

VINCENT AND ADDIE

by

Matthew Gutschick

CHARACTERS

VINCENT VAN GOGH	Late 30s. Left ear lobe partially cut off.
ADDIE RAVOUX	12 years old.
ARTHUR RAVOUX	40s. An inn-keeper and wine seller.
ADELINE RAVOUX	40s. His wife.
MARTINEZ DE VALDIVIELSE	Late 30s. A Cuban artist living in France. Full of food and bombast.
RENEE SECRETAN	13 years old. The son of a wealthy man.
PAUL LOUVET	12. Thinks he is the son of a wealthy man.

SCENE ONE

(A pool of light. A young girl. A sunflower. A chord at once entirely realistic and yet almost supernatural, of an excessive nature where limitless possibility and inextinguishable light break through an orchestra of broken instruments. It is not a wholly pleasant sound. Gradually, the chord breaks apart and each component part fades away)

ADDIE

Monsieur Van Gogh, Vincent, is gone. My friend, is gone.

But the sublime remains.

He is a legend now. I write this so that legends will fade and the sublime is what remains.

In May of 1890, my family had only recently moved to Auvers-sur-Oise, a small town by a river in the countryside, some distance from Paris. Paris, where we used to live.

(The entire exterior of Augberge Ravoux is revealed. Cafe tables face the street. Arthur is already setting glasses on them.)

ARTHUR

Addie, what are you doing with that flower? Monsieur Martinez will be here to take his breakfast at any minute.

ADDIE

I was just looking at it.

ARTHUR

Your mother is almost finished with the quiche and the rolls. Fetch them for me please.

(She sets the sunflower in a vase on one of the cafe tables.)

ADDIE

Ok.

ARTHUR

(Calling inside after her.)

We have a new guest coming this afternoon.
We will all need to move a little faster.
Not everyone has a temperament as agreeable
as Martinez. We have been lucky to have
him. The Spanish are a very forgiving
bunch.

(Addie re-emerges, rolls in
hand.)

ADDIE

There's only one other hotel out here.

MOTHER

(Stepping outside to give Addie
the quiche)

Addie. You forgot the quiche.

(Germaine cries from inside and
Mother rushes back to her.)

ADDIE

I just don't see why we have to kill
ourselves making this a Paris hostel.

ARTHUR

Well the Parisians will be out here very
soon enough on summer visits. Looking for
fresh air and sacrificing none of their
expectations for swift service.

ADDIE

I guess we will have to put Germaine to work
then, won't we?

ARTHUR

Addie. She's two.

ADDIE

And whiney.

ARTHUR

Stop. That's your sister.

ADDIE

And I love her so much.

ARTHUR

That's it Addie. I won't have us using love
as a weapon in this family. I know you
aren't happy here. I understand that Addie.

But that just means we need to stick together all the more. I need my sweet little girl back. I can't run this inn without her. Where did she go?

ADDIE

She's in Paris.

ARTHUR

Well she better show up in Auvers soon.

ADDIE

I just have no one to talk to out here.

ARTHUR

You can always talk to me and your mother.

ADDIE

She doesn't even see me. She only cares Germaine.

ARTHUR

You know that isn't true. Give me those napkins. Here's how you fold them. Addie, your sister-

ADDIE

Is sick. I know. I know that all too well. Every time I miss Marie or Lucienne I remember why we are here.

ARTHUR

The city was not good for Germaine. Or your mother. You will make new friends. Trust me. We need you Addie. We need that smile back my darling.

ADDIE

I'm trying Papa. I really am.

ARTHUR

How does this sound? After breakfast is served, you may go down to the river park.

(Martinez enters in a hurry. He is well put together and gregarious)

MARTINEZ

Adieu!

ARTHUR

Adieu Martinez.

MARTINEZ

Exquisite sunrise this morning. Did you see it? Very good for painting. I ran out of yellow I used so much. All I have left is a couple shades of Indigo and a dung brown. That won't work for a sunset will it? I'll have to catch the ten-thirty to Paris and visit Goupil to buy some yellows, so I must eat quickly.

