



BAKERSFIELD MIST

BY **STEPHEN SACHS**



DRAMATISTS
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INC.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Although inspired in part by a true incident, the characters and events in *Bakersfield Mist* are fictionalized and are not intended to accurately depict or resemble any actual person or event, living or dead. Names, characters, places and incidents have been changed for dramatic purposes.

BAKERSFIELD MIST received its world premiere at the Fountain Theatre (Deborah Lawlor and Stephen Sachs, Co-Artistic Directors) in Los Angeles, California, on June 11, 2011. It was produced by Simon Levy and Deborah Lawlor. It was directed by Stephen Sachs; the set design was by Jeff McLaughlin; the costume design was by Shon LeBlanc; the lighting design was by Ken Booth; the music and sound design was by Peter Bayne; and the production stage manager was Terri Roberts. The cast was as follows:

MAUDE GUTMAN Jenny O’Hara
LIONEL PERCY Nick Ullett

BAKERSFIELD MIST was first presented in the UK at the Duchess Theatre in the West End, London, on May 27, 2014. It was produced by Nica Burns and Sonia Friedman Productions, in association with TC Beech Ltd., Tulchin Bartner Productions, Chris & Kelbe Bensinger, and Darren Bagert/Martin Massman/ShadowCatcher Entertainment. It was directed by Polly Teale; the set and costume design were by Tom Piper; and the lighting design was by Oliver Fenwick. The cast was as follows:

MAUDE GUTMAN Kathleen Turner
LIONEL PERCY Ian McDiarmid

BAKERSFIELD MIST was first produced in a rolling world premiere by the Fountain Theatre (California) and New Repertory Company (Massachusetts) as part of the National New Play Network’s Continues Life program.

CHARACTERS

MAUDE GUTMAN, an unemployed bartender.

LIONEL PERCY, an art expert.

PLACE

A trailer park in Bakersfield, CA.
The trailer home of Maude Gutman.

TIME

Present day.

BAKERSFIELD MIST

A trailer park in Bakersfield, California. The home of Maude Gutman. Afternoon. Lights up. Her trailer is uniquely furnished with an odd assortment of thrift store artifacts. Odds and ends, bric-a-brac. Bizarre lamps. A collection of bottles. A pile of newspapers. Cluttered.

Maude sits at a table drinking Jack Daniel's from a shot glass. She fires up a Camel. She grips a letter in her hand. Studies it. Thinks. Struggles. Takes a hit on her Camel. Blows out the smoke. A sudden cacophony of barking dogs howl and yap outside her front door.

MAUDE. Shit. (*Quickly stashes the letter in a tin box. She dashes to the door. Flings it open. Screaming outside to the dogs:*) Get the fuck outta here! You hear me? Get the fuck outta here! (*To her visitor outside.*) No, sir. Not you. I'm talking to the — (*To the barking dogs.*) Will you get the fuck outta here? (*To her visitor.*) Just stand there. Don't move. They won't bite if you don't move. If you move, they're gonna — (*More barking.*) You moved. (*Hollers outside to a neighbor.*) Roberta! Get your fucking dogs! I got somebody over here! Get your dogs or I'll get my gun and blow their fucking brains out! (*Sound of dogs yelping, being pulled away. Barking dogs swirling off into the distance. To her visitor outside:*) Okay! Come on in! (*Lionel Percy stumbles in through the front door. An elegant, refined, gray-haired gentleman in his sixties. A very expensive tailored suit. Clutching an expensive briefcase. He is shaking, terrified.*) I keep telling Roberta those dogs are gonna kill somebody. Who listens to me? Right? Nobody. Come on in. Sit down. (*He doesn't move.*) They only bark like that when strangers come. We don't get many visitors here. Have a seat. Relax. (*Lionel glances at the nearest chair — a bizarre-looking, oddly-colored monstrosity.*) Roberta never had kids of her

own. The dogs are her babies. Spoils 'em rotten. They eat at the kitchen table with her. Can you believe it? At the table. In chairs. Hamburger. Pork chops.

LIONEL. Water.

MAUDE. The water she puts in a bowl on the floor.

LIONEL. May I please have a —

MAUDE. — Oh, yeah — My manners. Out the fucking window. (*Getting a glass, going to the sink.*) I'm nervous. I gotta tell ya. You coming all the way out here. Across the country. I've waited so long. Now you're here. I can't hardly believe it.

