

IN THE MIND OF THE BEHOLDER

By DonnaMarie Vaughn

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PREMISE: *A young man and woman ‘eye’ each other at a chance meeting at an art gallery on a rainy afternoon, where what they say is not always what they wanted to!*

OF NOTE: *This play can be done with prerecorded feedback as the man and woman’s conscience/inner thoughts, OR two men and two women can be used on or off stage to “perform” the inner thoughts. For competition each actor may step to the side, put a hand to the side of the mouth, or anything else that indicates the conscience is speaking.*

SET REQUIREMENTS: *One set, full stage, established as an art gallery with an assortment of paintings, or paintings done in black box style leaving the “art work” for the audience to imagine.*

TIME: *Present, contemporary*

COSTUMES: *Present day, everyday clothing*

SET: *A simple art gallery with several paintings on the wall and a sculpture or two. Large blank canvases should hang in place of the actual paintings that are discussed between the two characters.*

TIME: *Afternoon*

AT RISE: *BELINDA, in her 30s, stands in front of painting, simply staring at it. SHE wears sandals over bare feet and a long summer-print sleeveless sun dress. Very casual. Occasionally SHE taps her umbrella as if to punctuate her thoughts.*

NATE, late 30s, enters. HE is dressed casually but very neat - pressed khaki pants, polo shirt tucked in, a belt, and shoes with laces. Over one arm hangs a neatly folded rain jacket. His shoes make a soft shuffling sound on the floor as HE enters the room.

BELINDA's attention is drawn by the noise of his shoes; SHE gives him a nod of courtesy and goes back to staring at her painting. SHE bends her head to the side, takes a step closer to the painting, steps back.

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: What do you know, someone else is out on this totally awful day... ***(HE walks up to another painting, looks at it.)*** Why in the world I picked today of all days to come here. But Aunt Julie wanted me to make sure... ***(HE turns his attention once again to BELINDA who seems absorbed in the painting in front of her.)*** not bad... ***(BELINDA pays him no heed; NATE turns his head a little more. BELINDA finally turns slightly; sees NATE, offers a noncommittal smile.)***

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: ***(somewhat annoyed; sigh)*** He's looking at me... ***(a beat)*** jerk. Probably thinks the art gallery's a pickup joint like everywhere else... ***(HE smiles back.)***

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Nice smile.

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: At least his teeth are straight. and all there.

(They turn away from each other and back to their paintings. NATE shuffles over to the next picture, bringing him closer to BELINDA. They are now at somewhat of an angle to each other; each can easily 'size up the other' from the corner of their eyes without looking too conspicuous.)

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: Does he think I don't know he's looking at me..? Puh-lease!

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Is she looking at me...?

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: Probably married with a bunch of kids. Just here killing time while his kids are at the mall or the show. Pretending he knows art.

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Probably one of those 'artsy' types who spends saturday nights sitting in a bookstore drinking cappuccino and reading political magazines.

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: Already graying. Easily 40 plus.

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Easily over thirty. Dyes her hair.

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: Tucks his shirt into his pants. That would make him... white collar, desk job.

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: That dress is awfully wrinkled...

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: He's got shoes on! With laces! Eighty-eight degrees out and he wears shoes – probably has socks on, too. Probably doesn't even own a pair of sandals. I'll bet he's a full-fledged, card-carrying member of the republican party.

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: She's got sandals on with bare legs... nice looking legs, too... but sandals? In an art gallery like this? People have no respect these days.

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: Not a bad build. A little stocky, italian maybe?

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Not too fat, not too thin. Actually, not too bad at all. **(a beat)** Can't see her hands to see if there's a ring.

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: I wonder if he's taller than me.

(NATE moves to the next picture. BELINDA reacts by stepping over one step away and tapping her umbrella.)

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: He *looks* taller than me....

(NATE moves closer to BELINDA. HE is now at the picture right before the one SHE's looking at.)

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: I think she's checking me out, too! She hasn't moved since I entered this room, just keeps staring at that picture. funny how she'd pick that picture...

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: Come on, Belinda, time to concentrate. do your homework.

(NATE steps sideways so HE's within mere feet of BELINDA. HE sneaks a closer peek at her, checks out her butt.)

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Looks pretty firm, bet she works out...does she have a tan? Oh yeah, a pretty good one.

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: I'll bet he's looking at me right now... ***(BELINDA turns her head just a bit.)*** He is looking at me! ***(BELINDA smiles. NATE smiles, clears his throat again.)***

NATE: Hi.

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Nice eyes, nice skin... not a lot of makeup.

BELINDA: Hi.

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: Good, he is taller than me...

NATE: Guess we're the only ones here on this rainy afternoon.

BELINDA: Guess so.

(NATE gestures towards the painting.)

NATE: I noticed you've been staring at that painting for a long time.

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: I'm surprised you noticed since you spent all your time staring at me...

