**Final Brushstroke**

A 10-Minute play

by

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## Characters:

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| Barry Bright: An elderly artist, known as the “Hippie Van Gogh.” | Auctioneer on a cruise ship: Full of energy and a subtle disdain for high culture. |
| Lucy: A young urban hipster. | Rafael: Lucy’s boyfriend, an artist. |
| Deborah: Barry’s Daughter. Her business is selling Barry’s paintings. |  |
| Carl: Deborah’s husband and business partner. |  |

## Suggested minimal casting:

Auctioneer

Barry Bright

Deborah/Lucy

Carl/Rafael

**NOTES:** If Barry Bright is off-stage during the Auctioneer’s monologue, one actor can play both parts. Designations “stage right” and “stage left” are for clarity. Actual staging can be changes.

## Set

The entire set is the main room in Barry Bright’s studio. The only essential element in the set is a chair, perhaps a 60s-vintage chair. There might also be a second chair, some artist’s canvases (possibly with the backing facing the audience), and similar items. The characters periodically gesture offstage, stage left, toward a large group of paintings that are unseen by the audience.

Scene 1

Action.

The AUCTIONEER enters and takes big steps Downstage to directly address the audience members as if they are vacationers on the cruise ship attending the Barry Bright auction. Upstage, Barry is mostly oblivious but seems to occasionally wince at the AUCTIONEER’S crudest and most philistine statements. A few front-row audience members might be recruited to react with great enthusiasm to the AUCTIONEER.

AUCTIONEER: Hi everyone! Well, tonight is one of the real high points of our cruise. I know you cruisers have been talking all week about the Barry Bright Gallery Auction. But for those who spent the week playing chess in the library, I’ll give the pitch.

Barry Bright is known as “the Van Gogh of Haight-Ashbury.” That was the hippie capital of America back in the 1960s. Barry is one of the most important American artists. His paintings are in private collections and museums worldwide. A-list celebrities are big fans. Barry has been a guest on Oprah. (Beat.) And now, you have your chance to acquire your own Barry Bright—a *signed* Barry Bright, signed and dated. These are originals, not prints. No two are exactly the same.

Not only will a Barry Bright turn your living room into something truly special, these paintings are recognized as outstanding investments that will only increase in value over time. The price you paid for this cruise will seem like nothing when you see the value of your Barry Bright start to climb—perhaps just months after we return to port.

Consider: Many art experts regard Barry as equal or superior in technique to Vincent van Gogh. And, van Gogh mostly painted orchards, wheat fields, and flowers—nothing wrong with that, nothing at all. But Barry paints people—the amazing street life of Haight-Ashbury and climactic moments of those legendary rock concerts—the Grateful Dead, the Jefferson Airplane, and more recent concerts as well.

Here is an insider tip: Barry is not a young man, and you know what happens to works of art when the artist dies. When Barry finally ascends to that great rock concert in the sky, supply will stop, but demand will skyrocket. We all wish Barry good health. But, tonight’s auction is an art collector’s dream and an investment opportunity that may not be repeated!

So, pick up one of the bidding forms on your table. Remember it won’t be just Brad Pitt who owns a Barry Bright. It won’t be just Taylor Swift. You too will join this cadre of elite art collectors and smart investors. Now, we begin bidding on the first of these spectacular works of art.

(2-second freeze. Actors playing DEBORAH and CARL enter and stand imposingly over BARRY.)

(2-second free and Action)

Scene 2

Action.

BARRY’s studio. BARRY is sitting in a chair that evokes the 1960s. He is positioned Downstage Left and facing stage right. There are one or two artist’s canvases with the wooden framing facing the audience. These items, located Upstage Left, remain on stage throughout the play. BARRY’S daughter, DEBORAH, and her husband, CARL, are standing over him. All of them periodically gesture offstage, stage left, toward a large group of paintings that are unseen by the audience.

DEBORAH

Dad, we need you to sign these.

BARRY stands.

BARRY

Did I paint all of these? I don’t remember.

DEBORAH

Of course you did. But it was a while back. Months ago. But you never signed them. And you’re still actively painting, working every day on new works of art. Remember that, Dad. That’s how this family talks to the media.

BARRY

That one doesn’t really look like one of mine.

CARL

Sure it is, Barry. In fact, you’re on an upswing. In this painting, you’ve returned to your early style, the style for which you’re most famous. Your later stuff, not so much.

BARRY

Pearl Jam? Did I do a Pearl Jam? Someone else did this. I’m not going to sign it.

DEBORAH

Dad, your memory is not so sharp these days. It’s because of your meds.

