Is that it? Am I gonna get struck by lightning? Maybe it'd just be better for everyone involved to exile me, cast me off into the fucking abyss. That'd be better than fucking... this.

EM puts her head into her hands. Maybe

she's crying, maybe not. It's been a long night. The kind that makes you need to cradle your head and shut out the damned world while you fall apart.

EM

I'm invoking my right to remain silent now.

A moment.

OFFICER

I'm a pretty good judge of character—it comes with the job, well, when you're good at it anyway. You and your record are sayin' that you're a fighter that needs to get out of the fuckin' ring you're in. You ain't gonna win there. You know how many people with talent just waste it gettin' the crap kicked out of 'em? Too many. You wanna fight? Fine. But you need to find another way.

EM lifts her head up. The cogs are turning.

EM

When's my arraignment?

OFFICER

Lookin' like Monday, why?

EM

And my chances of getting a DAT ?

OFFICER

(Laughs) Low.

EM

I promise, I will show up on Monday, be cordial and civil—I'll be early even! You can keep my paint as collateral—

OFFICER

The paint is being kept regardless.

EM

Right... *(Pleading)* Please, I'll do whatever it takes.

OFFICER

Why?

EM

Why what?

Why you want out so bad?
A shot to make things right.
You will be back.
Thank you.
On Monday. Real damn early.
Abso-fucking-lutely.
You run, you don't show up, you're done.
I'm not running.

OFFICER
EM
OFFICER
EM
OFFICER
EM
OFFICER
EM

OFFICER gets up, gestures to EM.

OFFICER

Come on.

EM goes with OFFICER but stops to grab the invitation.

THEY exit.

Blackout.

Scene 3

Lights up on a large office filled with posters advertising an array of things—clothes, makeup, movies, perfume.

ADRIENNE sits at her desk in a big leather chair, on the phone, staring at a computer screen.

ADRIENNE

(Into phone) No sir... yes sir... we're trying... we're thinking of... yes sir... yes sir I'm looking at the feed now... no sir, we didn't...

She listens to the phone as the person on the other end shouts enthusiastically.

A quick knock. ADRIENNE covers up the receiver of the phone.

ADRIENNE

Come in.

EM enters. ADRIENNE gestures to the seat across from her and EM sits.

ADRIENNE

You're my 3 o'clock?

EM

No, I'm the person who painted over your ad.

A moment. The person on the other end of the phone continues to shout.

ADRIENNE

(To phone) Sir, I'll have to call you back.

ADRIENNE hangs up the phone.

ADRIENNE

I thought you were arrested.

EM

I'm out till trial.

ADRIENNE

For some reason, I thought you'd be a man.

EM

Common assumption.

ADRIENNE

As nice as it is to meet the vandal who defaced my company's property, I think I'll be calling security now.

I have a proposition for you.

EM

You do?

ADRIENNE

Your ads are awful.

EM

I don't hear a proposition in that.

ADRIENNE

I can make them better.

EM

How.

ADRIENNE

EM

I'll create a series of new ads for you. They'll be bold, unexpected, and way more effective than the stuff you're posting now.

ADRIENNE

And you'll work for free in exchange for a halting of the legal proceedings?

EM

Well... yeah. It would be like community service. Because I painted over one of your ads, you have me paint new ones. I can have them up by tomorrow morning and if you like them, you get me out of the legal stuff.

ADRIENNE

And if I don't find your debt to society repaid?

EM

If you hate them, I'll go to jail and owe you money I'll never have.

ADRIENNE

Why should I agree to this?

EM

You spend all this money
to sell products
without ever talking to the people you're selling them to.
You sit in this office on a leather throne,
racking your brain for what buyers
all the people 40 stories below you
want to see.

EM (cont.)

You don't know what they want to see.

I do.

I know those people better than you,
better than the people that work here
better than that asshole yelling on the phone.

And I know what you want.

I can give you that.

Attention,
new customers,
success,
and a damn good image.

ADRIENNE

You think allying myself and this company with a criminal will provide us with a good image?

EM

Technically, if you pay for the spaces I paint on, it's all legal.

ADRIENNE clicks to life a computer screen. A social media page pops up filled with pictures of the ad EM painted over. The Web is alive and excited.

ADRIENNE

This product has been out for nearly three months. Your stunt got it more buzz in the last few hours than in those three months. It also decreased sales by 25%.

EM

Is that a no?

ADRIENNE

You seem to have the uncanny ability to alter people's perceptions and sway their spending sensibilities.

EM

Is that a yes?

