

# **T h e R e m b r a n d t**

By **J e s s i c a D i c k e y**

Leah Hamos / Gersh Agency  
LHamos@gersh.com  
jessiedickey@gmail.com

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## FIVE ACTORS

ACTOR ONE—Male, 50s-60s

Henry—museum guard, bookish, grieving but in denial  
Rembrandt the painter-- brilliant, grumpy, soft-hearted

ACTOR TWO—Male, early 20s (to play 13-24)

Dodger—training to be a guard, subversive, tattooed, seeker  
Titus—Rembrandt's son, clever, loves his father, pragmatic

ACTOR THREE—Female, early-mid 20s

Madeline—art student, forthright, grieving, not afraid to argue  
Henny—Rembrandt's partner, loving, practical, grounded

ACTOR FOUR—Male, 30s-40s

Jonny—guard, military background, carries a gun, caring in his way  
Martin—hospice care nurse, strong, knowing

ACTOR FIVE—Male, 60s-70s

Simon—Henry's husband, poet, an inherent grace and toughness  
Homer the ancient poet—visionary, crude, crazy, brilliant

Please don't make everyone white.

## SETTING

A large, spacious room with walls that can change color to reflect--

White—Present day, a major art museum in the United States

Red—1653, a luxurious home in Amsterdam

Ochre—roughly 800 BC, A Temple in Greece

Black—Present day, the death bed of a poet

*The following four sections connect like four paintings curated next to each other. Distinct, but connected.*



*Aristotle with a Bust of Homer*  
*By Rembrandt (1653)*

# T H E R E M B R A N D T

By Jessica Dickey

## W H I T E

*(A spotlight illuminates a man's face. This is HENRY. His face shines out from the dark.)*

HENRY

One of the greatest painters of our civilization  
Rembrandt  
Preferred only four colors of paint:  
black, white, ochre and earth red.  
Because these hues best highlight the color of the skin.  
For example  
In Rembrandt's *The Man With The Magnifying Glass...*  
The clothing is dark ochre and shades of maroon  
His hair is brown and black with flecks of light  
The space around him is an earthen black.  
So that there  
floating in the middle of all that darkness  
Is the pale and luminous specter  
of his face.

I love that.  
That set against an immense and layered darkness  
The human light is most visible.

*(Florescent lights start popping on around him. Morning in a large room in a major American art museum. High ceilings, clean light. The walls are a crisp linen-white color. JONNY and HENRY are opening for the day.)*

HENRY

Good morning Jonny.

JONNY *(startled)*

Fuck me. What're you doin' here in the dark ya nutball?

HENRY

Have you ever been to Tucson?

JONNY

What?

HENRY

Have you ever been to Tucson?

JONNY

Arizona? No.

HENRY

*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*

Me neither. But the indigenous people of Tucson believe that the Saguaro Cactuses—cacti?—walk at night. Simon wrote a poem about them (in his second book I believe).

JONNY  
The what?

HENRY  
The Saguaro—you know, the tall cactus that grows in the southwest?—they sort of lean a little—they really do look like people... Simon called them “disciples of the sky”.

JONNY  
Okay

HENRY  
Anyway I’ve always thought that it was true here. That at night the paintings come alive, expand somehow. And then when the lights go on in the morning—on the Manet, the Vermeer, the Renoir—it’s like there’s a secret alive in the room, as if something vital and mysterious is pretending to be asleep, their inner life tucked beneath a frame.

JONNY  
Why are you saying this?

HENRY  
Because that’s what I’m doing here. In the dark. I like to be here when the shift happens. From “alive” in the dark, to “asleep” in the lights.

*(Beat.)*

JONNY  
You say weird shit in the morning.

*(HENRY goes about Prechecks for the morning shift.)*

Anything interesting in Prechecks?

HENRY  
Not yet.

JONNY  
That’s too bad. You heard about that umbrella that got left here last month, right?-- had pictures of naked cowboys in it once you opened it up? People are crazy.

*(HENRY keeps doing Prechecks. JONNY just hangs around—clearly likes HENRY, finds him comforting or something.)*

JONNY  
Supposed to rain.

HENRY  
Mmmm.

JONNY  
You gonna do the Anna Wintour birthday dinner? You know, in the Asian wing?

HENRY  
Uhhhhh I hadn’t thought to. Why, should I?

JONNY

Oh yeah man, she's big in the fashion world. Big. I love fashion. The Kardashians? Love that shit.

Hey-- so Twyla asked me to invite you to supper for the holiday. If you're free. I think she's gonna do a lamb or something. If you don't already have plans. I know it's still a ways off, but. She told me to invite you... To Easter...

HENRY

Oooh...

JONNY

I hate Easter. The bunny shit? Hate that. Anyway. You have plans? Or--?

HENRY

Uhhh no, no, not yet...

JONNY

Okay. I don't mean to pry. I just know she'll ask. *(ala Twyla)* "Did you ask if he had plans? People get shy when their partner is dying." *(Maybe he shouldn't have said that)* You know Twyla she's always mother-hen-ing everybody. I mean of course Simon is welcome to join, if—you know...

HENRY

That's very kind.

JONNY

... How is Simon?

HENRY

Uhhhhh. Still Stage Four.

JONNY

Yeah that's a shame. *(chuckling)* You know Twyla and I still laugh about that staff holiday party two years ago when Simon kept doing that squirrel voice?—you remember that?—he kept hoppin' around talkin' about NUTS. NUTS NUTS NUTS!

HENRY

Ah yes. My poet husband and his unusual flair for theatrics.

JONNY

It was hilarious! The staff parties always make me feel like such a jackass, the tie and everything, but Twyla likes 'em cuz they're fancy and there's free champagne. Simon got points in my book cuz he asked me about Iraq. Not many people do that... *(A sad pause)* So how's he doing? I mean, how are his spirits?

HENRY

Uhhh it's hard to say. He sleeps a lot. Or so I'm told. By his nurse.

JONNY

That's—yeah that's some real shit. I don't know how you're doing it man.

HENRY

"Doing it?"

JONNY

Yeah, like, how you're keeping your shit together. If Twyla were dying I'd be a fucking MESS. I'm saying you're strong. You gonna take any time off, or...?

HENRY

Well I suppose I'll have to. For the funeral.

JONNY

...Yeah. But I mean like—don't you wanna be home? With him?

HENRY

I don't think either of us would like that very much.

JONNY

Really? You guys aren't the chicken noodle soup types?

HENRY

I don't know what that means.

JONNY

You know, chicken noodle soup types. Like if one doesn't feel well the other makes them chicken noodle soup. Don't you guys like chicken noodle soup when you're feelin' bad?

HENRY

We do. We just prefer to put it in the microwave and eat it ourselves.

JONNY

Got it, got it. Well listen, you should take some time, buddy. Looking at these walls all day can't be good.

HENRY

I like these walls.

JONNY

Not me man. End of each day I am ready to BAIL. *(Small pause)* Well, look, if you're in the Leave Me Alone part of it, I get it, but if not you should come to dinner. Seriously. We don't have to talk about it. Or we can.

HENRY

That's very kind of you, but--

JONNY

Well, just, you know, just—give it some thought. Holidays can be tough. Even with the bunny shit.

*(MADELINE enters with her easel and paints. Beat.)*

JONNY

Ma'am this section is closed today.

MADELINE

Oh. I mean, they let me in... I'm a copyist? I'm going to be working on the Rembrandt?

JONNY

You sure you got your dates right? They're painting the hall out there for an installation.

MADELINE

I have my approval letter.

*(She offers her approval letter, which he checks.)*

JONNY

Alright, well. We're gonna have to check your measurements.

MADELINE (*"measurements"?*)

Okay.

HENRY

That's fine. I'll check her Jonny, it's fine. Go ahead and set up Miss. I'm almost done here with the Prechecks, I'll be with you in just a minute.

MADELINE

Okay. Thank you.

*(HENRY continues Prechecks. She sets up her stuff. JONNY has sauntered over her way.)*

JONNY

So you're a painter.

MADELINE (*no interest*)

Ish.

JONNY

Ish?

MADELINE

It's just a class.

JONNY

That's cool. *(re: the Rembrandt, down front)* You're gonna copy that one there? That's a tough one. The light... His eyeballs... *(He peeks at her canvas, which is blank.)* Got a long way to go.

MADELINE

I haven't started yet.

JONNY

No I know I'm just messin' with ya.

MADELINE

... Uh huh.

JONNY

So is that where the hot chicks go nowadays to meet dudes? Painting class?

MADELINE (*back the fuck off*)

Actually it's where the hot chicks go to GRIEVE A LOSS.

*(Beat. HENRY looks up from his clipboard.)*



JONNY (*getting the message*)  
I got you. That's cool. Respect.

(*Trying to recover, and also probably actually trying to be helpful*)

Hey Henry, maybe you should take a painting class.

(*HENRY and MADELINE make eye contact, recognizing they have something in common.*)

HENRY (*gently, taking MADELINE in*)  
Yes perhaps I should. Thank you Jonny.

(*HENRY turns and almost runs right into DODGER. He makes quite a picture with his radass Mohawk.*)

HENRY  
Oh my!

DODGER  
Is one of you guys Henry?

HENRY (*recovering*)  
Good morning. Yes. I'm Henry. You must be Bernard.

DODGER  
Dodger.

HENRY  
Sorry?

DODGER  
Dodger. Bernard is my grandfather.

HENRY  
--Oh, I thought they said—

DODGER  
I go by Dodger.

HENRY  
Alright then. Dodger.

HENRY  
It's nice to meet you. Uhhhh. This is Jonny.

JONNY  
'Sup.

HENRY  
Welcome to your first day.

DODGER  
Thanks.

HENRY

I'll be training you. Come in, come in, let's get you oriented with Prechecks and such.

DODGER

How do smoke breaks work?

