

The Portrait From The Artist Who Was An Idiot

By Zack Percy

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Cast of Characters

MICHAEL ANGELO	A scheming artist.
CLAIRE ANGELO	Michael's loyal partner.
ROBERT GILMORE	Michael's old friend, rich.
SAM GILMORE	Robert's wife, rich.

A note on casting: Gender and ethnicity are irrelevant in the telling of this story. Names can be changed if thought necessary by the director.

Synopsis: Michael Angelo, a starving artist, and his lovely wife have a dinner party with their newly-millionaired friends. But this dinner party is also an opportunity for Michael to show off his latest work: a wall-length painting of the viewing audience.

SETTING: The dining room of the Angelo household. There is a table set for a nice dinner with two chairs in the middle facing the audience and a chair on each end of the table.

AT RISE: CLAIRE ANGELO is putting some final touches on the table. She looks up at the audience, sadly sighs, and continues working on the table. MICHAEL ANGELO enters pleased as punch. He also looks at the audience, contently sighs, and goes to his wife.

MICHAEL

Isn't it just wonderful, sweetheart?

CLAIRE

What?

MICHAEL

My new painting! I just can't stop looking at it. It's a real masterpiece, don't you think?

CLAIRE

It's something, Michael. It really is.

MICHAEL

Do you think Robert and Sam will like it?

CLAIRE

They better like it. This whole night better go off without a hitch.

MICHAEL

Don't worry. Everything is going to work perfectly. Just stay in character.

CLAIRE

I'm always in character.

[Knock-Knock]

MICHAEL

They're here! I have to go prepare myself in the bathroom mirror. Don't let them say anything about anything until I get back!

CLAIRE

I'll try.

MICHAEL exits in a flash and
ROBERT and SAM enter.

ROBERT

Sorry we're late.

SAM

We got held up at the bank. Robert was making friends.

ROBERT

It's not my fault the bank president wanted to meet me.

SAM

We were going to bring some appetizers and wine, but I completely forgot them at the house.

CLAIRE

Oh it's fine! Dinner's all set anyway, we were just waiting.

ROBERT notices the painting
and stares flabbergasted.

SAM

What are you looking..

SAM also notices the
painting.

ROBERT

What in the world...?

SAM

You have a studio audience in your dining room.

ROBERT

What. In. The. WORLD?

CLAIRE

SHHH! Don't let Michael hear you!

SAM

Does he not know that it's here?

ROBERT

Because this is a terrible surprise.

CLAIRE

No! It's not a surprise. Michael knows it's here. He's the one
that painted it.

ROBERT

Why?

CLAIRE

He's an artist now.

SAM

An artist?

CLAIRE

Yes. He quit his job to pursue his...passion.

ROBERT

He quit?!

CLAIRE

Yes.

SAM

How could you let him do that?

CLAIRE

I didn't let him do anything! He left one morning with a job and when he came home it was gone. Just like that.

SAM

Just like that...

ROBERT

Where is this supposed to be?

CLAIRE

Some little run-down theater he used to work for. The seats were very uncomfortable. And there was a very distinct smell...

ROBERT

They all look terrible!

SAM

Robert!

ROBERT

Well they do, Sam! Just look at that guy! And her in the corner! I've heard of "impressionist" work, but this is ridiculous.

SAM

Keep quiet, Michael will hear you.

ROBERT

She looks nice. Right in the center there. Do you see her, Sam? Wow-o-Wow what a looker. Too bad she's with that Neanderthal. Him Tarzan. Her Jane.

SAM

Calm down, Robert. It's just a picture.

ROBERT

Well-

CLAIRE

Shhh...here he comes. Be nice. I think he's very fragile right now. I need you two to convince him to take his job back. He has to go back to work. Our savings are almost dried up.

SAM

Don't worry. We'll all get the bottom of this.

MICHAEL enters.

MICHAEL

Oh! Sam and Robert! I wasn't aware you two would be here so soon! Welcome!

ROBERT

We just noticed your wall.

MICHAEL

Oh, that old thing? Yes, it's new actually. Only the best for my wife. I bet you'll never guess the crafter.

an awkward pause.

SAM

Salvadore Dali?

MICHAEL
Nope.

ROBERT
Banksy?

MICHAEL
Not at all.

SAM
Was it...

MICHAEL
ENOUGH GUESSING. It was I!

ROBERT
Really?

MICHAEL
Yes, yes. Just a hobby of mine. I know it's terrible. I'll probably just put a coat of white over it tomorrow.

ROBERT
Oh, no Michael it's... great.

MICHAEL
You're just saying that.

SAM
No, no Michael it's really well done.

ROBERT
I was just saying how much I liked the woman up front here.

MICHAEL
Yes, yes. She was my Mona Lisa. There are a few oddballs that made their way in though.

ROBERT

Oh, yes! I see one towards the back there. With their arms crossed. No sense of style.

SAM

There's another one right in front! Classic front row ugly face. Distracting, really.