BELINDA: Yeah. I'm choosing it for my homework assignment.

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Nice face to go with those legs. Not a bad package.

NATE: Oh? Are you an art student?

BELINDA: Not really. I'm taking this night course in understanding art. We were told to find a painting we liked a lot and figure out why. Up until now it's been sap pictures for me.

NATE: Sap pictures?

BELINDA: Sap. Starving artists pictures? You know, those companies that come to town and sell paintings on the weekends from hotel lobbies, supposedly painted by real starving artists. "Priced from nineteen to sixty-nine dollars, none higher." Saps.

NATE: Oh, yeah... ***(nods as if HE clearly knows what SHE means)***

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: I have no clue what she's talking about.

BELINDA: Also used to describe people, like me, who buy them.

(BELINDA smiles brightly and NATE returns the smile.)

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Nice eyes, they sort of twinkle when she smiles. I keep getting a whiff of something... perfume?... soap...?

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: Maybe he's not forty. Some guys start to gray in their 30s, don't they?

BELINDA: So, are you an art student?

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Must be perfume... whatever it is, It's great...

NATE: Huh? No, not really. I mean, I like art, but I'm not into melting clocks and white spots on red backgrounds, if you know what I mean.

BELINDA: Ah, you're a fruit in a bowl and old farmhouses kind of guy, huh?

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: ...and dogs playing cards on black velvet...

NATE: No. I just like art I can understand. I mean, the picture over there, of all the different colored umbrellas at the beach, I like that.

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Wow, that dress is awfully wrinkled. Guess she doesn't iron. How can you wear something that's that wrinkled in public?

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: Oh, God, I hope he's not looking at that flabby part of my arm that sticks out by the armhole... I knew I shouldn't have worn this dress...

BELINDA: I liked that one, too. what do you think the artist was trying to say?

NATE: Say? Oh-oh... **(speaking)** Say? **(thinking)** I can't hear a word! **(smiles at his own joke) (speaking)** hmmm..... It's so sunny everyone needed to bring their beach umbrella that day?!? **(NATE smiles, raises his eyebrows, as if asking for forgiveness. BELINDA shakes her head, only partially amused.)**

BELINDA: **(thinking)** Wonderful, he has no clue about art. **(quick beat)** But then again, neither did I, which is why I'm taking this class... **(speaking)** Okay, let me ask you this way. you say you like the painting, right? So if you bought that painting, what would the reason be?

NATE: **(thinking)** It matches the colors in my living room? **(speaking)** 'cause I like it.

BELINDA: No, I know that. But, why? Most people buy paintings because they evoke some emotion from them, a feeling, and they want to have that feeling....

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: She's so cute when she's frustrated. I wonder what it'd be like to kiss those lips...

BELINDA: **(continuing)** ...again and again. They want others to share that experience...

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: What's that weird look on his face for?

BELINDA: **(continuing)** ...or have that feeling, too. So what "feeling" do you get when you look at that picture?

NATE: **(thinking)** Feelings. Women, they're always talking about feelings... **(stalling)** Feelings...hmmm. **(thinking)** I could tell her what feeling I get when I look at her but she'd smack me for sure...

(sees BELINDA waiting patiently)

(NATE walks back over towards the painting they're discussing, pretending to peer closer to it. HE steps backwards a few steps to "take in the whole picture." when NATE steps in, BELINDA steps in. when HE steps back, SHE steps back, only SHE steps back a little further than him so SHE can check him out!)

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Good, she's following me. She's interested, Nate, ol' boy.

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: Nice shoulders. Got that little belly thing going, must be a beer drinker. Arms look a little hairy. I hope he's not one of those guys with hairy shoulders and a furry back that uses a lawn mower instead of a razor blade to shave! Uhm, his butt's cute, thighs look nice... My gosh, he ironed his khakis. Who irons khakis?

(they are standing in front of the picture.)

NATE: Okay, you want to know why I would buy this picture? **(thinking)** Think, think, think... **(speaking)** Because... Because... It shows me that there are a lot of people at the beach on this particular day. A lot, because look at all the umbrellas and how close they are to each other... It must be a really beautiful day...

(BELINDA nods and NATE smiles widely, knowing HE's on to something.)

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Whatever b.s. this is, it's working....

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: A ranking member of the baffle 'em with b.s. club... But at least he's trying... (*speaking*) Okay, so then why didn't the artist show you the people?

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: Dang! There's always a trick question! (*stalling*) Well... Because... (*NATE steps up so HE is right next to BELINDA; tries to keep focused on the painting*)

NATE'S CONSCIENCE: There's that perfume again. It's driving me nuts. Her toenails are pink. Why is it she can find time to paint her toenails but not to iron her dress?

BELINDA'S CONSCIENCE: I don't see a wedding ring. But then not all men wear them. Then again, it's a rainy Sunday afternoon. If he had a wife, or a girlfriend, wouldn't she be with him? Or he with her?

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