HENRY

Smoke breaks?-- Uhhhh—I believe they work like all the other breaks—every twenty minutes you'll rotate and depending on your section and team size you'll rotate out every hour forty or so. And of course your lunch, which is forty-five minutes.

JONNY

Just make sure you smoke twenty feet from the building. That's a Thing.

DODGER

Okay.

JONNY

I'm serious. And show this guy some respect. Been here longer than most of the art.

DODGER

What the fuck man?

HENRY

Alright, let's begin shall we?

*(Brief standoff, but JONNY decides to let it slide for HENRY's sake.)*

JONNY

I'll check in with you later buddy-- Twyla makes a great lamb... *(exiting, loudly)* I'll be the good-looking man with a gun. If anyone needs me.

HENRY *(as JONNY leaves.)*

That's very reassuring Jonny thank you.

*(Once he's gone—)*

Sorry about that. Jonny is what we call an SPO—Security Protection Officer. Different unit than us. They carry guns. We're the GPOs—General Protection Officers. I don't know why we can't just be called Museum Guards, it seems simple enough to me, but there you have it.

There are basically three types you'll encounter on staff with you here at the museum— There are the retired military and government agency types. You can tell who they are right away. It can be a little unsettling at first—guns, metal detectors--but you'll get used to it. Most of them mean well and just try to do their job.

Then there are the retired teachers, people who want to do something simple, something that allows them to be around the art and people without too much responsibility. And then of course there are the artists, like yourself. There was even a year when the guards got together and produced a show of their work. It was really interesting, I can tell you.

DODGER

How do you know I'm an artist?

HENRY *(surveying the tattoos, the hair)*

Just a hunch. Now, I think first--

DODGER

So which are you?

HENRY

I'm sorry?

DODGER

The three types. Which are you?

HENRY

Oh. I guess I'm an amalgamation. I taught Art History in a small boarding school and at one time I fancied myself a painter. Anyway.

So!-- Welcome to the museum! It's a quiet morning, which is nice, gives you a chance to get the lay of the land.

*(HENRY plows through the following with quick pace.)*

I assume they showed you our entrance by the loading dock?-- you'll use that to enter and exit the museum, we'll make sure you know where your locker is. You leave your uniform here, you know, where it is laundered for you, and then every morning you'll attend the team meeting—they're easy—just covering any events going on in the museum, opportunities for overtime, which you'll find you want since the pay is rather DIRE. So let's walk through the morning procedure.

*(Throughout all of this MADELINE has been seated, getting herself ready, preparing her canvas, studying the painting. DODGER may occasionally steal a glance over to her.)*

Oh I almost forgot about you! We have a copyist here with us today, you'll see them around the museum from time to time. It's rather lovely—having someone here *painting* reminds our patrons that once upon a time all the paintings they see now *were painted!* An artist sat in front of a blank canvas and tried to communicate a truth from the human condition in the language of composition and color... Lucky for us our job today is simply to make sure their canvas is the proper size.

*(They stand by MADELINE's canvas.)*

So, they went through her bag at the door of course, so we'll just do this quickly and leave you to it. It cannot be the same size as the original; so in this case the Rembrandt is 143.5 by 136.5cm, so less than that. Here you are—

*(HENRY produces a little tape measure from his pocket and hands it to DODGER.)*

You can do the measurements.

*(DODGER awkwardly maneuvers around MADELINE.)*

DODGER

Hi.

MADELINE *(taking in his whole goth situation)*

Hi.

*(He measures the canvas.)*

HENRY

Alright my lady. *(With a reverent little bow--)* Bonne chance.

*(HENRY hops back to his instruction.)*

So. Prechecks. Just making sure there is nothing new—no tiny scratch or discrepancy of texture on the painting or the frame. If we find anything we are unsure about, we write it on our sheet and report it immediately, and someone from Restoration will come examine the piece. After a little time of doing this every day with the paintings, this intimate encounter at the beginning and end of each shift, you start to realize what a privilege it is.

You'll find your eyes continue to find something new. Something--- you didn't see before. And that's an interesting phenomenon, no?—how you can look at a piece a million times and suddenly see... It's mysterious. Because of course the painting is exactly the same, it's *you* that's different.

It's happening even now. Even now you are no longer the same. You know? Even now-- you are changing.

*(A beat between them. Then HENRY suddenly whips an Officers' Inspection Report of Objects sheet for the morning prechecks out of his pocket.)*

So! This is the Officer's Inspection Report of Objects! Wheee! Pretty self-explanatory-- just fill in the top section, date, gallery number, this is room thirty-nine... Uh huh right there... Uh huh. You see they list the different items that might be in the room—paintings and works on paper get tallied together, sculpture, furniture, etc. So first just count and we'll go from there.

DODGER

Okay.

*(DODGER counts the items in the room. HENRY looks at MADELINE and then at the Rembrandt, with a familiar smile.)*

DODGER

So the bust is a sculpture?

HENRY

Correct.

DODGER

And the sketches?

HENRY

Works on paper, up there with the paintings.

DODGER

Okay. We've got thirteen paintings and works on paper, one sculpture, one piece of furniture (Do I count the bench?)...

HENRY

No, but you do check the ceiling for any leaks.

DODGER

Okay. Done.

HENRY

You're a natural! Now. Something you'll hear an awful lot about, at team meetings and such, is protection. You see, we're not just here to protect the Art, we are here to protect the Space *Around* the Art.

DODGER

The Space Around the Art.

HENRY

Correct. We have an estimated four million visitors per year, in peak season that's roughly eight to nine thousand visitors per day, and it is our job to ensure that the Art (and the Space Around the Art) is safe. So that is why we rotate every twenty minutes. The idea being that by keeping a shifting façade--

DODGER

Do the guards ever move up?

HENRY

---Sorry?

DODGER

Like, do the museum guards ever rise in the ranks so they can affect policy?

HENRY

What an interesting question. Uhh not that I know of. Though I've only been here since *Ancient Greece*, so perhaps before then. Who knows-- maybe you'll be the first! (*re: the prechecks sheet*) Alright I'm going to run this down to the office. It's your first shift! Don't be nervous-- It's a museum. Nothing happens.

*(HENRY leaves. MADELINE stands down front, facing the audience, looking at a large painting. Her hands are on her heart. She is rapt. DODGER stands at his post by the archway. Several moments pass...)*

DODGER

If you want to touch it I won't tell.

*(Beat.)*

MADLINE

What?

DODGER

You heard me.

*(She takes a beat, decides mental illness might be at play, or that she misheard, goes back to the painting.)*

DODGER

I'm serious.

*(She looks at him.)*

You can touch it.

Touch it.

Touch the Art.

*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*

I won't tell.

You know you want to.

Go on.

Touch it.

Touch the Art.

Quick.

I can't protect you long.

Go on.

This is your moment.

Touch the Art.

Touch it.

Become part of its history.

Go on.

Touch it.

Touch it.

Touch it.

Touch—

MADLINE (*shaming him, very firm*)

Stop. Stop that. I'm not going to touch the Art.

*(She feels a little bad.)*

Thank you anyway.

*(A beat. She tries to go back to enjoying the painting.*

*Even puts her hands back on her heart.*

*She almost succeeds, but then--)*

DODGER

I understand.

You don't feel worthy.

It's the Art.

You're in the Space Around the Art.

You're under the spell!—

I get it.

It's cool.

I think you'll regret it.

Later.

In the bathtub.

You'll think Dammit.

I should've touched the Art.

Just saying.

MADLINE

I'm not going to touch the Art. What's wrong with you?

DODGER

What's wrong with me? What's wrong with *you*? That's the question. You get a perfectly good opportunity to touch the Art and you blow it? Do you realize what I'm risking for you?

I see you, your hands on your heart, and I think there, there is a person who would appreciate an opportunity to touch the Art. So I take that risk, I make that leap, and you shame me? Shame on *you*, that's what I say.

MADELINE

Are you mentally ill? I'm serious, do you have a diagnosis? Because later tonight "in the bathtub" (whatever THAT MEANS) I will NOT feel bad for not touching the Art, but I WILL feel bad for bawling out a developmentally challenged bipolar who had a bad day with his meds, you know what I'm saying?

DODGER *(a little cowed)*

My mother was bipolar.

MADELINE

Don't tell people to touch the Art. Are you going to tell people to touch the Art? Don't do that. Are you going to do that?

DODGER

No.

MADELINE

Don't lie to me.

DODGER

I'm not. You just seem like someone who deeply loves Art—

MADELINE

I do, I do deeply love Art

DODGER

Okay, and I think it would be good to bring Art and people together, not further apart, break down the divide so that people won't feel—so—alienated.

MADELINE

That "divide" as you call it is not there to make people feel alienated it's there to protect the Art from the grimey shit on our fingers, like chicken grease, which yes maybe I just had because maybe I've been a feeling a little sad and unmoored lately and I thought fried chicken would help, because I used to have it a lot as a child, which is not the point, the point is that we don't touch the Art because it will HARM the Art, and then NO ONE will be able to become "a part of the Art's history" because the Art will be RUINED.

DODGER

(I never thought of it that way.)

MADELINE

How did you get this job?

DODGER

Please don't report me. I wanna rise up the chain of command so I can affect change.

MADELINE

Well you're off to a bad start.

*(MADELINE stares back at the painting, suddenly consumed with the idea of touching it.)*

Have you ever touched the Art?

DODGER

*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*

No. I haven't, I swear to God, I haven't. I just want to. I just want someone who seems worthy to do it so that I can, I don't know...

MADELINE

And I would be worthy why?

DODGER

I don't know-- because you had your hands on your heart and you're so pretty. Please don't report me.

I'm not mentally ill.

I'm artistic.

*(Beat.)*

MADELINE

Alright I'm not going to report you. DON'T do that again. No one should touch the Art, do you understand? Unless they are trained professionals. Okay? Okay?

DODGER

Okay.

MADELINE

Okay.

