

HOLLIS: (*Laughs*) Enough of this bullshit. What do you know about the curatorial side of an art museum?

MERRITT: As much as a grantwriter needs to.

HOLLIS: Do you feel you can work within our structure?

MERRITT: I open structures.

HOLLIS: Aggressive. Nice. Saying what I want to hear. Think you've figured me out, my style?

MERRITT: I saw your *Ghosts of Modernism* show.

HOLLIS: Uh-huh?

MERRITT: Good thesis. Some nice selections.

HOLLIS: Some? *Newsweek* called it authoritative.

MERRITT: Too authoritative for my taste. The text panels were so definitive. And the poor, deceived public thinks any opinion put forth by an art museum is absolute fact, cultural gospel.

HOLLIS: This is the fault of my didactic panels?

MERRITT: Your opinion was disguised as fact. If you'd been a bit more speculative in the wall panels, people would have felt their own arguments were invited, if not actually valued.

HOLLIS: You're suggesting we encourage the public to *think* about art?

MERRITT: It's a more engaging approach.

HOLLIS: Engaging? Sounds like battle.

MERRITT: You enjoy battle.

HOLLIS: You're quick but completely full of shit.

MERRITT: Thank you. That's my job.

HOLLIS: To lie?

MERRITT: If I'm to make you look good. All grant applications are, by nature, lies. They outline hopes—which are lies. Plans, dreams, not reality. By no means reality. You're selling the funder a bill of goods, padding the budget to include overhead and hidden administrative costs.

HOLLIS: Your entire profession is therefore unethical.

MERRITT: I support your profession with my lies.

HOLLIS: But how good are you?

MERRITT: Since we sat down I've told you several lies, twice as many half-truths, and embellished most of the rest. Or not—maybe this is the lie. Can you sort it out?

(HOLLIS *shrugs*.)

MERRITT: Grantwriting.

HOLLIS: (*Standing*) I think I know what I need to know. I'll take you to Sidney.

MERRITT: (*Standing*) A fair assessment—that proves my point. You think you know what you need to know. Enough to create your own narrative.

HOLLIS: (*As they start walking*) I can see why you're looking for a job.

MERRITT: Pure speculation. Just like everyone else, you're addicted to narrative. It's the curse of modern society.

HOLLIS: People have craved stories since before *Gilgamesh*.

MERRITT: These days our narratives are too fractured. M T V, the internet. It's a struggle to figure out what's going on.

HOLLIS: We've adapted.

MERRITT: We just think we have. It puts us on edge, this sense of incompleteness, not knowing the end. We get insomnia, indigestion—some commit murder to compensate.

HOLLIS: Crap!

MERRITT: Most serial killers create narratives they can control. And they know their story will end not just with the deaths of their victims, but with their own capture, judgment and execution. A story with an ending, if not a happy one.

HOLLIS: (*Shaking hands*) Well, here's our happy ending—we must part. Sidney's right through there.

MERRITT: I take it you don't buy my theory.

HOLLIS: I don't buy shit.

MERRITT: Funny, I heard different from our curator of modern art.

HOLLIS: Valerie? If you take her seriously—

MERRITT: Not long after you were hired, hipster that you are, you developed a cocaine addiction that outstripped even your outrageous salary—

HOLLIS: What a bitch!

MERRITT: In order to pay for it you started taking kickbacks from dealers on some pretty crappy paintings you purchased for the museum—a lot of Kostabis if I'm not mistaken—

HOLLIS: You are mistaken—

MERRITT: But your debts kept piling up and you resorted to actually smuggling small art objects into the country from Europe and Japan—got caught once—

HOLLIS: What the fuck is she telling people? Who does she say this to?

MERRITT: Everybody. (*Peering*) Is that Sidney? But that's nothing compared to what you finally did—

HOLLIS: What?

SIDNEY: (*Appearing*) Are you Merritt? I'm Sidney. I'm on the development committee of the board.

MERRITT: (*Shaking hands*) Pleasure.

HOLLIS: What did I do?!

MERRITT: I don't think you want me to— (*Gestures toward SIDNEY*) —I need to talk to Sidney, and not about that—

HOLLIS: Here's my card.

MERRITT: (*Refusing the card*) You already gave me one.

HOLLIS: Call me or drop by as soon as—

MERRITT: Every minute is booked—

HOLLIS: When you get back to L A, then. From the airport, the plane!

MERRITT: I'll try.

(*HOLLIS disappears.*)

SIDNEY: You seem to have made quite an impression on Hollis.

MERRITT: (*Suddenly with a rather nasal southern accent that continues throughout the scene*) You know how folks get when they want to hear the ending of a good story.

SIDNEY: I've been hearing good stories about you.

MERRITT: Not a word of truth, I guarantee.

SIDNEY: (*Gesturing to a chair*) Something to drink? Soft drinks are all we have, I'm afraid. Which is no problem for me, because I don't drink. Alcohol.

MERRITT: Pity. A good rum-n-Coke would get me through these interviews right slick. Kidding.