

the beginning of

I WAS FINE UNTIL YOU CAME IN THE ROOM

(from **SINFULLY RICH**)

a short comedy by Rich Orloff

Time: Mid-afternoon, 51 years ago

Place: An art gallery

Characters: YOUNG PETE, a slightly shy and awkward man in her 20's
OLD PETE, 51 years older than Young Pete
YOUNG HELEN, a slightly shy and awkward woman in her 20's
OLD HELEN, 51 years older than Young Helen

As the play begins, OLD HELEN and OLD PETE stand on opposite sides of the stage, facing the audience. They will narrate this tale.

The center of the stage is an art gallery, which can be represented by... well, nothing if you'd like.

OLD HELEN

I know it was a, well, naughty thing to do, but I decided not to tell anyone my shrink was on vacation. I mean, in those days you didn't even tell anyone you were seeing a shrink. And you know, I worked hard in that office; there were no computers then, and every time some bozo executive wanted to change one word in a letter, I had to retype the whole thing. That hour away from work helped me get through the week. So even if my therapist was away, I knew that a break from my desk would be therapeutic.

OLD PETE

I had just finished a meeting with my lawyer. My lawyer had two clocks in his office. I think this was so regardless of where he was standing, he could talk long enough to bill you for another quarter hour. I don't even remember what the meeting was about. Yes I do. It was about fifteen minutes too long.

OLD HELEN

I drove to my therapist's neighborhood, so that you know if someone found me playing hooky, at least I was playing hooky in the right neighborhood. I took a walk and passed an art gallery I had passed dozens of times but never had the time to look in. Today I had the time.

YOUNG HELEN enters the art gallery.

OLD PETE

After my stupid meeting with my stupid lawyer, I needed to blow off steam before I got into my stupid car. It was a used Ford, and at the time, driving a used Ford was like eating a used hamburger. I passed by this art gallery. I had never gone in one, probably because they're filled with, you know, paintings. Not sure why I went in this time. Something inside my head just said, "Go in." And I was tired of arguing, even with myself.

YOUNG PETE enters the art gallery.

OLD HELEN

This guy entered the room. I became anxious. Not because I was particularly attracted to him. Or *not* attracted to him. I had just liked being alone, staring at paintings that made no sense whatsoever to me. They kinda symbolized my life.

OLD PETE

There was this girl in the room. Kinda cute, in a "I don't believe I'm cute" kind of way. I didn't want her to think I came in the gallery just to look at her, so I looked at one of the paintings. I have to be honest with you. She was much cuter than the painting.

OLD HELEN

I thought, a guy who likes art. Without being dragged into a gallery by a woman. He must be an art critic. Or maybe gay. Being gay had just started being trendy then.

OLD PETE

So I'm looking at this painting, which looks like very colorful vomit. I look at the price, and suddenly I feel like producing my *own* very colorful vomit.

OLD HELEN

Look at how he stares at that painting. He looks like he's completely bored. Yep, he's an art critic. Probably a *gay* art critic.

OLD PETE

I think I'd like to talk to her. But what should I say? God, I hate having to come up with pick-up lines. Stop pressuring yourself. You'll give yourself a stroke, and your doctor charges even more than your lawyer. All you have to do is come up with something smart, witty, friendly, not forced, not clumsy, not overbearing, and totally irresistible. But what brilliant and engaging thing can I possibly say that will make her want to have a conversation with me?

Young Pete walks up to Young Helen. She notices.

YOUNG PETE

Hi.

OLD HELEN

Well, I guess he's not gay. What should I do? Should I ignore him? Should I talk to him? I need to think of something quick before he thinks I'm weird. But what should I say, what should I say, what should I say?

YOUNG HELEN

Hi.

OLD PETE

My turn already?! I don't have a follow-up!