*(Beat.)*

And thank you.

*(Beat.)*

For saying I was pretty.

*(Beat.)*

DODGER

You're welcome.

*(Long beat. She stares forward, unable to stop thinking about touching the painting. What that would mean. And why that feels so connected to her hands on her heart. MADELINE stands lost in thought for a moment, looking down, brow furrowed. DODGER watches.)*

DODGER

Are you okay?

MADELINE

Stop watching me.

DODGER

Sorry.

MADELINE

Don't you have something else to do?

DODGER

No. ... You look -- *peaked*.



MADELINE  
Stop watching me.

DODGER  
I have to watch you it's my job.

MADELINE  
Well stop.

DODGER  
Sorry.

MADELINE  
*Peaked?*

DODGER  
... Sorry.

*(She continues to stand there in front of the painting, facing the audience. She seems unable to move—to sit back down and paint—or to cry—or to make a friend—all of which would probably help her.)*

MADELINE  
There's nothing wrong with rules.

DODGER  
Did you really just say that?

MADELINE  
What? There's not.

DODGER  
Of course there is.

MADELINE  
No there's not.

DODGER  
Rules SUCK.

MADELINE  
*Rules SUCK?* What, did you like read that on a t-shirt?

DODGER  
Don't tell me you think rules are *good*?

MADELINE  
Of course I do. Rules tell you how to live, what's wrong with that?

DODGER  
Rules don't tell you how to live, *morals* tell you that. And you already know how to live. You're here communicating with Art. You're ahead of most of the world.

MADELINE  
*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*

You're the weirdest person I have ever met.

DODGER  
Thank you.

MADLINE  
It wasn't... a... compl---...

*(She get a wave of lightheadedness.)*

DODGER  
Are you okay?

MADLINE  
... No—I need—to just—I'm---

*(She sits down right where she is, right in front of the painting, down center. DODGER comes to her.)*

DODGER  
Okay okay just sit right there. Sit right there. Yeah you look—you're still very pretty but you do look a little-- sweaty—like your eyes are watery and your pupils are dilated.

MADLINE  
I need to just. Sit. For a moment.

DODGER  
Okay. Uh. Do you want me to go get you some water?

MADLINE  
No.

*(He looks around for a moment. No one is around.)*

DODGER  
Should I go call someone?

MADLINE  
I have some water in my bag.

*(He gets it out and hands it to her. She takes a sip. He crouches next to her.)*

DODGER  
Is that better?

*(She nods. A quiet beat. Her eyes are closed.)*

MADLINE  
Will you just hold my hand? For a moment?

DODGER  
... Sure. Yes.

*(He takes her hand. They stay like that for a moment.)*

MADELINE

Do you ever feel... like your whole life is ahead of you... and you're not sure...

DODGER

... You're not sure what?

MADELINE (*searching*)

I don't know-- you're not sure... *why*.

*(They sit for another moment.)*

DODGER

What's your name?

MADELINE

Madeline.

DODGER

Madeline. I'm Dodger. (*He gives her hand a little bob up and down.*) Nice to meet you.

*(HENRY re-enters.)*

HENRY

Oh dear.

DODGER

Sorry. She got—she felt—

MADELINE

I felt dizzy for a moment—it's nothing really—I can get up now.

DODGER

You sure?

HENRY

No no, just stay here for a moment. Dodger we have to file a report. (Forgive me madam I'm going to use this as a teaching moment--) We can't let her get up and walk around until she's cleared.

MADELINE

No really I'm totally fine now.

DODGER

She seems totally fine now.

HENRY

I'm sorry my lady I have to ask you to rest here for me. (*To DODGER*) What if she gets up and staggers around and knocks over the sculpture over there? This is the protocol. Go notify Jonny.

*(DODGER reluctantly lets go of MADELINE's hand. He exits. HENRY and MADELINE sit quietly for a moment.)*

HENRY

Thanks for your patience.

HENRY

This won't take very long, we'll have you back up to your work in no time. *(Beat.)* So how long have you been a painter?

MADELINE

Uhhhhh about a week?

HENRY

Oh. A novice.

MADELINE

Yeah. What's that quote? *If you're sad, the best thing to do is learn something...?* My grandmother and I used to come here when I was little, before her MS got really bad... So I found this painting class. I'm terrible at it, but I like it. It's soothing or something.

HENRY

It was Merlin.

MADELINE

I'm sorry?

HENRY

Merlin said that. T.H. White I believe, *The Once And Future King*: "The best thing for being sad... is to learn something... You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love—" *(He pauses, as if he just swallowed something that hurts)* --- "There is only one thing for it then — to learn."

MADELINE

Yes. While my grandmother was dying I read to her. That passage stayed with me.

HENRY

You must have spent a lot of time with her.

MADELINE

She took care of me. Well, the last few years I took care of her.

HENRY

You're very young to have been a caretaker.

MADELINE

I guess so, but... She was my Person. She died. Just last week actually. *(She touches a small ring on her finger.)* She left me this ring.

*(HENRY takes her in.)*

HENRY

You know, there are three types of people who come to the museum.

The most obvious are the tourists. Kind folk who feel they should see that famous Van Gogh or Monet, so they zoom through the rooms to find them, and then look around a bit forlornly before they wander out again into this strange thing we call a city.

Then there are the old white haired ladies (and their dutiful husbands) who have been coming to the museum for years. You know who I mean-- this brave, blessed generation of men and women who go to the theatre, who buy memberships, who understand what it means to participate in the cultural institutions of our country-- and who are frankly keeping those institutions alive. And who themselves will soon die, leaving the rest of us to CATCH ON.

And finally there are the Seekers. Souls on the verge of an *Understanding*. They look at each painting, at each sculpture, like it's going to reveal exactly what they need. As if any moment it's going to look back at them and say... "*I know you*"...

*(She nods. Something between them. Then she rubs her leg, her brow furrowed.)*

HENRY

Are you alright?

MADELINE

My leg is tingling. This has been happening all week-- I keep—having symptoms of MS—I can't tell if they're just—psychosomatic or—I get dizzy, a tingling in my legs...

*(She starts to panic a bit, rubbing her leg.)*

MADELINE

I need to get up. I need—please I need to move my legs.

HENRY

I'm sorry, I uh---

MADELINE

Please. I can lean on you, I just have to get up right now, my leg needs blood, I need to get up. I need to get up right now.

HENRY

Alright. Alright. Let's...

*(He helps her stand. He steadies her as she moves her legs tentatively, getting feeling back into them.)*

HENRY

How is that, is that better?

MADELINE *(trying to calm down, or not bawl)*

A little. Sorry. I don't really know what to do with myself...

*(A beat as HENRY figures out how to help/distract her.)*

HENRY *(looking at up at the Rembrandt before them)*

It's a wonderful painting you're working on, *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer*.

MADELINE *(still recovering a bit)*

Yeah.

HENRY

There are so many rich details that make it unique, don't you think? Like the hands.

MADELINE

What about the hands?

HENRY

Oh have you not noticed?—the hands are different sizes! Look at that front hand—it’s abnormally large, while the other hand is quite small.

MADELINE

Wow. I’ve never noticed that.

HENRY

I don’t particularly know what to make of it, but I love it.

MADELINE (*appreciatively*)

Huh. And look at that little ring. It’s just *glows*.

HENRY

Did you choose this painting? For your class?

MADELINE

Yeah. My grandmother was the second type you mentioned-- the old ladies who support culture?—

HENRY

Ah yes. God bless her!

MADELINE

Yeah, right?— So it just seemed right to do a classic.

HENRY

Well you picked a good one. Rembrandt was at the height of his powers when he painted it. It was commissioned by a rich Italian named Ruffo, and all we know is that he requested “a philosopher”.

MADELINE

Why did he pick Aristotle?

HENRY

It’s debated whether he did! There’s some pretty good scholarship out there that asserts it was actually Apelles, the ancient painter. Do you notice anything funny about his clothing?

MADELINE

His clothing... Oh!—it’s not historically accurate. He’s not dressed like an Ancient Greek or whatever.

HENRY

Yes you’re very clever! It’s true—Rembrandt put Aristotle (or Apelles) in clothing of his own time. Apparently *historical accuracy* is a relatively modern notion!

MADELINE

I love the way he is touching the head of Homer... As if he’s trying to connect to the past, find something he can *hold on to*...

HENRY

Mmmm I like that. And see the way his other hand is touching the chain he wears? That refers to the Golden Chain of Being-- from Homer's *The Iliad*-- the Chain that connects the earth to the heavens. Wonderful poet, Homer. *(Beat.)* How's your leg feeling?

MADELINE

It's better. Thank you.

*(Suddenly there is "ding" from HENRY's pocket. He pulls out his cell phone.)*

HENRY

I'm so sorry.

MADELINE

That's okay—

HENRY

We're not supposed to—but my partner is-- *Not Well.*

*(He reads the text. Doesn't respond.)*

MADELINE

Is everything okay?

HENRY

Hm? Oh, just a grocery request. No one's dead. At least not yet. (Ha ha.)

MADELINE

What's your partner's name?

HENRY

Simon. Simon Noth (speaking of wonderful poets).

MADELINE

Oooh a poet. I'd love to marry a poet. Or at least sleep with one.

HENRY

Oh they're terribly dashing as a breed, aren't they? Shall we walk you a bit? Would that help your leg?

*(They walk in a loop around the room, her on his arm.)*

MADELINE

You met in school?

HENRY

Oh no, he was fifteen years older than me, although we were in a school (technically). He was giving a reading at the school where I taught, and I was *very* young, mind you, I'd never been in love, and I saw him read his work and he was-- lit from within or something-- I just wanted to touch him.

MADELINE

An older man. I'd also like to sleep with one of those.

HENRY *(re: her long list of people to sleep with)*

My lady you have much work to do!

MADELINE

Yeah, I guess I really do!

