

Nightingale

written by

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EXT. OPEN FIELD OF FLOWERS - AFTERNOON

A field of wildflowers, all blowing gently in the wind as rolling hills speckled with trees loom in the background.

SUPER: "The absence of beauty is a profound form of deprivation." -Elaine Scarry

INT. ART EXHIBITION (RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA) - NIGHT

ROBIN HOST (28, Latina, pant suit) stares at a PAINTING hanging on the wall opposite her, picking at her lip. Others walk behind her observing other paintings attended to by their artists, talking enthusiastically about their work. Robin looks over the blue streaks and subtle gray lines. A voice SPEAKS over the intercom.

JUDGE 1 (O.S.)

Please join us in the foyer for the presentation of awards.

The crowd begins moving towards the back, but Robin continues staring as if she hadn't heard the announcement. CHRISTIAN HOST (32, White, button-up and a tie) comes up behind her.

CHRISTIAN

You coming to the foyer?

Robin appears not to hear him. Christian nudges her.

CHRISTIAN (CONT'D)

Robin?

ROBIN

Hm? What?

CHRISTIAN

They're announcing the winners.

ROBIN

Already?

CHRISTIAN

Yeah, it's almost ten. We've been here for hours. I saw a guy get asked about commissions like ten times over in the corner there. You've got to see what he's doing. He does a lot of portraits, but makes them really... I don't know the word for it, but I'm sure if you saw it you'd get it. Maybe you could do more stuff like him.

Robin has stopped listening to Christian and is staring at the painting again. Christian finally notices her losing interest in what he's saying.

CHRISTIAN (CONT'D)
But this looks good, too, babe.
Robin?

ROBIN
What? Ow.

Robin picks a piece of her lip and it begins to bleed.

CHRISTIAN
I told you, you have to stop
picking your lip.

ROBIN
Sorry. Have you seen my chapstick?

CHRISTIAN
Here. Just use mine.

Robin dabs at her lip and then applies the CHAPSTICK
Christian hands her.

CHRISTIAN (CONT'D)
Come on. Let's head to the foyer.

They start walking to the foyer together. People are
gathering up and the JUDGE (50s-60s, suit) speaks with other
OFFICIALS as they flip through their notes.

ROBIN
I don't think the undertones are
right.

CHRISTIAN
What?

ROBIN
On the landscape. The blue isn't
working.

CHRISTIAN
I thought that one was great.

ROBIN
It's fine, but it's not good.

CHRISTIAN
I like that one.

ROBIN

It needed work. And you said you liked it when you knew it needed worked.

CHRISTIAN

I liked it.

ROBIN

It's not good enough.

CHRISTIAN

Hey, hey.

Christian holds Robin by the shoulders and looks her in the eye. Robin tries to compose herself and maintain some dignity, but Christian talks to her like she's a child having an emotional episode.

CHRISTIAN (CONT'D)

Listen to me. You're fine. You're a great artist. You're good at this. And, yes, it's been a while since you've done anything like this, but you knew you had to get it out of the way sometime.

ROBIN

I wasn't ready.

CHRISTIAN

And that's fine. Win or lose, I'm by your side. No one's going to die because of blue undertones, right? I'm not going to divorce you over an art exhibition. The stakes aren't that high. You've said it a hundred times: You paint because you enjoy it. So let's enjoy it.

ROBIN

Christian, I wanted to get at least third, but after seeing-

CHRISTIAN

Hey. It's okay. I love you no matter what. Give me a hug.

Robin hesitates, and in that moment, the judge walks up to a MICROPHONE at the far end of the foyer.

JUDGE 1

Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen. If we could all gather around?

Robin turns from Christian towards the judge.

CHRISTIAN

Are you okay?

ROBIN

Let's just listen.

JUDGE 1

I believe we've made our decision. I am reminded of a quote from Aristotle, the great teacher. He once said, "The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance." Myself and the other judges tonight have seen a great deal of beautiful paintings, but above that, we've gotten to see a little more of the artists in this room. You've shown us a piece of your souls, and our decision not only reflects the practical and technical achievements of the artists, but also the beauty conveyed from within each of you. Needless to say, everyone here is deserving of an award tonight, but, alas, our budget only allows us to make three trophies.

A CHUCKLE ripples through the crowd.

CHRISTIAN

(whispering)

See. Everyone deserves an award.

Robin takes Christian's hand.

JUDGE 1

Without further ado, we'd like to present our third place finisher. And the award goes to...

(dramatic pause)

Ms. Molly Taylor.

The crowd APPLAUDS as MOLLY (20s, White, red hair) walks up and accepts the trophy. Christian and Robin clap, but Robin looks even more stressed.

CHRISTIAN

Maybe you'll get second.

ROBIN

What?

CHRISTIAN

You could get second.

JUDGE 1

For our second place artist, the
award goes to... Mr. Pierce
Mackelby.

The crowd APPLAUDS again as PIERCE (early 20s, hipster) walks
up in faux humility and accepts his trophy. Robin breathes a
sigh of resignation and her shoulders slump.

CHRISTIAN

That's the guy I was talking about.

ROBIN

Let's just go.

CHRISTIAN

What? But they still have to-

ROBIN

Let's go.

Robin and Christian politely push their way through the
crowd.