(He swipes a piece of the quiche, meant for him or not.)
Can't smear this quiche across my canvas can I? Such a nice baby chicken shade of yellow. Mmm. Delectable! Absolutely delicious quiche. I have to give my compliments to the chef personally.

(He enters the Inn)

ADDIE

Tell me again why we needed the napkins.

ARTHUR

(Following Martinez into the building.)
I better make sure he doesn't eat everything in the house.

ADDIE

We can't afford that.

RENEE

(Offstage)
Yeehaw!

PAUL

(Offstage)
Moo!

(Addie steps over to see where the boys' voices are from. She quickly ducks back behind a table when they enter. The two boys emerge, linked by a rope with which Renee has clearly lassoed Paul)

PAUL

Moo. Moo. Moo! Ok Renee, let me go.

RENEE

Not until you fall over.

PAUL

These are new pants. My mother will kill-

(Renee gives the rope a yank and
Paul falls to the ground)

Ah!

RENEE

Got you.

PAUL

Alright, my turn to be the cowboy.

RENEE

Oh sorry, I think the rope will only work
for me.

PAUL

That's not true. Give it here and run out
there.

RENEE

I'm not cut out for being the cow. I'm too
good of a lassoer. Besides, you moo so
realistically.

PAUL

(snatching the other end of the
lasso)

Give it here.

RENEE

I'm not being your cow Paul.

PAUL

I'll make you my cow.

(Renee tries to avoid Paul's aim
as they struggle. Paul
eventually tosses the lasso,
errantly striking Addie with it,
which forces them to notice each
other.)

RENEE

I hear you are new in town.

ADDIE

...I hear you like cowboys.

PAUL

We like cowboys.

ADDIE

I see that.

RENEE

I've seen real ones. I bought my hat off of 'em.

ADDIE

A real cowboy? In France?

RENEE

I went to this crazy show with real Indians and real horses and real tepees and real people. It was called Buffalo Bill's Wild West. From America.

PAUL

But we are from Paris.

ADDIE

So am I.

RENEE

I only live here in the summers. Cool air and all that, Dad says. You like it?

ADDIE

Not really.

RENEE

Me neither. I'm Renee Secretan.

ADDIE

Adeline Ravoux. Addie.

PAUL

I'm Paul Louvet.

RENEE

I hear your mom makes good food.

ADDIE

She does. I help too sometimes.

RENEE

Did you help with this here breakfast?

ADDIE

I'm helping now. I've got to get the tables ready.

RENEE

Oh. Then you could share a little couldn't you?

PAUL

Mmm. These rolls smell amazing.

ADDIE

The rolls are for the guests.

PAUL

How many do you need for this breakfast anyways?

ADDIE

No.

RENEE

What? You have to save them all for the crazy loon. Does he eat ten of them a day to make up for having no ear.

ADDIE

No ear?

RENEE

Then you haven't seen him yet. I can't believe we are the ones to tell you.

(Paul starts doing an impression of what he thinks a "crazy" person does. Rolling around grabbing his ear, making odd noises)

I heard Dr. Gachet, you know him? He's the guy with white hair who lives on top of the hill. He's got this patient, calls himself a painter. He's so crazy his own brother kicked him out of his house. I heard he's coming to live at your inn. No place else would take him because he cut off his own ear.

ADDIE

That's not true.

RENEE

The best part is that once he gets here, nobody is going to want to stay at your place. Because of all the weeping and screaming.

ADDIE

(to Paul)

RENEE

I mean, my dad knows a lot of people from Paris who come out here to stay for the weekend. City folk with a lot of money. Wouldn't it be nice if he said good things about your little inn?

PAUL

Mmm. These rolls smell amazing.

ADDIE

The rolls are for the guests.

PAUL

How many do you need for this breakfast anyways?

RENEE

She's not going to share Paul. That's OK. Let's go.

PAUL

Ok.

ADDIE

Where are you going?

PAUL

Down to the river. It's my turn to be the cowboy.

RENEE

(beginning to leave)

Hope the rolls are good. Let's go Paul.

ADDIE

You can have one!...they're only rolls I suppose.

PAUL

(taking one and eating it)

Amazing!

RENEE

(doing the same)

These are really good. Thank you.

ADDIE

You're welcome.

RENEE

Just like Maison Stohrer in Paris.