HENRY

Oh nonsense you have plenty of time. But I have to tell you, after our first date I thought, *Oh don't love someone so much older. He'll die before you; you'll have to watch him-- decay...* But—what can you do?... *(Small beat)* Sorry I'm being macabre. Yes hang out at poetry readings! Great way to meet a-- what do the youth say now?-- a "Hottie!" Great way to meet a "Hottie".

MADELINE

My grandmother always said, Whatever blows your skirt.

HENRY

Oh my!

MADELINE *(laughing with him)*

Oh yeah!-- and she knew how to blow her skirt, believe me. She said Madeline, you'll find most of the time the *braver* choice is the *better* choice. She was deeply cool.

*(They've arrived back in front of the painting, which she now considers in a new way. DODGER re-enters with JONNY.)*

JONNY

How are we doing here?

HENRY

Much better it seems.

JONNY

Ma'am are you sure you should be standing?

MADELINE

Yeah. I just felt light-headed.

JONNY

I can call an ambulance for you if you'd like.

MADELINE

No, seriously--

DODGER

Maybe a little orange juice? It's vitamin D fortified.

MADELINE

--?—No. No orange juice, I'm really fine.

JONNY

Okay I'm going to get the paperwork for you to sign saying you declined the ambulance.

*(JONNY leaves.)*

MADELINE

Jesus.



HENRY

It's the era of lawsuits.

DODGER (*gentle, to Madeline*)

How are you?

MADELINE

Better. Much better.

HENRY (*noticing their connection*)

Dodger, what's your station in life?

DODGER

Uhhh. I'm a street artist.

HENRY

What do you mean?

DODGER

Depends on who you ask. If you ask the Establishment I vandalize public buildings.

HENRY

If we ask you—

DODGER

Then I create art right on the very walls of public life. Not separate, but right on the side of your bank. Your train. Your favorite deli.

MADELINE

So, in the Rembrandt, who do you think that is-- Aristotle or Apelles?

DODGER

Oh Apelles.

HENRY

Interesting!

MADELINE

Why?

DODGER

Rembrandt was saying artists are the real philosophers. We're the ones really studying and communicating the human condition. Poor sonofabitch.

MADELINE

Rembrandt?

DODGER

Oh yeah. Lost everything. His money, his fame, his family. But here he is.

*(A thoughtful pause between all of them.)*

MADELINE

What is it about museums? They just make it better somehow.

DODGER

Do you think? I think they make people feel more alone, more separate.

MADLINE

But that's why they make it better. The aloneness is the truth.

DODGER

The aloneness is the truth. Rules tell you how to live. Listen to you!

MADLINE

Listen to *me*? Listen to *you*! Museums make people feel more separate? You're a MUSEUM GUARD. You WORK in a MUSEUM!

DODGER

It's my first day.

MADLINE

Somehow I'm sensing it's not gonna work out.

DODGER

Not with *that* attitude it's not.

MADLINE

*Not with that attitude?* You are so annoying.

DODGER

Thank you.

MADLINE

It's NOT A COMP---

HENRY

Can I say something?

*(They had forgotten about him.)*

MADLINE/DODGER

What?

HENRY

You two should go on a date.

*(Beat.)*

MADLINE/DODGER

What??

HENRY

A date. You should go on a date.

Just do it.

Go on a date.

You're the same age!

You're both lovely!

You seem to—um— ENGAGE one another—

Go on a date!

*(They look at him like he's crazy)*

Listen:  
She's grieving.  
He can pull off a Mohawk.  
It's a match!

*(That makes no sense. Another "ding" from his pocket.)*

HENRY  
Excuse me. Dispatch from the House of Death.

DODGER  
House of Death?

HENRY  
That's our nickname for our apartment.

*(He reads the text. Doesn't respond.)*

MADLINE  
Henry's partner is dying.

DODGER  
Really?

HENRY *(putting his phone away)*  
Uhhhhh. Yes.

DODGER  
I'm sorry to hear that.

HENRY  
Well. I mean we're *all* dying, in one way or another. Some of us are just doing it a little faster than others.

*(Beat. HENRY escapes by looking closer at the painting.)*

HENRY  
Look at that chain. Did Rembrandt really intend for it to be Homer's Golden Chain of Being? Or did he paint it just because it was fun to paint?? I mean look at the thick, voluptuous paint. It's very bold. It *shimmers*. Makes you just want to ... touch it.

*(MADLINE and DODGER make eye contact.)*

MADLINE  
Maybe you should.

*(Beat.)*

HENRY  
What?

MADELINE

Maybe you should touch it.

*(HENRY nods, not sure if he misheard or mental illness might be at play, tries to go back to the painting, but then--)*

HENRY

What??

MADELINE

Maybe you should touch the painting.  
Maybe you should touch the Golden Chain of Being.

HENRY

*Maybe I should touch the painting?*

MADELINE

Yeah.

HENRY

Have you lost your mind?

MADELINE

Yeah.

DODGER

I'm with her. I think you should touch the painting.

*(Beat. HENRY's brain just won't compute.)*

HENRY

What?

DODGER

Touch it.

MADELINE

Touch the painting.

DODGER

Touch it.

MADELINE

Touch the painting.

DODGER

Touch it.

MADELINE

You're worthy.

DODGER

You really are.

MADELINE

*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*

You're the most worthy human being in this room.

DODGER  
Well.

MADELINE  
What?

DODGER  
You're worthy too.

MADELINE  
No I'm not.

DODGER  
Yes you are.

MADELINE  
I'm really not.

DODGER  
You're wrong.

MADELINE  
I wanted my grandmother to die. Believe me I'm not worthy.

DODGER  
What do you mean?

MADELINE  
Like I stood at her bed and I said *Please just go*.

DODGER  
Everyone wants their grandmother to die.

MADELINE  
What??

DODGER  
Grandparents are scary. Right?? Eventually?? Not when you're little, not before you understand that Death is going to devour everything you love. But then you start to understand these things and you watch your grandparent get older and lose their dignity and who wouldn't want that to end? It's a major buzz kill.

MADELINE  
You're not helping.

DODGER (*back to Henry*)  
You should touch the Art.

MADELINE  
You should.

DODGER  
And so should you.

*(Beat. HENRY looks back at the painting, like it's suddenly calling to him. It has never occurred to him that he could touch the art.)*

HENRY  
Touch the Art...

*(Something opens inside him.)*

*JONNY re-enters with the forms.)*

JONNY  
Okay buckarooneys. Here's a form for you, and a form for y---.

*(He stops, sensing he's interrupting something large.)*

What's goin' on?

*(Beat.)*

HENRY *(still with the painting)*  
Grief is  
mysterious.  
It's-- the sunlight.  
Or certain street corners.  
A sudden sense that you're dreaming.  
Like you misplaced something of immense value and have no idea where.  
Or how.  
Grief is  
A profound sense of failure.  
Terrible terrible failure.

MADELINE *(recognizing it for herself)*  
Failure...

HENRY  
It's so hard... To love someone.  
Because inevitably it's not going to be enough. Or work.  
Eventually they're going to---  
*(he makes a gesture that mirrors the Golden Chain in the painting)*  
Ascend their own Golden Chain  
and there's nothing you can do.  
Except hope that you helped them, somehow.  
And live with the fact that you couldn't.

*(Beat.)*

JONNY  
Well now I'm depressed.

HENRY  
So am I.  
...  
Which is why I'm going to touch the Art.

MADELINE (*gasps*)  
!

JONNY  
Wait, what?

HENRY  
Jonny we're going to touch the Rembrandt. You should join us.

JONNY  
Are you joking?

HENRY  
No.

DODGER  
Let's do this.

*(MADELINE and DODGER and HENRY prepare.)*

JONNY  
Wait guys guys what's goin' on?

MADELINE  
How should we do this? Like a three count?

JONNY  
What's happening?

HENRY  
I love that.

JONNY  
Guys GUYS come on, let's just--

HENRY (*totally unfazed*)  
I say we only touch a specific spot, reduce the impact.

JONNY  
Step back.

MADELINE  
I'll touch the ring.

JONNY  
Come on.

HENRY  
I'll touch the chain.

DODGER  
Alright. Homer's hair.

*(JONNY suddenly draws his gun.)*

JONNY  
GUYS. GUYS. STEP AWAY FROM THE PAINTING.

*(They stop and look at him, but don't move. JONNY stands there with his gun, very uncomfortable.)*

Goddammit this is the worst day ever!  
 I just drew my gun on my friend!  
 Because he's lost his mind with GRIEF!  
 And said all this depressing shit that I'm never going to forget.  
 And now I have to go home and ask Twyla if I've remotely helped her up her Golden Chain.  
 Fuck me!

MADELINE (*to Henry*)  
 Thank you for saying all that. I feel—better.

JONNY  
 This is really awkward right now.  
 Henry we've been friends a long time-- don't make me tackle you.

HENRY  
 I'm sorry Jonny.

MADELINE  
 You only live once, right?

DODGER  
 We do realize this won't change anything. We're still going to be... whatever we are.

JONNY  
 Guys.

MADELINE  
 But maybe not. Maybe something-- will *get in*.

HENRY  
 Let's do this.

DODGER (*in response to "Something will get in"*)  
 What?

HENRY  
 One.

DODGER  
 What will get in?

JONNY  
 Guys!

HENRY  
 Two.

MADELINE (*twinkling with the mystery, the potential*)  
 I don't know.

HENRY  
 Three.

(HENRY, MADELINE and DODGER reach out to touch the art.)



*Blackout.*  
*End of scene.)*

## RED

*(Lights up to reveal a large, spacious room in a luxurious home in Amsterdam. The year is 1653. The Rembrandt paintings that were on the wall in the museum are now resting on the ground, covered in sheets. The walls are now a deep red. The bust of Homer is still in the corner.*

*Rembrandt van Rijn is getting ready to paint. He has had too much wine. He holds a letter from Ruffo, his patron.)*

REMBRANDT *(reading Ruffo's letter)*

*A philosopher?* Oh he's got to be joking.