ADRIENNE

Tentatively. I'd need to know that you would treat our clients and their products with the upmost respect and integrity.

EM

I didn't realize respect and integrity were included in an advertisers vocabulary.

ADRIENNE

You will not defame these companies or what they are selling.
You will create an ad that sells the product,
that frames the product,
that makes the product hottest thing anyone in this city has every seen.
And if these ads fail
If they are criticized
If you do not meet these standards
you will take the fall,
not me.
You will bear the full responsibility,
Not me.
You will be the only one linked to them,
Not me.
Do you understand?

EM

You take the credit if they fly, I take the rap if they fall.

ADRIENNE

So we have a deal.

EM

Absolutely. You have my word.

ADRIENNE

I'd like a little more assurance than that. I'm going to have legal draw up a contract detailing the agreement.

ADRIENNE writes something on a piece of paper before slipping it into the folder. SHE hands the folder to EM.

ADRIENNE

By tomorrow afternoon, fives works for this product in the five locations enclosed. No latter, no less, and nowhere else.

EM

They'll be up before you are.

ADRIENNE

Good. I have a meeting tomorrow with that asshole on the phone, as you so tenderly put it. If your work gets any positive press, a nice social media response, we'll be in touch.

EM

And if it all goes to shit—

I'm sure you'll look lovely in orange.

ADRIENNE

Understood.

EM

ADRIENNE slinks closer to EM.

Don't make me regret this.

ADRIENNE

Blackout.

Scene 4

Lights up on a gallery. Wooden planks, cans of paint, brushes, and other supplies are strewn across the space. JAY stands staring at a row of paintings. Occasionally he picks up a brush and splatters some paint or drags it across one of the canvases. Make no mistake, JAY is careful and caring with these paintings, like a father with his children.

EM enters with a knock, something bunched up behind her back.

JAY looks up, unsurprised and unimpressed, then back to his paintings.

You got out.

JAY

Yeah.

EM

Guess you didn't need me after all.

JAY

No.

EM

So why you here?

JAY

EM throws JAY a gold scarf.

JAY

What's this?

EM

A peace offering.

JAY

One of your scarves?

EM

It's not mine.

JAY

Then whose—

A realization.

EM

Yeah...

The night after your first gallery show

The one I had to find out about in the next morning's paper

The paper with the picture of you

And her

Her lips on your cheek

Your hand on her ass

The night after the morning I confronted you

after you admitted it was true

and I walked out on you,

The night I had to walk back in

because I had no where else to go

The night I saw you had packed your bags and gone

left me your business card

Instead of a note.

That night, I slept in the closet

because the room felt too big.

The bed felt too empty.

It was hungry too hungry for just one person,

I thought it would swallow me up if I went in alone.

So I crept into the closet and buried my head in the paint-stained clothes and ripped jeans
you left behind.

And buried beneath it all was a scarf.

That scarf.

EM (cont.)

Her scarf.
I was going to burn it.
Or strangle her with it.
Or you.
But I thought about what you said and...
You were right.
I need to let the anger go.
So I'm returning the scarf and giving up the anger.

A moment.

JAY

It's not poisoned is it?

EM

No but it's dirty, might want to wash it before you give it back to her.

JAY

Is this for real, Em?

EM

Yeah, ... Sometimes it's hard for me to get where you're coming from. At some point we grew apart and I blamed you for that.

JAY

And I blamed you.

EM

Now I see that my anger was silly, really. You were just doing what you needed to do. For your own sake.

JAY

That's what I've been trying to say. It was self-defense, you know? I was just trying to protect myself. And, I mean, you too. Would it have been right to stay together when you were so different from me and I had feelings for someone else?

EM

No. I can see things from your perspective pretty clearly now.

JAY

I'm glad you could work all your issues out.

EM

Me too.

JAY

I'd offer to take you out for a drink but I really should keep working.

EM

Of course. Big day tomorrow.

JAY

Your invitation still stands... You should come.

EM

... You know what? I think I will. What time?

JAY

3.

EM

I'll see you then.

EM goes to exit but stops and turns back to JAY.

EM (cont.)

Don't work too late.

JAY

(Mockingly) Okay, mom.

EM

(Laughs) Just looking out for you. You know how bloated you can get when you don't get enough sleep. *(Em exits)* See you tomorrow!

JAY keeps working. He catches sight of himself in a mirror or a window. He sucks in his stomach a little and pulls at his eyes. He starts to collect his gear quickly.

JAY exits and the lights in the gallery dim.