LIONEL. Neither can I.

MAUDE. My whole life can change in the next thirty seconds. (*Holds out her hand.*) I'm shaking.

LIONEL. I'm having a seizure.

MAUDE. (*At the sink, looking out the window.*) Who's the gent outside?

LIONEL. The driver.

MAUDE. Bring him in.

LIONEL. The dogs have persuaded him to stay in the car.

MAUDE. I don't want him waiting out there by himself.

LIONEL. (*Eyeing her bizarre place.*) Don't worry. This won't take long.

MAUDE. (*Brings him the glass of water.*) Here ya go. (*Holds up her glass of Jack Daniel's.*) You want a little something else 'sides water?

LIONEL. I'm working.

MAUDE. It'll take the edge off.

LIONEL. I'll keep the edge on, if you don't mind.

MAUDE. Any trouble finding the place?

LIONEL. Actually, yes. The address of your trailer park didn't appear on the limo's navigational system.

MAUDE. Hah! That's us. Off the beaten path. How was your flight?

LIONEL. I'm here.

MAUDE. What was the movie?

LIONEL. No movie.

MAUDE. All the way from New York? No movie?

LIONEL. I'm afraid not.

MAUDE. Fucking airlines. Cutting everything. I flew to Des Moines to visit my cousin Frannie 'cause of her gallbladder. They charged me for a pillow. Can you believe it? A fucking pillow! Next they'll run your credit card every time you go to the toilet. Don't get me started. What you fly? Sounds like Delta.

LIONEL. The Foundation has a jet.

MAUDE. Oh.

LIONEL. Shall we get down to business?

MAUDE. Yeah. All right.

LIONEL. The Foundation assigned me as the consulting expert on this case. I, of course, am Lionel Percy.

MAUDE. Maude Gutman.

LIONEL. You know who I am.

MAUDE. I hit the fucking jackpot.

LIONEL. There is a long list of small-time mediocre art experts.

MAUDE. I bet.

LIONEL. I am not on that list.

MAUDE. I gotta thank you. Taking my case. Flying all the way out here. Such an important, busy man. You must have better things to do.

LIONEL. You have no idea.

MAUDE. Why did they assign you to my painting, do you think?

LIONEL. I now teach Abstract Expressionism at Princeton University. Prior to that, for twelve years I served as curator, and then director, for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (*A look to her.*) That's in New York City. (*Organizing his paperwork.*) After leaving the Met, for seven years I was editor-in-chief at *Connoisseur* magazine.

MAUDE. Never read it.

LIONEL. (*Glancing about the room.*) Indeed. (*Then.*) In addition to teaching, I now serve on the board at the Whitney, the Frick, and the Museum of Modern Art. I am a lecturer. The author of several books. Two on the *Times* Best Seller list. Many now considered classic texts. *The History of Art in Western Civilization*, *The Chronology of Modern Art in America*, *The Symbolist Aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism*. (*Directly at her.*) *Art for Dummies*.

MAUDE. Can I get you a beer?

LIONEL. No, thank you. (*She bolts up.*)

MAUDE. Shit! I nearly forgot! I made a little something. You hungry?

LIONEL. No.

MAUDE. Nothing fancy.

LIONEL. I was about to say —

MAUDE. You look thin. You should eat. (*She fetches the plate.*)

LIONEL. (*Trying to stay on topic.*) The International Foundation for Art Research —

MAUDE. Just a little nibble.

LIONEL. — is a world-class —

MAUDE. A little whatcha-call-it.

LIONEL. — recognized world-wide as the foremost art organization —

MAUDE. (*Presenting the tray before him.*) Ta-da! Here ya go. (*Proud.*) Don't be shy. Help yourself. They're little wiener rolls. I made them myself. (*Pointing.*) With Velveeta. (*Pointing.*) Without. (*A beat.*)

LIONEL. Perhaps later.

MAUDE. Should I get the painting now?

LIONEL. Paperwork first. Shall we? (*Pulling folders from his briefcase.*) Among its many goals, the Foundation for Art Research strives to prevent the circulation of forged, misattributed, or misappropriated art. Proving forgeries is a personal crusade of mine. I like to think of myself as a fakebuster.

MAUDE. My painting is not a fake.

LIONEL. Well, if you're the expert, then what am I doing here?