*(as Ruffo)* Dear Rembrandt-- Paint me a *philosopher*.

*(as himself)* Dear Ruffo— No. *(mutter)* (Jackass.)

And then he'll write me back--

*(as Ruffo)* Dear Rembrandt—Why not?

*(as himself)* And I'll say, Dear Ruffo—Because you're a greasy headed PUTZ.

*A philosopher* is someone who appreciates the dark edges of humanity.

And *you* sir, make BISCUITS. You're a BISCUIT GUY.

What kind of asshole has a family fortune in BISCUITS?

And he'll say-- *(ala Ruffo)* Me. *(an impotent Ruffo laugh)* Hehe hehe hehe.

*(Rembrandt as himself)* (I bet that's how he laughs: *Hehe hehe hehe.*)

*(back as Ruffo)* Dear Rembrandt—I am paying you five hundred florins to paint me a *philosopher*.

*(as himself)* Dear Ruffo—I don't give a pigeon's pecker. *Hehe hehe hehe!*

*(Suddenly passionate, furious)*

*A philosopher*

investigates their own face

over and over again,

searching for the bare, miserable, elemental TRUTH.

*A philosopher*

reveals not what you WANT,

but what you ARE.

You wouldn't know a *PHILOSOPHER*

If he SHAT on your FACE!

Actually don't mind if I do.

*(Rembrandt plops the canvas on the floor and squats to take a shit. HENNY enters on REMBRANDT, mid-squat. She's brought bread.)*

HENNY *(unfazed, also unamused)*

What are you doing?

*(Beat.)*

REMBRANDT *(caught)*  
Prepping the canvas.

HENNY  
Is this a new technique?

REMBRANDT *(still squatting)*  
Yes.

HENNY  
And who might this new technique be for?

REMBRANDT  
Antonio Ruffo. The Biscuit Guy.

HENNY  
Sounds benign.

REMBRANDT  
Don't be fooled. Putzes like him will destroy us all.

HENNY  
He's employing *you*, so he can't be that bad.

REMBRANDT  
Well.

HENNY  
What does he want, this putz?

REMBRANDT  
*A philosopher.*

HENNY  
Not bad.

REMBRANDT *(loud fart sound)*  
Pffffff

*(Beat.)*

HENNY  
My love.

REMBRANDT  
What?

HENNY  
Get up.

*(Beat.)*

REMBRANDT

*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*

I can't.

*(Beat.)*

HENNY  
Why not?

*(Beat.)*

REMBRANDT  
I'm stuck.

*(She goes to him.)*

I hate getting old!

HENNY  
You're not getting old.

REMBRANDT  
Yes I am that's why they hate me.

HENNY  
Who?

REMBRANDT  
The annals of my fickle public.

HENNY *(restoring his pants)*  
Annals? Don't say annals my love. Your public loves you.

REMBRANDT  
But eventually they WON'T love me and I'll be bankrupt and destitute, with little gray patches on my sleeves, the cries of my dead children clanging in my head like hungry coins in in in tiny metal cups.

*(Both struck with the sudden darkness of this image.)*

HENNY  
Why do you drink in the morning my love?

REMBRANDT  
(I know)

HENNY  
It makes you so maudlin.

REMBRANDT  
I knooooooooowwwwww.

HENNY  
When I hear you doing voices in here I know you need some bread.

REMBRANDT *(taking her hand.)*

And so you brought some.

HENNY

And so I brought some. Shall I sit for you?

REMBRANDT

I'm not painting a woman.

HENNY (*starting to undo her blouse*)

That's never mattered before. You need company.

REMBRANDT

No no let me work. There's a certain Italian putz that needs a painting. I hate him.

HENNY

You don't.

REMBRANDT

I do.

HENNY

You hate needing him. It's not the same thing.

REMBRANDT

Yes it is.

HENNY

Do you have an idea?

REMBRANDT

Oh whatever-- it's always me in the end. It's like a curse. With the lace, the fur, I can get away, crack into something *beautiful*—and then I get to the face and there I am—mucous-y eyes, thirsty lips, worried brow. Me. Every time. And eventually they'll see it. The *Fashion* will see it and I'll be ruined.

(*HENNY has been listening, like a good friend.  
She perhaps has also been tidying, like a good partner.*)

HENNY

How much is the commission?

REMBRANDT

Five hundred florins.

HENNY

Very good.

REMBRANDT

Says you.

HENNY

Yes says me. Says the *annal* of your fickle *pubic*.

REMBRANDT (*an old joke between them*)

Oh Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha.

HENNY  
Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha.

REMBRANDT (*she made him laugh*)  
You're charming

HENNY  
And you're grumpy

REMBRANDT  
Well bring your annal over here and improve my mood.

HENNY  
I'll do no such thing, leave my annal out of it. Eat your bread. I checked your pigment last night—your fine on red and ochre, but you needed charcoal, so I sent Titus.

REMBRANDT  
Well we know how Titus loves a good *errand*.

HENNY  
Be nice to poor Titus, he's had a very bad morning.

REMBRANDT  
And why's that?

HENNY  
A package arrived.

REMBRANDT  
So what?

HENNY  
So you promised Titus no more packages for a while.

REMBRANDT  
Oh god. That's a present for you, you know.

HENNY  
I don't need any presents.

REMBRANDT  
Don't say that, I love giving you presents.

HENNY  
My love the very fact that I will never again be someone's maid is all the present I shall ever need.

REMBRANDT  
Did you hate being my maid?

HENNY  
Well obviously being *your* maid had its perks, but I'd been many many maids before I was yours and yes I hated it. You saved me.

REMBRANDT (*dead serious*)  
No no. It was you who saved me.

(*She touches his face.*)

HENNY

Nothing will save you from Titus so you'd better eat some bread. I'll have tea for you in a little while when you hit your slump.

REMBRANDT

My slump. What slump?

HENNY

You know, when you come into the kitchen and pick things up and put them down.

REMBRANDT

What??

HENNY

Every day at about noon. And tea always helps.

REMBRANDT

My Henny. What would I do without you?

HENNY

Stay drunk and run out of pigment. I leave you to it.

*(She starts to go.)*

REMBRANDT *(stopping her, very serious)*

My love. I dreamt it again last night. I was on a dark ship, like some Odysseus. You were naked on the bow, shivering. There was a light on half my face, like here, and I could hear Titus crying in the dark...

HENNY

My love--

REMBRANDT

...and there was an angry god down in the water... And then you were gone.

HENNY *(warning)*

My love stop--

REMBRANDT

Everyone was gone—

HENNY *(with love, his face in her hands)*

Stop this. There is nothing to be afraid of. There is no dark ship. There is only you. And that canvas. Nothing more.

*(A beat. He nods.)*

REMBRANDT

A philosopher...

HENNY *(holding her breasts)*

Oof I'm going to wake the baby. My breasts are killing me.

REMBRANDT

Good God—the baby! I always forget we have one! What's her name again?

HENNY  
Cornelia.

REMBRANDT  
Cornelia, lovely that.

HENNY  
She's quite enchanting actually. And hopefully hungry.

REMBRANDT  
Bring her in here, I want to eat one of her fat legs.

*(The sound of the front door.)*

HENNY  
I will in a bit. I believe your other child just arrived home.

REMBRANDT *(back to his canvas)*  
Titus? Good, I need the charcoal.

HENNY  
Be nice to him. He worries about you.

REMBRANDT *(not really listening, working)*  
Mm.

*(She starts to go—he looks up)*

Henny.

*(She stops.)*

You're beautiful.

*(She smiles. Then leaves. He works. TITUS enters, very pissed.)*

TITUS  
You have got to stop.

REMBRANDT  
There you are. I need that charcoal.

TITUS  
How could you?

REMBRANDT  
How could I what?

TITUS  
You know what.

REMBRANDT  
I don't actually, the charcoal.

TITUS *(putting the charcoal on the table)*

How could you buy this damn POT?

*(REMBRANDT continues working.)*

REMBRANDT  
Pot what pot?

TITUS  
This Asian pot, this pot from Asia.

REMBRANDT  
Oh that

TITUS  
*(Oh that he says.)*

REMBRANDT  
That, my dear boy, is a *vase*.

TITUS  
*(A vase.)*

REMBRANDT  
An Asian *vase* and a very *elegant* one at that.

TITUS  
Elegant? I believe the “e” word you’re looking for is “expensive”.

REMBRANDT *(taking the vase from him, sets it aside)*  
Well of course it was *expensive*; beautiful things of quality usually are. (I make my living on this principle, lest we forget.)

TITUS  
It’s precisely your living that I’m talking about.

REMBRANDT  
Is it? I thought we were talking about a pot.

TITUS  
You can’t keep spending like this.

REMBRANDT  
Like what?

TITUS  
Like an emperor or something. You just bought this huge house in the most ridiculous part of town.

REMBRANDT  
Which you don’t seem to mind living in.

TITUS  
Of course I don’t mind living in it, it’s not the house I take *issue* with—

*(He has pronounced “issue” with the “ss” sound rather than “sh”)*



REMBRANDT

*“Issue?”* Is that how the youth are saying it nowadays?

TITUS (*ignoring him*)

It's the buying of the house and then proceeding to spend as if said house was not purchased!

REMBRANDT

*“Issue...”* It's like putting a moustache on a WIG.)

TITUS

You're always complaining about having to hound people to pay you, and yet you spend like you're on salary with the royal crown!

REMBRANDT

Titus you're your mother's son.

TITUS

And a lot of good it did *her*.

*(A stunned beat.)*

I'm sorry. I didn't mean that.

*(A pained silence.)*

I just want you to be more careful.

REMBRANDT

If it were up to you we'd live like monks.

TITUS

That's not true.