Scene 5

The gallery is filled with the light of the night—moon and stars, streetlamps and the occasional headlights of passing cars.

We hear a click and a door creaking open. EM enters in all black, carrying a sack.

She creeps through the gallery, makes her way over to JAY's paintings.

EM stares at JAY's paintings, almost in the same way he did earlier.

EM

Sometimes I see pieces of the old Jay
in his paintings.

I even still see pieces of me in everything he makes.

Jay was obsessed with heroes
the battles
the victories.
I loved messing with the mythology.
He would paint men in Herculean poses
facing insurmountable odds but always coming out on top,
always surviving,
having their praises sung by the people they'd rescued.
Usually thanks to me.
Where was my song though.

Our first night in this new place, we painted a triptych across three buildings on the outskirts of the city
Part of an old, decaying skyline that had once thrived,
before it was dumped with the rise of the high rises.
Jay always felt uncomfortable around the forgotten
but here was a place we could work all through dawn,
into the morning,
and no one would stop us.

EM starts reliving that night.

We started.
He painted a man—a tall chiseled matador
Then the monster—a bull breathing fire
The man was toast.
But I stepped in, and where the red cape should have been
I painted a fire extinguisher.
And the matador lived to hear his tale told.

We cast the shadows of warriors on the wall.
an army of the undead,
Jay painted the last of the living set to fight them.
The inevitability of death surrounded him, charged at him with swords and shields.

EM (cont.)

But that boy better thank me because I gave him the key to the kingdom:
a hand grenade
With a single pluck,
toss,
duck,
the bomb would land and the army would be vanquished.
And the hero could move on to something bigger
better.

There were thick lines,
twists and turns,
stenciled scales.
Sweeping gesture after sweeping gesture and then
a dragon capable of swallowing any man whole
and spitting his charred bones back out.
Jay stopped and stared at the beast he created standing before him.
He couldn't draw the hero
How could he when the monster loomed over him to menacingly
mockingly
Jay looked so small compared to that creature.
I bumped him aside and did what had to be done.
The dragon's eyelids were painted shut,
His posture made lazier, looser
And by his claw rested a bottle of pills
"Ambien," I wrote in those big pink block letters. "It can put ANYTHING to sleep."
When I'd finished Jay laughed and looked at me,
really looked at me,
And it was one of those looks...

*EM starts coming back to the present. She
looks to Jay's paintings.*

With everything we've been through...

It's easy to say he never loved me,
to say that I never loved him,
and maybe we never really did
maybe we loved parts of each other but never the whole package
And maybe we never even loved
maybe we only fell in love
the kind of love that carries the expectation of being cast away like a stack of bricks.
But even if we never loved
we had our moments.

EM takes a moment to distance herself from these memories.

EM (cont.)

Jay picked up a can and drew the hero on top of the dragon.
Victory was his.
And now victory can be mine.

EM looks at all the paintings again, pained.

EM (cont.)

We were in those burners.
We're in these paintings.
But that "we" is over.
The me that painted that night doesn't exist anymore.
The Jay I painted with is dead.
And he isn't coming back.
And I don't give a fuck.

EM lays all of the paintings on the ground and reaches into her pack.

Blackout.

Scene 6

Lights up on the gallery, bright. The paintings are hung on the wall, covered by a sheet. A crowd is chatting about nothing.

G.G. and JAY stand by the row of paintings, affectionate and anxious, holding glasses of champagne and each other.

G.G. raises her glass—clink clink clink.

G.G.

To a man that has propped himself up onto the pedestal of propriety
I'd like to propose a toast.

Jay.

(Laughs sweetly) What can I say?
The first show I did with Jay, he was
a nervous wreck.
He was pacing back and forth.
Sweating like a sauna

G.G. (cont.)

Doubting every painting, double-checking every position and placement.
And I was
Standing against the wall
champagne in hand
waiting for him to slow down,
stop,
and breath.
I knew he would in time.
And several drinks later
He finally did.

Crowd laughs politely.

G.G. (cont.)

Jay
What can I say?
The first time we met,
I was walking around town at midnight
When I stopped at the sight of a shadow on a rooftop.
I watched as he painted,
descended the ladder,
and hopped onto the sidewalk.
I stared at him.
He stared at me.
And at that moment I knew.

G.G. and JAY share a foamy, loving glance.

G.G. (cont.)

Jay
What can I say?
(*To Jay*) Today is a testament to your hard work
To your dedication
Your devotion
You.