CARL

Sign the paintings, Barry. That’s why we’re here. There are 12 of them. It won’t take more than an hour. If it makes you feel better, you can add a few brush strokes to each one. Then you will know that it’s your work. But don’t do too much. (Mimics BARRY’S trembling hand.) We’re kind of on a schedule here.

BARRY looks closely at one of the paintings.

BARRY

Melania Trump? Out of my studio! Both of you. Out! Leave!

DEBORAH

Dad, you’re ruining everything Carl and I have been working for.

BARRY

(Pointing, stage right, to door.) Out! Out!

DEBORAH and CARL open and step through imagined door and pause outside. We see BARRY pacing around his studio deeply upset. DEBORAH and CARL are talking outside the studio.

DEBORAH

I can’t stand it. He’s getting more ornery all the time.

CARL

I have a plan. I told you I have a plan.

2-second freeze.

Scene 3

Action.

CARL is talking to LUCY, a young, attractive woman wearing “urban hipster” clothing. They are Downstage and separate from the part of the set that represents the studio.

CARL

So, you get the idea. You’re technically Barry Bright’s studio assistant. You’ll help him paint—if he does try to paint. Also, you’ll take care of the studio, make sure there’s food in the fridge. Most important—well, you know what’s most important—is his “attitude.” You’re here to keep the old man “pliable,” “cooperative.” These days he’s very isolated. Once you’ve gotten on good terms with him, you should be able to influence him in the ways we need.

LUCY

OK. You *know* what I think of all this. It’s all phony capitalist bullshit. Whatever talent Barry Bright once had, he sold out 50 years ago. He should sign each painting “Barry Bright”—with three dollars signs. If you want to exploit his reputation to rip off *other* rich people, the kind who go on cruises, that’s fine with me.

CARL

Lucy, I’m expecting that you’ll use your “feminine charm”—as needed. Barry is old, but he’ll be responsive. My wife manages his credit card account, and we see payments to Pornhub.

LUCY

OK, but there are limits. I have a boyfriend, Rafael, who, by the way, is a real artist. Real artists don’t get enough attention. If you ever decide you want to sell real art, something worthwhile, I’ll take you to his studio. You can sell Rafael on your cruise ships!

CARL

Well, for now your job is to help us manage Barry.

2-second freeze.

Scene 4

BARRY, CARL, and LUCY are standing together in BARRY’s studio.

Action.

CARL

So, I’ll leave you two to get better acquainted.

LUCY smiles at BARRY, who seems pleased.

CARL

(To BARRY.) Deborah and I have a lot to do today. See you later, Barry. I’m glad we’ve gotten past that little dust-up last week.

LUCY

Barry, would you take me through your studio? I want to see everything.

Exit stage left

Scene 5

Action.

BARRY and LUCY, talking earnestly, enter stage left into the studio portion of the stage. They take off their coats and place them on a waiting chair. Lucy may help Barry take off his coat. There is a chair.

BARRY

Thank you for showing me Rafael’s paintings. That’s a good little gallery, and I enjoyed getting out and meeting your friends. Rafael has a very different conception of art than I do. I didn’t really enjoy his work. But I can see that if you accept his premises—and I guess a lot of young artists do these days—he’s very good.

LUCY

I like that you respect art even when it doesn’t do anything for you. And I like that you’re honest about what you think. Rafael will like that too when I tell him.

BARRY

There’s one part of my studio you haven’t seen yet. It’s my private collection. It’s in the room that’s locked. I’d show it to you if you’d like.

LUCY

Yes.

They exit stage left with BARRY taking keys from his pocket. They cross the stage behind the screen. They re-enter stage right and gaze and gesture Offstage Right so that BARRY and LUCY are looking at paintings unseen by the audience.

LUCY

You painted junkies shooting up in an alley?

BARRY

I wanted to record *everything* that was going on in Haight-Ashbury, and there was a lot more going on than “Flower Power.”

LUCY

I didn’t know you did paintings like this.

BARRY

There wasn’t much interest in those subjects. Then, the hippie thing sort of imploded, and there was a lot less interest in *anything* I did. But I still painted, and I *liked* what I was painting. Winnie and I were happy. Everything was fine—until she died. Somehow I couldn’t paint after that. I lost focus. My art lost focus. I was ready to do something really different. But Deborah and Carl had built this business, and they *wanted* more Barry Brights, *needed* more Barry Brights. They didn’t care if the stuff was bad. Now, they’re selling fakes.