ADDIE

I love that place! The eclaires that melt in your mouth. I can smell the sweet air of that place now.

RENEE

We should go there sometime. Take the 10:30 train and be back by dinner.

(Paul starts stuffing rolls into his pockets until there are none left)

ADDIE

Have you ever been to the opera house? My dad used to take me all the time when we lived there. The costumes were so-

RENEE

Opera isn't really my thing Addie.

ADDIE

Oh-

RENEE

I'm more of a cancan kind of guy.
(The sound of Arthur and Martinez laughing comes from inside the inn)

MARTINEZ

(offstage. To Mother)
I have no mind to keep you.

RENEE

We're going down to the river now. You should come too once you're done being a house servant.

PAUL

Let's go.

(They leave. Addie busies herself arranging flowers in the table vases. Martinez and Arthur enter. Martinez is mid-story with Arthur)

MARTINEZ

...and when I lifted my head up, the policeman looked at me and said "bet you a pillow would have been softer"

(laughs)

That was the last time I ate oysters, for sure.

(he sits and begins to take his breakfast)

Arthur, you deserve more guests. You and your wife have built a good thing here.

ARTHUR

We are doing fine.

MARTINEZ

(looks around)

I must be missing something. There's still nobody here. Maybe you charge too little. Did you think of that? Some people might think three francs a day indicates something untowards...scandalous even.

ARTHUR

We have a new guest arriving today.

MARTINEZ

I want this place to work out. Maybe I should be happy. If nobody stays here, there will be more food for me. Am I right?

(He opens the bread basket and upon noticing it is empty, let's out an unmanly noise.)

The rolls are...dead. Gone.

ARTHUR

Surely not.

(checking the basket)

Addie, where did you put them?

ADDIE

They were there...

ARTHUR

And now they aren't.

MARTINEZ

Criminals! I will find them-

ARTHUR

Martinez, please. Addie-

ADDIE

I had them and-

ARTHUR

And what? Did you walk away? Birds?

MARTINEZ

Little savages descending from the sky and eating my breakfast!

ADDIE

No. I- there were these two boys.

ARTHUR

And.

ADDIE

I gave them one. I didn't think it would hurt. They must have taken the rest.

(Mother exits the house.
Germaine is crying from within.)

MOTHER

What's wrong?

ADDIE

Nothing-

ARTHUR

Addie ruined Msr. Martinez's breakfast.

ADDIE

I just wanted to make friends.

ARTHUR

Well that's about to get more difficult. You'll spend the rest of the day getting the second floor bedroom ready.

ADDIE

For what?

MOTHER

We have a guest coming this afternoon.

ADDIE

No! The crazy guy?

ARTHUR

We do not speak about guests that way.

MARTINEZ

I have heard he's as loony as a duck. She's right.

ADDIE

Don't do this. People will think we are-

MOTHER

We are so behind Addie. And this sudden... charity of yours just made it worse. Your sister won't stop crying and...you need to get the bedroom cleaned.

ADDIE

No.

ARTHUR

That wasn't a question.

(Arthur stares at her)

Now.

(Addie goes into the house and the second story room is revealed- cramped, sparsely furnished, full of cobwebs and dust. Time moves very slowly for Addie as the day progresses while she cleans.)

(Eventually, Vincent enters wearing a blue drill jacket, shorter than normal, and a floppy felt hat. His left ear is bandaged. He carries two canvases. Their color is like a candle in a dark room to this space.)

ADDIE

(startled)

Ah-

(a stunned silence)

I didn't see you come in.

VINCENT

Your back was turned.

(silence again. Neither of them moves.)

ADDIE

I...your room isn't ready. I'm sorry I haven't finished cleaning it.

VINCENT

This will do.

(Vincent begins bringing more
canvases into the tiny room)

ADDIE

My parents will be embarrassed-

VINCENT

This will do.

ADDIE

I should help-

VINCENT

Go!

Please.

...I will finish up.

(Addie leaves quickly.)

SCENE TWO

(Renee and Paul fish by the river. Addie finds them, having apparently walked quite a distance to find them.)

ADDIE

Hello.

RENEE

Addie.

ADDIE

Did you enjoy the rolls?