REMBRANDT (*suddenly furious*)

Yes it is. Titus the monk. Except I don't know what you pray to, Titus, what is your aim?

TITUS

You, you are my aim, you're what I pray to, do you know how that feels? Oh Rembrandt the genius and it's like yes but have you seen our bank book? I'm the child. Not you. It's not fair.

*(REMBRANDT studies him.)*

REMBRANDT

You're right, my boy.

TITUS

Oh god.

REMBRANDT

You are, you're quite right.

TITUS

Now you're humoring me.

REMBRANDT  
Humoring you?

TITUS  
Yes.

REMBRANDT  
What's the difference between humoring you and *agreeing* with you?

TITUS  
If you *agreed* with me you'd *change*.

REMBRANDT (*struck*)  
Jesus. I either need to get smarter or hope my family gets dumber.

TITUS (*softening slightly*)  
Maybe Cornelia will be dumb.

REMBRANDT  
You think?

TITUS  
I hope. Right now she's the only one I can boss.

REMBRANDT  
I know how you feel.

(*Still mad, but wanting to be close.*)

TITUS  
Can I sit on your lap?

REMBRANDT (*huh*)  
Of course you can.

(*TITUS sits on his father's lap.*)

TITUS  
You stink.

REMBRANDT  
Well I'm old. Part of the deal.

TITUS  
That if you're old you stink?

REMBRANDT  
Indeed.

TITUS  
But I'm young and I stink.

REMBRANDT  
You don't stink.

TITUS

How do you know? You're so old you can't smell.

REMBRANDT

I can too smell.

TITUS

What do I smell like?

REMBRANDT (*smelling his wonderful son*)

Like sweat and bad vegetables and hair. It's lovely.

TITUS

Henny says I stink.

REMBRANDT

What does she know?

TITUS

Everything.

REMBRANDT

It's true.

TITUS

Lucky us.

REMBRANDT (*chuckling*)

Lucky us.

TITUS

Do people think I'm Henny's son?

REMBRANDT

Why do you ask?

TITUS

Master Thomlin told her to mind her son when we were in the shop. Til he realized who we were and then he sucked up because he knew we would buy something.

REMBRANDT

Do you want to be Henny's son?

TITUS (*with a shrug*)

I like what I am.

REMBRANDT

And what's that?

TITUS

I'm like her helper that she hugs and tells they stink and then let's have warm apples with cinnamon.

REMBRANDT

Ah lovely. She's lovely, our Henny.

TITUS

Am I crushing your leg?

REMBRANDT

A bit.

*(TITUS gets off his lap, sits down next to him. Softly.)*

TITUS

Do you think about mother?

REMBRANDT

Saskia? Of course. Every day.

TITUS

What do you think about?

*(A painful beat.)*

REMBRANDT

Mostly I think about the end... I wasn't very there for her. In the end.

TITUS

Where were you?

REMBRANDT *(far away, like a bad dream)*

Anywhere I could be. Anywhere but next to her gaunt, sad face.

*(They both remember her gaunt, sad face.)*

TITUS

Do you tell Henny you think of her?

REMBRANDT

Of course. Henny knows grief and love aren't mutually exclusive.

TITUS

What do you mean they aren't mutually exclusive?

REMBRANDT

They're opposites that can co-exist.

TITUS

Like that I stink but I'm lovely?

REMBRANDT

That's right. Or like light and dark.

TITUS

Or love and death.

REMBRANDT

Yes. Well done little monk.

*(TITUS has started mixing pigment for his father. They work together around the table. Throughout the following REMBRANDT begins to paint.)*

TITUS *(the bust of Homer)*  
Who's that?

REMBRANDT  
That's Homer. Great poet. He wrote *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

TITUS  
They were poems?

REMBRANDT  
More like stories. With speeches. *Lots* of speeches.

TITUS *(crinkling his nose at the bust)*  
He looks weird. Was he weird?

REMBRANDT  
Oh I imagine so. We don't really know. Kind of like now. No one really knows who anyone is.

TITUS  
I hate when you talk like this.

REMBRANDT  
It's true. We're all just standing in front of one another, perceiving the basic composition, but the real core of it, this human being in front us, is a mystery. Like a good painting.

TITUS  
I know you.

REMBRANDT  
Oh do you?

TITUS  
Yes.

REMBRANDT  
What do you know?

TITUS  
I know you like bacon.

REMBRANDT  
I do.

TITUS  
And it gives you diarrhea.

REMBRANDT  
It does.

TITUS

I know your cough in the morning sounds like the wheel at the mill getting stuck over and over again... And you hate rich people and you're ticklish under your arm pits and your favorite color is blue.

REMBRANDT

How do you know my favorite color is blue?

TITUS

You always want Henny to wear her blue dress.

REMBRANDT

There's a lot of reasons I want Henny to wear that dress.

TITUS

And you never paint with blue.

REMBRANDT

So what?

TITUS

So that's how I know it's your favorite.

REMBRANDT

You think it's my favorite because I *don't* paint with it.

TITUS

Yes.

*(Beat.)*

REMBRANDT

Does my cough wake you?

TITUS

Yes. I always hear your cough. Even when I'm at school I feel like I know exactly when you're coughing.

*(They both think about Titus thinking about his father's cough.)*

REMBRANDT *(struck, then redirecting)*

You can't paint with blue because it steals the show. These colors keep the person, the human being, focal—put blue on the canvas and suddenly we don't know where to look.

TITUS

Why?

REMBRANDT

Because blue is the color of divinity, the heavens. We don't need to see the heavens; we need to see *each other*.

TITUS

I told you it was your favorite.

REMBRANDT *(smiling, quietly satisfied with his wonderful son)*

...

TITUS (*re: the painting*)  
Who is this for by the way?

REMBRANDT  
This, my dear boy, is for a certain Italian penis. In Italy.

TITUS  
That's generally where Italian penises live.

REMBRANDT  
And may it stay that way.

TITUS  
It is going to be of Homer?

REMBRANDT (*that's an idea*)  
Homer—huh—I hadn't planned on it.

TITUS (*back to Homer*)  
He looks so old.

REMBRANDT  
He is old.

TITUS  
Older than you?

REMBRANDT  
Older than all the books you know.

TITUS  
Older than the Bible?

REMBRANDT  
Older than the Bible. When I was your age my father read him to me.

TITUS (*ala gruff Harmen, a joke between them*)  
Harmen van Rijn.

REMBRANDT (*chuckle, ala gruff Harmen*)  
Harmen van Rijn. Haven't they started Homer at your school? I'm going to read him with you tonight. And then someday you can read Homer to your son or daughter.

(*TITUS approaches the bust of Homer. Pats his head.*)

REMBRANDT (*a hint of his terrible dream.*)  
Met a very bad end, poor Homer. No family or friends. Disgraced.

TITUS  
Homer.

(*He suddenly sees TITUS' hand on Homer's head.*)

REMBRANDT

Look at your tiny hand. How strange.

TITUS

It's not tiny.

REMBRANDT

It is. Look at mine.

*(They compare hands)*

TITUS

Mine isn't tiny. Yours is just BIG. Your painting should have one of my hands and one of your hands.

REMBRANDT

Why's that?

TITUS

Then we'll be together. In the painting. Can I touch it?

REMBRANDT

The canvas? Sure why not.

*(TITUS goes to the canvas, gently touches his fingertips to it. He stays there touching it for a long time.)*

REMBRANDT

Titus? What's wrong?

TITUS *(still touching it)*

Someday you'll be gone and we'll only have your stupid paintings.

REMBRANDT

That's not true.

TITUS *(quietly)*

Yes it is.

REMBRANDT *(trying to make a joke)*

You'll have the Asian pot. *(more serious)* You'll have your memories.

TITUS

I don't want memories. If you're not here I can't sit on your lap. Or smell you in the kitchen. And if you keep buying stupid Asian pots we won't have any money for your cough and you'll die.

*(Ah. There it is. REMBRANDT stops working.)*

REMBRANDT

Ah. *(Beat.)* Oh my boy.

*(A moment of having no idea what to say. Gently--)*

I see it the other way.

I won't die someday because I buy the Asian pot.

*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*



I buy the Asian pot because someday I will die.  
 Money is the opposite of beauty.  
 And beauty is all we have.

TITUS

Well some of us don't care about beauty and would rather have YOU.

REMBRANDT

Alright. Alright Titus. No more Asian pots.

*(Beat.)*

TITUS *(quietly)*

You've said that before.

REMBRANDT

I have not.

TITUS

Yes you have. That's how I know you're humoring me.

*(A kind of despair comes over REMBRANDT. He puts his hand on TITUS' smelly head)*

REMBRANDT

My boy. Your old man is a very flawed creature.  
 You have to forgive him for it.

*(A beat.)*

Go on now, let me work.

*(TITUS leaves. REMBRANDT turns back to the work at hand.)*

A Philosopher...

*(Blackout.)*

## O C H R E

*(From the darkness--)*

HOMER

I don't want it written down!

*(Lights up to reveal the ochre wall of a large temple in Ancient Greece.*

*It is sunset.*

*The poet HOMER is ranting about poetry.)*

I keep saying over and over again—

*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*

Don't write the damn thing down!  
 That'll fuck it all up!  
 If it's written down someone can sit and read it *by themselves*,  
 And that's a terrible idea! Terrible!  
 They won't understand it.  
 Not unless it's in front of them in image.

*(He looks up and suddenly sees the audience.)*

Holy shit.

*(He stands there and adjusts to this new given, this large group looking at him from the dark... And then he decides to roll with it and continue his point.)*

Well why not...

Do you know what I'm saying?  
 They need to *hear it*- with their neighbor's smelly armpits and  
 their child's hiccups and some stranger's hair twisted up off their neck from the hot sun.  
 It needs to wash over them in the air— through their ears, around their thoughts...  
 You need to be able to zone out on the boring bits.  
*The Iliad* is a long goddamn poem!  
 I should know, I wrote it, and believe me not all of it is COMPELLING—  
 So let them think about the evening meal  
 or what it was like to touch their first breast  
 and they can't do that if it's written down, if it's written down  
 they have to READ every word,  
 IT'S A TERRIBLE IDEA.  
 I may be old and useless but I know a few things about poetry  
 and it's meant to be HEARD.