JUDGE 1

And our first place finisher, by
unanimous decision, is... Ms. Robin
Host.

The crowd APPLAUDS louder than ever. Robin stops in her
tracks and looks up towards the judge, who's looking around
the room.

JUDGE 1 (CONT'D)

Robin? Has anyone seen Robin.

CHRISTIAN

She's right here!

The crowd parts as Christian leads Robin by the hand to the
front, then almost forces her towards the judge as he stands
just off to the side. Robin looks at the small gold TROPHY
and her face finally breaks from shock to joy. She LAUGHS and
the judge indicates her to speak. Robin approaches the mic.

ROBIN

Wow! Oh my God. I don't know what
to say.

CHRISTIAN
That's my wife!

The crowd LAUGHS and APPLAUDS.

INT. HOST HOME - NIGHT

Robin and Christian walk into their front door. Robin is rambling she's so excited, still holding the trophy. The living room is modestly decorated, with a few simple luxuries on the coffee table and hung up on the wall. The couch looks worn, but in good enough condition. It is, as best as can be seen at first glance, the living room of a starter home.

ROBIN
And Dr. O'Flannery said my brush strokes were impressionistic, but like a revival of the form. Oh my God! I have to call Dr. Jensen and let her know! She's going to be ecstatic.

CHRISTIAN
I know, babe. She's gonna explode, I swear.

ROBIN
No, no, she's much more controlled than that. But, holy shit, when Dr. O'Flannery started pointing out each of my paintings one by one- I got asked to do commissions. Did I say that yet? Commissions, Christian! I could travel and make a living off of this.

CHRISTIAN
That's what I'm talking about! And they all said art couldn't make money.

ROBIN
Who said that?

CHRISTIAN
What? No, it's just an expression.

Robin shakes off the comment. Nothing could bring this moment down for her.

ROBIN

Just the thought of it, though. I think I might actually be able to do this. I might... be good at this.

CHRISTIAN

I've always said you're a good painter. I still have those pictures you painted of me in the basement.

ROBIN

I know, I just mean... This could be real for me.

CHRISTIAN

Once you start making money off this, maybe I'll be the one who can quit my job and you can bankroll me. You won't need a sugar daddy anymore, right?

Christian LAUGHS.

ROBIN

I have made money, Christian.

CHRISTIAN

I know, but, like... pay-the-bills money. Not a-date-night-out kind of money.

Robin looks at Christian confused, then amused.

ROBIN

Honey, you know tonight was a competition, right?

CHRISTIAN

Yeah. Of course.

ROBIN

I didn't just get a trophy. There's a cash prize. I made \$15,000 tonight.

The news stops the gears turning in Christian's head, then all of a sudden they start whirring at twice their speed.

CHRISTIAN

Oh my God! \$15,000? In one night?

ROBIN

I mean, it wasn't one night's work-

CHRISTIAN

You weren't kidding! And you've got commissions coming down the line to keep you afloat between contests. Jesus, Robin, why didn't you say that? Holy shit! We gotta get you doing more of these.

ROBIN

I mean, it's just one competition. It's not like I'm going to win every time I enter one of these.

CHRISTIAN

Right, but it's just been a hobby for you, and you still made money.

ROBIN

Painting isn't "just a hobby," Christian. I went to school for this.

CHRISTIAN

Right, but you know what I mean.

ROBIN

I don't, though.

CHRISTIAN

I just mean... What if I really started taking this seriously?

ROBIN

If you took this seriously?

CHRISTIAN

I mean financially seriously. I could look at this kind of like one of my investments at the firm. Crunch some numbers, run some risk analysis, figure out the ROI.

ROBIN

I'm not sure-

CHRISTIAN

Hell, you meet the first criteria easily: it's an investment I believe in! I've never believed in anyone more than I believe in you.

ROBIN

Okay, Christian, I need you to slow down.

Robin ushers Christian to the couch and they both sit.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

It's very sweet of you to jump into supporting me like this. I'm more than grateful for how gung-ho you are. But I don't think I like the idea of you treating me as an "investment." Painting and art has always been something that I've loved, and all the business talk feels like it might suck the joy out of it for me.

Christian deflates.

CHRISTIAN

Okay. Okay, but can I say one more thing about it?

Robin CHUCKLES.

ROBIN

Sure. Make your pitch.

CHRISTIAN

I understand your concern. I really do. But I'm just asking you to trust me. If this was some Wall Street, cigar-smoking, gigantic firm just looking at the bottom line I would understand. But this is me. You know me. You can trust me.

ROBIN

Christian... I don't know-

CHRISTIAN

Let me just give you a vision of this, okay? I would pay for all your supplies.

ROBIN

You already do that.

CHRISTIAN

And an art studio? You finally can move this operation out of the garage and get some natural light in your life again. I'll find somewhere first thing in the morning. Maybe once things get rolling and you're getting commissions frequently I could get you a personal assistant. We could write off travel expenses. Please, Robin. I want to support you. Just let me support you on this.

Robin opens her mouth like she's about to protest, but the image he's painted in her mind has softened her. The more she looks at Christian's pleading face and the more she thinks about his plans, the more appealing it seems. Finally, she caves.

ROBIN

Alright. Let's do it.