*G.G. and the crowd applaud politely. Jay
nods and acts humbled by the crowd but
really, he's soaking it in.*

JAY

Thank you, G.G. for the beautiful toast
And thank you all for coming here tonight.
This show was inspired by the idea of power
and love

JAY (cont.)

and how the two can interplay.
Some may say
that the two don't go hand in hand
Well, let's just hope those people aren't here today.

Crowd and G.G. laugh politely. EM slowly walks in.

JAY (cont.)

I don't want to say too much,
I'd rather you all look for yourself
and interpret the art as you wish.
Think what you will about the art,
as long as you love it.

Crowd and G.G. laugh. EM does not.

JAY and G.G. go on either side of the paintings and one, two, three, they remove the coverings on the paintings.

A small shock goes through the crowd.

All of the canvas have had the paint smudged into oblivion, huge chunks of images wiped away entirely.

EM looks on.

G.G.

(Whispering to Jay) What is this?

JAY

I-I don't know.

G.G. gets closer to JAY.

G.G.

(Warmly to crowd) It seems we're having a small issue with the paintings. I'm sure this is a mistake. If you'd just exit into the lobby, you'll find some wine to sip on while we work this out.

Crowd's conversation slowly dissipates as they go into the lobby. EM remains in the shadows.

What's going on, Jay?

G.G.

These aren't my paintings.

JAY

G.G. goes to check the sides of the paintings.

They all have your signature on the side.

G.G.

No fucking way. These aren't my paintings!

JAY

Okay, I get it! Hanging up phony paintings to mess with me. Ha ha very funny, where are the real paintings?

G.G.

I didn't hang up anything! I didn't do—

JAY

JAY goes to the paintings, looks at them over and over, checks his signature, runs his hands over them.

His body seems to deflate as the truth settles in.

Oh my god.

JAY

Jay.

G.G.

These are...

JAY

Excuse me?

G.G.

JAY

These, these are my paintings, were my paintings are my paintings.

... this is what you painted.

G.G.

No. Yes.

JAY

Which is it Jay, yes or no, you can't not fucking paint something you fucking painted.

G.G.

These are my paintings, this isn't what I painted.

JAY

These are your paintings.

G.G.

Yes.

JAY

Jesus fuck. Is this what you meant when you said you were going to showcase something new and different? Is this some kind of new style?

G.G.

No.

JAY

You said this was going to be your best work yet.

G.G.

It was.

JAY

You think this is good?

G.G.

No!

JAY

I told everyone. I told everyone! This is his best work yet. Best. Work. And you give me this shit.

G.G.

This isn't my fault.

JAY

G.G.

Oh shut your shit, Jay, the world isn't out to get you. What am I supposed to say? What am I going to tell all of the people in the lobby waiting to see your work?

JAY

Tell them... tell them... that, that—

G.G.

What??

JAY starts to become manic.

JAY

Tell them the days got mixed up or I need more time or there was a flood or an issue with heat or something, anything, say anything to them, get them back here, back here in a week, I know, I know I can do it over, I can paint something new—I can paint something new and better and that, that will blow them away! Tell them that!

G.G.

You really think anyone will come back here to see you after this? This was your one moment, Jay. And now, it's over.

JAY

Don't fucking say that. We could do it! You could do it! You can do anything! I can do it!

G.G.

There's nothing I can do at this point except go into that room and beg them not to abandon this gallery.

JAY

You'd fight for the gallery before you'd defend your fiancé?

G.G.

This gallery has never disappointed me the way you did.
This gallery has been around before you and will be around long after you.
This gallery gives me everything and asks for nothing in return
while you ask for everything and give me nothing.
I'll chose this gallery over you in a heartbeat.

JAY

G.G.

G.G.

I think you should go.

I didn't—

JAY

Fine! I'll go then.

G.G.

G.G. exits. JAY stares heartbroken at her, his paintings.

EM steps forward.

Quite a show.

EM

... I didn't hang up the paintings.

JAY

Don't worry I took care of that for you. And a couple other things.

EM

You—

JAY

You really should have checked under that sheet before you started celebrating. Hindsight is 20/20, am I right?

EM

...You fucking cunt.

JAY

Hey now, don't be angry, Jay. You aren't helping anyone with your anger.

EM

Shut the fuck up, you harpy! You ruined my life! You ruined my relationship, my reputation, my art! My fucking art.

JAY

JAY starts crying, crumples to the ground.

EM hovers over him.

Feel that Jay? That's what I've felt for the last 6 months.
That's heartbreak.
That's fucking heartbreak, you selfish son of a bitch.
You drain everyone of everything good
Then you bail.

EM

EM (cont.)