*(Calming himself, still eyeing the audience warily.)*

Alright squirrel slow yourself. Steady. Steady now.

*(chuckles to himself)*

Squirrel.  
 That's what my wife called me you know.  
 Livia.  
 Ooooh she was a POX.  
 But I adored her by the end.

It takes a long time for people to learn to live together. And some people never do, I've seen that. But if you can get through all the awful stuff, being separate people and all that, domesticity can really work. Once you've done the procreation bit and you can just let yourselves be the siblings you are—siblings with a sordid past, if you will—you can just sleep with whomever you please and enjoy a nice meal together at the end of the day. It's a boon.

I always found it quite interesting actually, who she'd take for lovers.  
 I remember when she took up with Hiram, the baker.  
 Oh he's terribly plain, terribly dull, I never would've thought.  
 But I saw them one day, he was wrapping her bread, *literally*,  
 and there was something in the way she took it from him, smiling,  
 that I knew he was wrapping her bread *metaphorically*...

and that fascinated me!  
 I spent the next few weeks watching him...  
 It was a bit weird of me, I admit, but I wanted to *know!*  
 I was *curious*, you see?  
 I was curious about him, but really I was curious about HER.  
 Why she liked this plain little baker with his paunch and bald head.  
 People cross paths at particular moments in their lives and it's a fascinating thing—ten  
 years ago you'd have never dreamt it and then something about the thing they are and the  
 thing you need... I watched the way he worked the dough in his shop, the pale thick yeasty-  
 smelling flesh, and I thought... (*like he can sense the appeal*) *Huh.*

It's such a shame really—that by the time you're able to really see another human being, not  
 as you know them, not as they pertain to you, but just as they are—which of course is an  
 unknowable thing, a mystery—your life is basically over. It's like it's all about to get a lot  
 more interesting, and POOF. You're out.

(*Suddenly very earnest, to the audience.*)

I want to put my hand on your head.  
 Lay my images before your brain through the soft furry mess of your hair.

(*Trying out a poem—Maybe playing a lyre*)

Bring your eyes to mine.  
 Let's start the climb—up the Chain  
 link by link—  
 scene by scene—  
 Til we can feel the gods.  
 Til we ARE the gods.

(*Beat. He makes a face.*)

Meh.

I like the idea though.  
 Climbing the Chain.

A good poem should make you look down and suddenly see yourself  
 Your fragile, freckled hands and toenails.  
 Your puckered rear.

(*Maybe he plucks the lyre again, gently, unconsciously*)

I was by the river the other morning  
 And there was a large heron in the stream.  
 Slender, like a reed of light and mist  
 I watched it glide from one leg to the other for a few minutes—  
 When suddenly it turned and saw me—  
 I saw that we could see each other—and I thought—That—  
 That—is what it is to be *Alive!*

We have no idea what the other is thinking, what's it's like to be them...  
 We barely perceive what it is to be *ourselves!*  
 We are constantly encountering wild animals!  
 I'm a wild animal called Homer!

This temple belongs to a wild animal called Jove!  
 And you're a—well I don't know, what are you??—  
 See, it's happening even now!...

*(He acts this out a bit, like he's the heron, the audience is him)*

You and I are in a great stream, gliding from one leg to another,  
 We sense another is there,  
 and so we turn and see...

You know madness isn't so bad.  
 One day you're ranting about poetry and then you look up and there's a legion of – what?—  
 mysterious creatures looking back at you and you think,  
*Well alright!*

Maybe that's what this whole business is about-- Art.  
 It's practice for the Real Thing.  
 If we can bear to listen to a poem, or a whatever,  
 we just might stand a chance of seeing another person...

*(Suddenly frustrated, or filled with despair.)*

Or-- I don't know.  
 I shit in a pot!  
 Can you believe it?  
 Shit? In a *pot*? It makes no sense.  
 But this will never change!  
 From now til eternity man will shit in a pot!  
 Death will await each of us.  
 Stop now—think—you're going to die, and you have no idea *HOW!*  
 It's a mystery that floats ahead of us all our lives.  
*How will you die?*  
 Your mouth full of blood, your organs gasping?  
 Your legs crushed, the infection set in and unstoppable?  
 A broken heart?  
 Old age?  
 Drowning as your child waves to you from shore...?  
 Or a chicken bone—like a sharp exclamation point  
 stuck in your pink throat...

I don't mind it really.  
 Death.  
 I don't want to *suffer*. I don't want boils on my flesh  
 or to fall into a ditch and break my leg and die ripped apart by buzzards.  
 But the dying itself bit?-- I'm good with that.  
 I try to look at it positively.  
 There are so many things I'm finally going to get to FIND OUT.  
 For example—  
 What on earth did Livia see in that Hiram?  
 I'm going to ASK HER.  
 (I'm also going to make love to her good and proper, rather than the drab routine I did the  
 last two hundred times or so she indulged me.)  
 I'm going to kiss her more.  
 Ooooh that'll shock her!—she'll swat my arm and tell me to go jump in the river (that's what  
 she did when I was cheeky, which was always).

I'm going to see the Heavens.  
 See what's really going on in all that blue up there...  
 What a god really looks like.

*(He looks back at the audience. Sudden struck by a possibility...)*

Or

Has that already happened?

Am I here already?

Did you watch me pull myself up,  
 Grasp the final golden link in that long long Chain...  
 And start raving about poetry  
 Not knowing  
 that I am Here...?

*(He steps toward them, palms open, truly humbled)*

Is this the Heavens?  
 Are you...  
 the gods?

*(He stands there, searching their faces.  
 Throughout the scene the sun has been slowly setting,  
 the light getting cooler and darker.  
 HOMER slowly, gently, drops to his knees, palms up.)*

Did I write anything of value?  
 Was I anything more than a poor, blind fool?  
 Did anyone hear any of it and  
 Miss their son,  
 Or plan a delicious evening meal,  
 Or tell their wife they adored her...?

You'll let me know.

Ye gods.

You'll let me know.

*(The sunset completes.  
 Blackout.)*

**B L A C K**

*(A dark room in the apartment of an old building. There is not much furniture left in this room, just the hospice bed, maybe the couch, an IV stand, a bed pan. HENRY enters. The hospice nurse MARTIN gets up, meets HENRY near the door.)*

*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*

MARTIN  
Shhh.

HENRY  
Hi.

MARTIN  
He's sleeping.

HENRY  
How was he today?

MARTIN  
Did you get my texts?

HENRY  
Sorry.

MARTIN  
Would it hurt you to send a reply?

HENRY  
We're not supposed to have our phones. On the job.

MARTIN  
Mm hm.

HENRY  
Did he eat?

MARTIN  
Some pudding.

HENRY  
Chocolate?

MARTIN  
Mm hm.

HENRY  
Good.

MARTIN  
He wanted pistachio.

HENRY  
And?

MARTIN  
We're out. Thus my texts.

HENRY  
Right. Yes. Sorry.

MARTIN  
Mm hm.

HENRY  
His fluids?

MARTIN  
Pretty good. His spirits have improved. He told me to suck his dick.

HENRY  
... No.

MARTIN  
Oh yes.

HENRY  
No!

MARTIN  
Suck my dick.

HENRY  
He hasn't said that since 1989!-- a cop arrested him for holding my hand at a restaurant.

MARTIN  
Well he said it today. Suck my dick. Right in that bed.

HENRY  
Jesus. Well, I'm sorry.

MARTIN (*affectionately*)  
Don't be. Simon makes even suck my dick sound like poetry.

HENRY  
Amen.

(*A beat.*)

MARTIN  
You should know...

HENRY  
Yes?

MARTIN  
He's in and out.

HENRY  
In and out?

MARTIN  
Of consciousness.

HENRY

...Oh.

MARTIN

He has moments of total lucidity, where he's his old self, and then the next moment he's gone.

HENRY

Okay.

MARTIN

Just so—you know. So you're prepared...

HENRY

I understand.

*(Beat.)*

MARTIN

Alright I'm off.

HENRY

Thank you Martin.

MARTIN

Sure thing.

HENRY

See you tomorrow.

MARTIN

I'll be here.

HENRY

So will I. All day. From now on.

*(He stops.)*

MARTIN *(no judgment, just surprise)*

Really?

HENRY

Yes.

MARTIN

Alright. See you then.

*(He leaves. HENRY stays by the door, contemplating the sleeping SIMON across the room. A beat.)*

SIMON *(eyes still closed)*

Fuck you.

HENRY *(startled)*

Oh Jesus. You're awake.



SIMON (*mocking their exchange*)  
The living bonding over the dead.

HENRY  
Martin said you were asleep.

SIMON  
“Amen.” Assholes.

HENRY  
You scared me you know; “Fuck you” coming from the dark like a ghost.

SIMON  
Oh just you wait. I’m gonna haunt you like the Cask of Amanti-fucking-llado.

HENRY  
Simon.

SIMON (*making haunting ghost sounds*)  
Ooooooooooh.

(*SIMON coughs. His voice is weak, but he’s himself.*)

HENRY  
Simon stop.

SIMON  
You didn’t get the pudding.

HENRY  
You had chocolate.

SIMON  
Chocolate tastes like plastic now.

HENRY  
I’ll run out first thing in the morning. You’ll have pistachio pudding before you can say  
“Suck my dick”.

(*HENRY gives him a look.*)

SIMON  
He deserved it.

HENRY  
I doubt that very much.

SIMON  
He was trying to make me shit in that thing again—that plastic pot—and I told him I was  
DONE—he said I wasn’t dead yet and I still had to behave and shit where people can handle  
it, so I told him what he could do.

