

NOTES

Unsigned Paintings is a short play for two mature actors. This play should be performed by a male and female performer and may be entered in either Duo Interpretation or Duet Acting. The dynamics of the scene will be determined by the performers' ability to play moments. The scene takes place in the preparation room of a funeral home where Mark Stern, owner of the funeral home, is preparing a deceased person for a viewing; therefore, it is important that the actor portraying Mark to recreate realistic stage business for the task at hand. Each pantomimed task should be performed with the slow precision and methodical movements of an artist creating a masterpiece. Mark's wife, Jenna, has had emotional problems in the past. Being aware of this subtext will help determine the tone as each actor delivers his/her lines of dialogue. Oftentimes, the most engaging scenes are those that reflect moments taken from real life. Overall, this is a dramatic scene; however, there is a great deal of humor found within the script. Play that humor. Let the characters react to one another with 100% honesty. The drama mask icons are merely visible to show the performers where the ending of a teaser could be placed, if a teaser is desired.

Characters:

Mark Stern, the owner of Stern's Funeral Home

Jenna Stern, his wife

Setting:

The preparation room of Stern's Funeral Home

Jenna: So...you're still working?

Mark: Yes. This is taking longer than I expected.

Jenna: I see that. It's getting late.

Mark: You know what they say, "You can't rush a masterpiece."

Jenna: It's not like people will see your work for very long.

Mark: (*Slightly insulted*) Thanks.

Jenna: I mean, how long does a viewing or funeral last anyway?

Mark: It's important that this be as perfect as I can make it.

Jenna: She...she looks good.

Mark: Thanks.

Jenna: How did she...? What did they say was the cause of death?

Mark: Fracture of the skull...from a fall—internal bleeding and brain hemorrhaging.

Jenna: (*Suddenly realizing*) She's the one, isn't she? She's the one they've been talking about on the news. They think she might have been pushed down a flight of stairs or something. Aren't they investigating her husband?

Mark: They've questioned him—yes. They haven't pressed any charges or anything.

Jenna: So, he'll be there? For the funeral, I mean.

Mark: I don't think it would bode well for him if he *didn't* show up.

Jenna: No, I mean—I'll get to see him. See if he looks like the type that would...

Mark: You know, you don't have to go to every funeral with me.

Jenna: No. I want to go. It's important that I be there. You know that.

Mark: I do.

Jenna: So, I'm going.

Mark: Okay...



Mark: You're not going to make a scene are you?

Jenna: Of course not. Have I ever made a scene at a funeral?

Mark: Yes.

Jenna: When?

Mark: Remember the time when they were about to conclude the graveside service and that woman began to sing her hymn?

Jenna: (*Laughing*) I'd totally forgotten about that.

Mark: She started singing, "Jesus Is Calling," and just as she said those very words—your cell phone started ringing.

Jenna: Well, the real irony is that it was Jesus. He wanted to know if we wanted our hedges trimmed the next time he and his crew mowed the lawn.

Mark: (*Laughing*) It may have been the only service where technology served a higher purpose and made a few of the mourners born-again believers.

Jenna: I wonder how he'll act.

Mark: Who?

Jenna: Her husband. If he *did* do it, I want to know how he'll react at the service. Will he be remorseful and cry the whole time—wishing he could undo the crime? Or will he be reverent and try to act strong—all the while thinking deep down inside—that he can't wait until this funeral is over so he can take all of the life insurance money and hightail it to some exotic island?

Mark: What? You've already sentenced the guy? He's guilty—no trial or anything?

Jenna: They usually *are* guilty, you know...

Mark: You've been watching way too much television.

Jenna: Yes, I have! And that's exactly *why* I'll be able to tell if he's guilty or innocent when I watch him during the service!

Mark: That's it. You're not going.

Jenna: You'd be surprised at how much I've learned from some of the detective shows on television today. *CSI, Law and Order*—even the old reruns of *Murder, She Wrote*—they're all very educational. You know, most of those shows are based on real cases.

Mark: Says who?

Jenna: *TV Guide!*

Mark: Okay, you're not going—and that's final!

Jenna: Fine! *(Pauses and picks up one of the instruments on Mark's table)* I won't go.

Mark: Good. And don't play with any of my instruments! You know how I don't like anyone messing around with my tools down here.

Jenna: *(Slowly putting the instrument down and picking up a photograph)* You know, you really are an artist. *(Looking at Mark working)* She looks beautiful. *(Looking back at the photograph)* She looks just like the picture her family gave you. You—you really are talented. She looks like...a painting. You always make them look like paintings.

Mark: I think they look more like sculptures.

Jenna: No. They're paintings. Sure, they're three-dimensional, but what you do for these people is amazing. What you do for their families. It's a gift.

Mark: Compliment accepted.

Jenna: Seriously. You and I both know what most of these people look like when they come in here. I mean, some of them look—

Mark: *(Joking)* Dead?

Jenna: *(Laughing)* Stop it. I'm serious. Most people have no idea how different their loved ones look when they've been sitting in a morgue for a few days. Not to mention the ones who weren't found for days—or even weeks sometimes. The coloring...

Mark: Or lack thereof—

Jenna: You bring...I don't know—*life*—back into their faces.

Mark: I try.

Jenna: You do more than try, and you know it. *(Pause)* I'm proud of you.

Mark: Thank you. *(Beginning to work on the eyes)* This is always the trickiest part—the eyes.

Jenna: I would have thought it would be the mouth.

Mark: The mouth?

Jenna: Well, you wouldn't want the deceased to look 'smiley' or anything, but you also don't want them to look like they're scowling either. Yeah, I'd have thought the mouth would be the most difficult part of any reconstruction.