G.G. should be thanking me,
singing my praises.
I saved her from you
and your shit.
from learning the worst of your disappointment.

You don't even care that you lost her.
You never cared about her.
She was just your ticket to elsewhere, higher ground.
You aren't hurting because she's gone.
You're inconvenienced but not hurt.

It's your art.
Your fucking art.

I should have known.
Every loving glance,
Every embrace,
Each romantic-novel kiss
It was all after painting!
Loving me,
loving her,
was just a side effect from huffing paint fumes
breathing in the cement blocks and canvases
feeling a brush, a can, a roller in your hand
watching the scene in your mind get splattered into life.
You only loved what you made.

And what you made to be hung on these walls is dead now.
I killed it,
And I loved every minute of it,
hated every second of it.
And you can make new ones,
try again,
but they'll never be the same.
The pain of losing the firsts will eat at you
devour you
And G.G. was right.
No one will give a shit about what you do now.
You'll go down in history as the guy who had his shot and fucked it up.

JAY

You aren't getting away with this.

EM

I am.

JAY

I'm calling the cops, I'll tell them what you did—
breaking and entering
destruction of private property
Vandalism.

EM gestures around the gallery.

EM

I don't see any cameras.
What will you go to them with?

JAY

The truth

EM

Your truth.

JAY

The truth. I'll tell them that you broke in, washed away the paint in some insane effort to get revenge.

EM

They'll never believe you.

JAY

Why not? You have a pretty thick file filled with incidents where you were defacing property, the artwork of others. Why wouldn't they believe me?

EM

Well you may have your word
but I have an alibi.
I was working around town last night.

JAY

Your word,
a criminal's word,
against my word,
a respected artist's word.
I wonder who'll win that round.

EM

Oh it's not just my word, Jay.

EM (cont.)

I have proof,
A string of photographs of my work sent at
One in the morning
Three in the morning
Five in the morning
Seven a.m.
Nine a.m
Oh wait, doesn't G.G. come in around 8?
She would have had to see me,
which she didn't,
In order for me to plausibly be here,
which I wasn't.
It's the word of the laughing stock of the art world
versus the word and proof of a freelance street artist
And the support of her new employer.

Your move.

JAY

Fuck you.

EM

Right back at you.

EM exits.

*JAY grabs his paintings, one by one,
destroying them. When the carnage is over,
he sobs and heaves.*

Blackout.

Scene 7

*EM walks down the sidewalk after leaving
the gallery, a duffle bag across her
shoulder.*

*She sits in front a billboard painted white,
the billboard she painted over that first
night.*

ADRIENNE calls. EM picks up.

ADRIENNE

(Phone) You're a sensation.

EM

(Phone) They like the ads?

*The ads EM painted appear behind her.
They're witty and smart, beautiful and
tough.*

ADRIENNE

(Phone) They like the response they're getting.

EM

(Phone) I figured.

ADRIENNE

(Phone) As promised, I'll take care of your charges. No fines, no jail time. But you could be looking at more work with us.

EM

(Phone) I don't know about that.

ADRIENNE

(Phone) Think on it.

The phone conversation ends.

EM

Life is built on broken promises.
unmet expectations.
dreams that turned out to be impossible in the harsh light of reality.
Life is full of heartache.
love.
healing.
breaking.
success
failure.
Today, tonight, tomorrow,
I'll paint.
I'll paint on a wall and someone will dismember my work,
They'll bind it behind walls of grey or red or white,
to try and hide it.
Maybe someone else will come and work next to my piece, then over it.
Paint will beget paint will beget paint.

EM (cont.)

And today, tonight, tomorrow,
Someone will paint.
They'll paint on a canvas,
hang their work proudly in a pristine white room
and it will disappear too
into the home of another
or storage
or the trash,
into the collective memory
or the place things go when we forget to remember them.
Give and take,
Death and life,
There will be sadness,
and happiness
again
one day.
Until then
I fight.
No matter how many times I get hit.
No matter how many times I fall down.
I will not stop.
I cannot stop.
I will carry on.
And even when I'm gone,
You will carry on,
we will carry on.
People will keep fighting.
Keep pressing back on the walls that try to box us in, that try to never move, never be
moved.
We will move
on.

*EM stares out. A can of spray paint rolls by
in front of her. She stops it with her foot.*

She picks up the can and gives it a shake.

*She pops off the cap, twists around and
sprays her small gold serpentine figure on
the billboard behind her.*

She puts down the can, stands up, and exits.

The image lingers.

Blackout.

End of Play.