HENRY  
Suck your dick.

SIMON

Indeed. I can't believe you didn't bring the pudding. I'm dying you know.

HENRY

I do.

SIMON

No you don't. You don't know I'm dying. You just think I'm smelly and sickly and shitting in a pot.

HENRY

When you've spent thirty-five years failing someone, it doesn't seem right to suddenly turn into Partner of the Year. Right at the End.

SIMON

(Failing someone...)

HENRY

Right at the Home Stretch.

SIMON

What are you talking about?

HENRY

All the times I came home from work and you just wanted to go on a walk together.

SIMON

Well you know how I love to creeper our neighbors.

HENRY

And all the dinners I finished first and left the table to read the paper because you eat so *interminably slow*.

SIMON

(my delicate constitution)

HENRY

And left you sitting at the table... alone... *(He shakes his head with the pain of that thought.)*  
Or how I always drank too much at your writing parties and accused you of flirting... or hinted you were a burden or... I could go on and on.

SIMON

Don't be dramatic.

HENRY

I have been vain. And petty. And eremitic.

SIMON

Eremitic? Don't say eremitic.

HENRY

And MEAN. And COWARDLY.

*(Beat. SIMON really takes him in.)*

SIMON

Well. I'd forgive it all for some fucking pistachio pudding.

HENRY

Would you now?

SIMON

Yes.

HENRY

Well then.

*(HENRY pulls out some pistachio pudding he picked up on the way home. SIMON gasps.)*

HENRY

Ta da.

SIMON

Add manipulative to that list. And DISHONEST.

HENRY

I shall.

SIMON

And SNEAKY.

HENRY

Done. Shall I also add Forgiven?

SIMON

Get me a spoon you cad.

*(HENRY does.)*

Were you just going to keep that in your fucking pocket?

HENRY

I don't know, I was just trying to find some way to surprise you.

SIMON *(chuckling, pleased)*

I should have died while you still had it in your pocket! THAT would've haunted you good and proper. *(ala tortured Henry)* "Oh he never knew I had the pudding! I was too EREMITIC."

HENRY *(an old joke between them, laughing like this)*

Oh Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha.

*(HENRY sits next to SIMON while he eats the pistachio pudding. He himself has opened a chocolate.)*

SIMON *(joining in, an old joke between them, laughing like this)*

Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha.

HENRY

I like the chocolate.

SIMON

Well you don't have Stage Four cancer.

HENRY

Neither do you. You're just smelly and sickly and shitting in a pot.

*(They eat.)*

SIMON

So how was your day at The House For Dead White Men? Did you bring me another umbrella with naked cowboys in it?

HENRY

No.

SIMON

Then get out.

*(HENRY chuckles then pauses, trying to process his day.)*

HENRY *(almost vibrating with it)*

I think—I think I had an amazing day.

*(SIMON stops.)*

SIMON

Really? Pray tell.

HENRY

*Pray tell?* Don't become Emily Dickinson.

SIMON

What do you mean *become*? Emily and I have been *ONE* for many years, you know that.

HENRY

*(Pray tell.)*

SIMON *(falsetto, ala Emily Dickinson, an annoying one at that)*

*Because I could not stop for Death--*

*He kindly stopped for me--*

*The Carriage held but just Ourselves--*

*And Immortality.*

HENRY

You sound like a fag.

SIMON

I am a fag.

HENRY

How do you know?

SIMON

You suck my dick.

*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*

HENRY (*spitting up a little pudding*)  
Ha!—not for many months now.

SIMON  
Oh rub it in.

*(They eat together for a few moments.)*

Lucky Emily.

HENRY  
Why do you say that?

SIMON  
Here we are, over a century later, quoting her poems.

HENRY  
You've published eight books.

SIMON  
Well.

HENRY  
Well what?

SIMON  
Will anyone *read it*? Will anyone quote it while eating pudding with the love of their life?

HENRY  
... They may.

SIMON  
Oh shut up.

*(HENRY watches him, not wanting to break the spell)*

HENRY  
You're very spry tonight.

SIMON  
How do you know? Maybe I'm this spry all day long.

HENRY  
You know what I mean. We haven't talked like this in weeks.  
Usually when I get home you're out cold.  
... I've missed you.

SIMON  
Oh god don't.

HENRY  
Don't what?

SIMON

Don't start in with some simpering "Don't die" crap.

HENRY  
I'm not.

SIMON  
Well good.

HENRY  
... But don't.

SIMON  
Don't what?

HENRY  
Die.  
...  
Don't die.

SIMON (*trying to play the old joke between them*)  
Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha

HENRY  
I'm serious.  
...  
Don't die.

SIMON  
Come on.

HENRY  
Don't die.  
Don't die.

SIMON  
Henry.

HENRY (*heartbreaking, simple*)  
Please.  
Don't die.  
Please don't die.  
Please.  
Don't die.  
Please don't die.  
Don't leave me here without you.  
I don't want to be here without you.  
My love.  
My heart.  
Please.

SIMON (*taking his hand, a whisper*)  
Henry.  
...  
(*Gently, but firmly*)  
Enough.

*(He holds HENRY's hand a moment longer, until he's recovered, then he pats it.)*

SIMON

So come on. You were Out There today, The World Beyond These Walls— Tell me everything. Any mental illness on display? Did Jonny let you touch his pee pee in the boys room?

HENRY *(laughing, wiping his tears, but recovered)*  
Oh you're terrible to Jonny!

SIMON

Well he's ridiculous.

HENRY

He's alright.

SIMON

Of course he's alright (if you drop every aspect of his personality besides the fact that he is kind to you).

HENRY

Well. He invited me to Easter.

SIMON

Oh?

HENRY

With him and Twyla.

*(SIMON experiences a tiny, imperceptible heartbreak.)*

SIMON

... You should go.

HENRY

Apparently she makes a very good lamb.

SIMON

You should. You should go.

HENRY

Who cares.

SIMON

You need to start doing things without me.

HENRY

Oh shut up.

SIMON

You do.

HENRY

All this was before Jonny drew his gun on me.

SIMON  
 ---What?

HENRY  
 Jonny drew his gun on me.

SIMON  
 ---Is that a euphemism?

HENRY  
 No. Jonny drew his gun on me. And I no longer work there. At the House for Dead White Men.

SIMON  
 ... What are you talking about?

HENRY  
 I got fired.

SIMON  
 --- You did not.

HENRY  
 I did.

SIMON  
 You did not!

HENRY  
 Yes I did.

SIMON  
 Don't fuck with me.

HENRY  
 I'm not. I touched the Rembrandt.

SIMON  
 (Why does everything sound like code?)

HENRY  
 I touched the Rembrandt in room thirty-nine.  
*Aristotle with a Bust of Homer.*  
 Painted by one of the greatest painters our civilization has ever known.  
 The subject of which is two of the greatest thinkers our civilization has ever known.

And I touched it!  
 Specifically the Golden Chain of Being (that Aristotle is wearing)—

*(HENRY holds up his middle and pointer fingers.)*

I touched it.

*(SIMON just sits there, stunned. HENRY disappears into the memory of it.)*

*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*



It was... surprisingly-- *spiky*.  
 The paint.  
 Slashes of ochre  
 and black  
 and white  
 and red.  
 I suddenly thought--  
 Art is such a *slight* thing.  
 It's a trick.  
 The closer you get, it recedes, like a shadow.  
 It *lives*, it *glows*, and then you touch it and it's not really there.  
 Or it's *ALL* there— Rembrandt. Homer.  
 I touched *it all*...  
 Well, specifically *three* of us touched it—myself, this girl Madeline and Dodger.  
 We counted to three, and we touched it.

SIMON

What the fucks a dodger?

HENRY

He's a new guard. Or—well—who knows if they'll keep him on-- but they might— give him another chance... I hope so, he's a sweet lad. (A sweet lad, God I sound old.) I *felt* old, watching them exchange phone numbers, arguing about where to meet for dinner, their faces like wet paint... (*like it's beautiful*) I felt *ancient*.

SIMON (*dreamily, from a far away place*)

It's as if I'm on a great ship. I'm honestly not sure if I'm dreaming this conversation...

HENRY

I know! I already feel it wasn't real or something...  
 Look at my hand-- it looks so LARGE...

(*The sight of his large hand triggers the memory*)

I remember my Dad reading in the paper that this Rembrandt had been purchased for 2.3 million-- and this was 1961 mind you!-- and he turned to me, I was all of FIVE, and he said (*ala gruff dad*) "Come on Hank, we're going to see what the hell is worth 2.3 million." And he dragged me to the exhibit. We stood in front of it, his brow furrowed, the callouses on his hand... There was something about the way he stood there—staring—as if he felt *separate*— as if it was some Great Thing that would always be just beyond his reach...

I never asked him what he thought of it, the painting.  
 If he liked it.  
 If it pleased him.  
 (I'd like to think it did—that somehow he was—touched by it.)  
 I regret that actually.  
 Terribly.

It's just a slight thing—canvas, paint— and yet it contains—what?  
 Worlds. Truths.

(*As he speaks he is also seeing his beautiful Simon, of whom there is only one in all of time*)

I stood there today, and I thought,

*The Rembrandt*

*by Jessica Dickey*

There is only *one* of this-- in *all of time*.  
I touched that fragility  
and my heart just...

*(Sometime in the last few minutes SIMON has closed his eyes. He is very still.)*

HENRY  
My love? Are you there?

*(SIMON doesn't answer. We can hear his breath drawing gently in and out.)*

I want you to know.  
You've been  
a wonderful  
partner.  
You have.  
I have failed you so terribly.  
So terribly.  
But I am here now.  
I'm here.

*(HENRY puts his hand on SIMON's head, just like Aristotle with a Bust of Homer. They sit like that for a tender moment.*

*Then BLACKOUT.*

*END OF PLAY.)*