ROBERT

And over there as well! Hideous. That haircut.

MICHAEL

Well enough looking at the painting. Let's all sit down to a nice meal and just ignore it.

MICHAEL and CLAIRE take their places on opposite sides of the table. SAM and ROBERT sit in the two chairs facing the audience.

CLAIRE

So have you two been? How are you feeling?

ROBERT

Uh... Self-conscious.

SAM

We've been fine. Right Robert?

ROBERT

All the world's a stage.... What? Oh yes, well we've been a little better than fine.

CLAIRE

Yeah, we saw on the news you won the Mega Millions jackpot.

SAM

It really was a surprise.

ROBERT

We plan on staying exactly the same though.

SAM

Definitely. We just want to pay off all of our bills and Toby's college expenses.

CLAIRE

I wouldn't rule out any extravagant purchases, though! I mean you have enough money.

ROBERT

We wouldn't know what to buy.

CLAIRE

You'll need something that shows you have great taste. Speaking of, I'll go get the main dish.

CLAIRE exits.

SAM

So, Michael, Claire tells us you left your job?

MICHAEL

I did. I just knew that this was my calling. Sure, money has been tight lately, but hey who cares. I know I'll make it big soon. Who needs cable, electricity, and starting next week heat... when you're entertained and warmed in the soul by a great work of art.

ROBERT

If you two need any help....

MICHAEL

No, no, no. Not with this baby up for sale. It'll be sold in no time and then we'll have millionaire parties together with champagne and gold and stuff.

CLAIRE re-enters.

CLAIRE

Sorry it isn't much everyone. Hope you like bread. It's only a day old. And we have some tap water with a few ice cubes for flavor.

SAM

Oh! How... lovely! I'll help you cut the bread.

ROBERT

Michael, can I talk to you in private for a moment...

MICHAEL

Sure, Robert.

MICHAEL and ROBERT walk to center stage in front of the table looking at the painting.

ROBERT

You know, Michael, we've been friends since college.

MICHAEL

Oh, I know. I still have our class ring....Oh right I had to pawn that for paint supplies...

ROBERT

You know if you need any financial help at all, you can come to me. Especially now.

MICHAEL

We don't need any help. This baby is going to sell! You'll see. Times are tough, but I don't want a hand-out, Robert.

ROBERT

Fine, I'll buy it.

CLAIRE

What?

ROBERT

How much do you want for it?

CLAIRE

Robert, are you sure?

SAM

Sure, we're sure. It really is...great. We'd love to have it in our home.

ROBERT

Yeah, I can't wait to wake up every morning and see that face staring back at me.

MICHAEL

I named that one [AUDIENCE MEMBER]

SAM

Well I love [AUDIENCE MEMBER]. I love them all. Robert get out your checkbook.

ROBERT

Way ahead of you. Michael, how much?

MICHAEL

I couldn't take your money. It goes against every principle I have.

The lights dim to show the power's gone out.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Well maybe I could take some...

SAM

How much do you need to get back on your feet?

CLAIRE

Well we haven't really thought about it...Maybe...

MICHAEL

Two million.

ROBERT

TWO MILLION?!

SAM

I think that sounds perfectly reasonable...for such a lovely piece.

MICHAEL

It is an investment, after all. When I sell more pieces, the value of this original masterpiece will skyrocket.

ROBERT

RIGHT.....reasonable.....let me just write you the check. You can take that down and wrap it up.

MICHAEL

Oh I can't take it down.

SAM

Why not.

CLAIRE

It's painted on the wall.

ROBERT

Excuse me?

MICHAEL

You'll have to pay some construction workers to take the wall out and replace it for us. Obviously that wouldn't be covered in the two million though. That's your expense to figure out.

ROBERT

GREAT. I'll call tomorrow... Here's your check.

CLAIRE

This money will really help.

SAM

I'm sure it will. Well I think we've had enough excitement for one night.

ROBERT

Agreed. Very nice to stop by, sorry we couldn't have any dinner.

MICHAEL

Oh it's fine. I'll invite you over when I finish my next creation!

SAM

We can't wait to see it. We'll send some gentlemen in the morning to collect the...wall.

CLAIRE

Sounds great! Have a good night.

ROBERT takes one last look at the wall, sighs, and exits.

MICHAEL

You see honey, I told you it would work.

CLAIRE

I never doubted you. Do you feel a little bad?

MICHAEL

Bad? Honey they won the lottery, they can afford to get scammed once or twice.

CLAIRE

I guess you're right. So what do we do now?

MICHAEL

Skip town, meet some more friends who recently won the lottery, pull the starving artist routine again. Next time though, we should just print a big picture instead of painting. It took way too long.

MICHAEL pulls out a camera.

MICHAEL (cont.)

Smile everyone! Say: "Pay The Artist!"

MICHAEL takes a picture of the audience. The camera flashes.

BLACK OUT.

END OF PLAY.