MAUDE. I need you.

LIONEL. How flattering.

MAUDE. We'll see.

LIONEL. The Foundation draws on an international network of art scholars and experts from around the world, of global eminence — that would be me — to provide expertise to the public. That would be you. To verify the authenticity of works of art. We only accept a very limited number of projects like this each year. We receive hundreds of applications. From all over the world. Few are chosen.

MAUDE. You must really think my painting is real.

LIONEL. (*Opens her file.*) Your application. The two color photographs you sent of the painting. A photocopy of the non-refundable deposit. The full balance of the fee. The name on your checks: he is?

MAUDE. My brother.

LIONEL. I see.

MAUDE. I don't have the money for any of this.

LIONEL. Is there a Mister Gutman?

MAUDE. There was.

LIONEL. Was?

MAUDE. He's gone.

LIONEL. Dead?

MAUDE. Let's hope.

LIONEL. And how long have you resided here at ... Sagebrush Trailer Park?

MAUDE. Thirty-three years.

LIONEL. By yourself?

MAUDE. Sometimes. (*A sly wink at him.*) Sometimes not. (*She gives him an “if you catch my drift” kind of look.*)

LIONEL. Occupation?

MAUDE. Bartender.

LIONEL. Of course.

MAUDE. Was.

LIONEL. I see.

MAUDE. They fired me. I quit. (*Downs her drink.*)

LIONEL. You are certainly not the standard art collector I typically encounter.

MAUDE. This is me, pal.

LIONEL. (*A smug chuckle.*) I hardly see you sipping Clos du Mesnil with Diane Von Furstenberg at Acquavella evaluating de Kooning. (*He chuckles at his own joke.*)

MAUDE. I'd rather stay home with a sixer and watch *Dancing with the Stars*. Can I bring in the fucking painting now?

LIONEL. (*Hands her documents.*) I need you to sign this agreement.

MAUDE. What's it say?

LIONEL. That you fully understand that my job is to render an objective expert opinion on the authenticity of the painting. That I am forbidden from offering you a monetary appraisal. (*She stares at him. Blank.*) If I believe that the painting is authentic, I cannot tell you how much the painting may be worth. Do you understand?

MAUDE. I understand.

LIONEL. I have no interest whatsoever in this outcome.

MAUDE. Okay.

LIONEL. Do you understand?

MAUDE. Yeah. Okay.

LIONEL. After seeing and evaluating the painting, I will check one of the two boxes on this form. “Yes,” I do believe the painting to be authentic. “No,” I do not. A fully written report outlining my findings and stating my opinion as to authenticity and attribution will be mailed to you from New York.

MAUDE. Got it.

LIONEL. Sign here.

MAUDE. (*Starts to sign. Stops.*) So — how much do you think my painting could be worth? (*He stares at her.*)

LIONEL. Did you not hear a single word I just said?

MAUDE. I heard.

LIONEL. I am forbidden to —

BAKERSFIELD MIST

by Stephen Sachs

1M, 1W

Maude, a fifty-something unemployed bartender living in a trailer park, has bought a painting for a few bucks from a thrift store. Despite almost trashing it, she's now convinced it's a lost masterpiece by Jackson Pollock worth millions. But when world-class art expert Lionel Percy flies over from New York and arrives at her trailer home in Bakersfield to authenticate the painting, he has no idea what he is about to discover. Inspired by true events, this hilarious and thought-provoking new comedy-drama asks vital questions about what makes art and people truly authentic.

"Not to be missed! [BAKERSFIELD MIST] tackles large creative questions with well-timed zingers."

—Vanity Fair

"Thoroughly entertaining ... Put a smile on my face and kept my brain buzzing for a good while afterward."

—The Times (London)

"Wonderfully funny! Entertaining ... one of the best plays on now in London. Terrific! Definitely the genuine article."

—The Telegraph (London)

"Sachs' short, clever play is a battle of wits."

—The New York Times

"It's exhilarating in the extreme when a play strikes rich on every conceivable level. A wry two-hander that handles highbrow artistic issues while zinging in plenty of uproarious one-liners. A perfect marriage of emotion and ideas that is rare indeed."

—Los Angeles Times

"A triumph! Hugely gratifying! An absorbing, hilarious two-hander about the nature of art and the vagaries of human perception."

—Backstage

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