

brushstroke
a short play (excerpt)
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*Scene: At stage L, a large easel holds a painting, perhaps 3 to 5 feet square. (It could also be resting against a wall or propped on something on the floor.) It's a modern piece, muted tones in many bold swaths and smaller strokes across the canvas. To anyone but Timothy, it appears quite finished—no gaps or empty places. To one side is a small table holding a palette with blobs of paint on it and several brushes. Standing in front of the painting is **GAVIN TAYLOR**, a man in his 30s to 40s, neatly dressed. At stage R, slouched in a chair, rubbing his eyes, is **TIMOTHY PARSONS**, the artist. He can be any age from late-20s to 50s. He's dressed in a casual, artsy style, but his clothes are not the paint-spattered kind typically used to say "artist." After the lights rise, a moment passes where Gavin is appreciating the painting.*

GAVIN My. Timothy, oh my.

TIM (*without looking*) Mm hmm.

GAVIN This is...magnificent.

TIM Hmm.

GAVIN I mean it's—I hate to sound gushy, but...it's so powerful. Stunning.

TIM You think so, huh?

GAVIN (*crossing back toward Tim*) I really do.

TIM Huh.

GAVIN Don't you think so?

TIM I wouldn't know.

GAVIN (*laughing*) The artist wouldn't know if his work was good?

TIM (*flatly*) It's hard to say until it's finished.

Pause. Gavin looks at Tim, then to the painting, then back to Tim.

GAVIN It's not done?

TIM (*with some exhaustion*) No. It's not done.

GAVIN Really? *(Walking back to the painting)* Because, you know, it honestly is quite—

TIM It's not done.

A tense pause.

GAVIN You could have fooled me.

TIM Apparently I did.

GAVIN Not done.

TIM No.

GAVIN How much longer do you figure before it is?

TIM Hard to say.

GAVIN How long has it been like this? Unfinished.

TIM Three weeks, maybe.

GAVIN Ah. *(He takes a few steps back and studies the painting.)*
You've made a good start.

TIM Very funny.

GAVIN So what is it missing? What is it going to take to finish it?

TIM One brushstroke.

Silence. Gavin looks at Timothy with a question on his lips.

TIM *(rising)* One brushstroke. Then it's done.

GAVIN Are you serious?

TIM *(crossing past him to regard the painting)* Quite.

GAVIN So you could finish it today. Now.

TIM No.

GAVIN No?

Timothy looks at the painting. Cocks his head. Shakes his head and walks back to the chair and sits wearily.

TIM No.

GAVIN May I ask why?

TIM I don't know that I have an answer for that.

GAVIN You're beginning to worry me, Timothy.

TIM Imagine how I feel.

Pause. Gavin regards Timothy, as if to gauge if he's serious. To some degree, Gavin feels that he's not. He picks up a brush from the table, walks back to Timothy and holds it out to him.

GAVIN Finish it. *(Pause.)* Come on, just finish it, then we'll go have a drink to celebrate. I'm buying.

TIM Just like that?

GAVIN Just like that. *(He walks back toward the canvas.)* Let me see it happen. One brushstroke and be done with it!

TIM Just like that.

GAVIN Come on.

TIM Where does it go? *(Pause.)* If it's so patently simple, Gavin, then help me out here. Where is it supposed to go?

GAVIN It's not my work.

TIM *(rising and crossing)* No, no, no, no—you don't back out like that. You don't just merrily tell me to pick up my brush and finish my painting and then say you don't know how.

GAVIN But I—

TIM Come on! Tell me where it goes! Tell me how to finish it! *(He snatches the brush from Gavin and waves it at the canvas)* Does it go here? Huh? Up in this corner? No? Here? The middle? Where? Where, Gavin? Show me exactly where! How long should it be? How wide? How wide should it be? Which brush do I use? Do you know? And what color? Tell me what color. Huh? What color finishes it? Is it brown? Is it sort of brown? Is it blue, Gavin? Is it? Is it blue? What if it's not blue, Gavin? What then? WHAT IF IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE BLUE? *(He throws the brush down, storms across stage and kicks the chair. He stands with his back to Gavin.)*

A lengthy, tense silence.

GAVIN I didn't want—I meant no disrespect, Timothy.

TIM I know.

GAVIN I didn't know. How could I know?

TIM I understand that. *(He turns.)*

GAVIN Do you want to talk about it?

Timothy thinks a moment. He crosses to the brush, wherever it is, picks it up and puts it back on the table with the palette.

TIM Probably. And I probably should. But to tell you the truth, I'm not sure I'd know what to say. Or what I need to say.

GAVIN Just tell me what's going on.

Timothy turns and smiles at him, but it's a sharp smile, almost a smirk.

TIM That's what I like about you, Gavin. You have this firm, simple belief in the absolute black and whiteness of things.

GAVIN Are you going to insult me again?

TIM No! No, you've got it wrong. I mean that. I mean, you genuinely believe that whatever's going on with me, with me not finishing this painting for three weeks, can just be drawn out somehow by you asking me what's going on. That there's got to be this one thing that constitutes the entire problem.

GAVIN *(simply)* Isn't there?