LUCY

I couldn’t live in the situation you’re in—so compromised. Rafael has never sold out, has never compromised on anything. That’s how we live our lives. I took this gig because I didn’t think anyone involved deserved respect. Any money that would flow from *your* world into *my* world was a plus. But, I had that wrong. You’re *not* the same as Carl. If you’re ready to recapture your integrity, I’m ready to help you do it.

BARRY

Please, Lucy. Yes, I am. But I’m afraid of Carl. He’s a hard man.

LUCY

Let’s start with the fake paintings. Rafael and I could cut every one of them into slivers by morning. No one would think of “restoring” them. And we’d get you out of here. You’d go underground with us—for a while anyway. We can work something out. Are you ready for that?

BARRY

They’ll be no fixing things with my daughter. I’ll have no one.

LUCY

You’ll have me and Rafael. . . Take a moment, Barry. This is *your* life. *You* need to decide. But if you’re going to let yourself be controlled by Carl and Deborah, I won’t be your studio assistant. I won’t stand around and watch that.

BARRY

I’m ready. I’m ready to escape everything. Just make sure we take my own paintings. Get those out safely, and be sure they’re taken care of.

LUCY

We have friends. We can do that.

2-second freeze.

Scene 6

Action.

RAFAEL, LUCY, and BARRY are standing stage left in the studio portion of the stage. Barry is holding his will and a pen. RAFAEL holds his smart phone. LUCY is talking on hers.

LUCY

(Into the phone.) OK, Helena. Yes. Thanks. Thanks a whole lot.

LUCY puts away her phone. Rafael steps Downstage, turns Upstage, and beckons to Barry to stand facing Downstage for the video.

RAFAEL

Ready, Barry? Whatever you say will go up on You Tube some time tomorrow morning. It *will* get noticed!

BARRY

Lucy, why don’t you get into the picture.

LUCY stands in the background behind Barry, also facing Downstage. RAFAEL starts the video.

BARRY

I want to apologize to everyone who bought paintings that I painted when I didn’t really want to paint anything. It’s not good art. People close to me wanted more paintings to sell. I was weak. But I disavow all those paintings. I’m sorry. Also, it’s *possible* that I signed some recent paintings that I actually didn’t paint. I may have been tricked. I also want to say that I am responsible, wholly responsible, *happily* responsible for the destruction of twelve bogus paintings in my studio last night.

Next, I am reasonably sound in body and—especially right now—very sound in mind. After being alone—essentially alone—for a long time. I’ve found two people who understand me and want what’s best for me. This is my updated will. It supersedes all others. I hereby declare Lucy Johnson and Rafael Sánchez to be sole heirs of my estate. Furthermore, I appoint Lucy Johnson and Rafael Sánchez as my executors, both financial and artistic. They will have oversight over my private collection of Barry Bright paintings. All of you who are watching this video are witnesses as I sign my name.

BARRY signs.

BARRY

One more thing. I bequeath to Lucy and Rafael my most cherished painting. The one of my wife that I did a month before she died. Upon my death, that painting belongs to them.

LUCY steps away from the field of view of the smart phone lens. BARRY glances Offstage Left as if there is some new activity in the studio.

LUCY

(Softly to BARRY.) Our friends are here.

LUCY exits stage left as if tending to some business.

BARRY

(Still being recorded by RAFAEL.) Lucy, Rafael, and I are about to disappear—for at least a while. When we appear again, we’ll have a solid plan for our futures together. Maybe I’ll finish my life with them. Maybe I’ll teach a little boy or girl how to draw.

RAFAEL

(Softly.) Barry, it would be good for us to leave now. OK?

BARRY

Sure, Rafael. I’ve said everything I needed to say.

RAFAEL ends the video and pockets his phone. LUCY enters stage left carrying BARRY’S fully-packed, soft-sided suitcase. She sets it down.

RAFAEL

(Gesturing Offstage Left.) Barry, this is Simeon. He’ll drive us out of the City and get us settled in his country place. It’s way out on Route 17, nothing fancy, but it will be fine for now.

BARRY

(Nodding.) Thank you, Simeon.

LUCY

(Gesturing Offstage Left.) This is Helena. That’s Tony. They will get your paintings out of here before the video gets posted. They’re artists. They know how to take care of big canvases.

BARRY nods in thanks.

RAFAEL

You’re ready, Barry?

BARRY nods.

LUCY

You did it. You’re breaking free. It’s good to live free. I know.

BARRY, LUCY, and RAPHAEL turn toward door to studio, which we’ve been envisioning as stage right.

RAFAEL

I can take your suitcase.

BARRY

No, I’d like to carry it. I’m feeling strong. . . This feels good—like I’ve just done a painting. One of my early ones.

2-second freeze.

## The End