PAUL

(shakes crumbs out of his pocket)

A lot.

ADDIE

You guys got me in a lot of trouble actually.

RENEE

Well, you're here.

ADDIE

Look, just don't steal from us again.

PAUL

You gave them to us.

RENEE

They were only rolls. Is your family so poor that a couple rolls go missing and you're going to be beggars? Come on. Relax. Grab a line.

ADDIE

I'm ok.

RENEE

What? You never learned to fish? Teach her Paul.

PAUL

Sure...so there's this stick looking thing here-

RENEE

A pole he means.

PAUL

And you kinda whip it around like you're trying to swat a bug or something.

ADDIE

(getting ready to try)

Ok...

RENEE

Bait you amateur. She needs bait.

PAUL

Oh. That's right. You need to put a worm on the hook or sometimes it can be a fly or I've tried peanut butter and crackers and-

RENEE

Just use a worm. I've never seen trout eat crackers.

ADDIE

(casting a line)

So you were right. There is a crazy guy living at my house.

PAUL

Is he all "Bluhhhshmgfrandidleahhhh!"

ADDIE

No. He's just creepy.

RENEE

Oh yes. Tell me about him. Does he have googley eyes and a hunchback?

(Paul acts this out a little)

ADDIE

No. But you were right. He's missing an ear.

PAUL

Ahhh! My ear, I can't even hear my own screams. Ahhh!

RENEE

Disgusting. I bet he carries it around with him. My dad said to walk on the other side of the street if I see him. Dr. Gachet is one of his friends and-

(Vincent enters from a distance

and sets up an easel to paint en
plein air)

PAUL

There he is.

(calling out to Vincent)

Ahoy!

ADDIE

Stop it or he might come over here.

RENEE

Oh that would be great. Adieu monsieur! Hey!

(Vincent barely notices them)

Wow. Maybe he really can't hear. Should we
scare him?

PAUL

No. A guy who cuts off his own ear obviously
owns knives.

RENEE

I know what we'll do. Let's give him my
coffee.

PAUL

Why would we do that?

RENEE

Listen. Put one of the worms in it. Let's
see what he does when that thing is crawling
in his mouth. The crazy will really come out
then.

PAUL

Knives man. Knives.

RENEE

Just do it. Addie you know him. You take
it to him.

ADDIE

No way...

(struggling to come up with a
reason)

He almost killed me earlier today when I was
in his room.

RENEE

You both aren't fit to be my friends.

(to Paul)
 If this works, you're going to play the cow
 for a month. I'll never let you be the
 cowboy.

PAUL

No-

RENEE

And I need to practice my branding.

(he drops a worm in the coffee
 and makes his way to Vincent)

Excuse me.

(using faux sign language and
 speaking too loudly)

MY FRIENDS AND I WANT TO GIVE YOU THIS. IT'S
 COFFEE. PEOPLE DRINK THAT IN THE MORNING.

(Vincent smiles cordially at the
 offer and takes the cup)

DRINK IT QUICKLY BEFORE IT GETS COLD.
 BRRR...

RENEE

(noticing Addie and Paul
 looking)

Quit staring at him or he will know
 something is wrong.

PAUL

(turning back to the water.
 Artificially)

Wow. Fish are really biting today.

RENEE

Now he will know you're a liar.

ADDIE

He's drinking it.

(Vincent drinks the coffee
 without looking down. He
 coughs. Spits into the cup.)

RENEE

Here it comes...

PAUL

I'm going to be sick.

RENEE

That'll wake him up.

(Vincent moves briskly to the kids)

RENEE

Run!

PAUL

The fishing gear-

RENEE

He'll kill you. Go!

(in this brief exchange, Vincent has closed on them. The kids turn and almost run into him. They reverse as he pursues, silently. Paul trips)

PAUL

Ah!

RENEE

Leave us alone you freak!

(they toss dirt in Vincent's face to buy time for Paul to get up. Vincent coughs. Renee, then Paul toss handfuls. Addie is last, and hesitates only slightly before throwing hers and running out after the boys)

SCENE FOUR

(Outside Auberge Ravoux.
Evening. Adeline, Arthur,
and Mother prepare tables
for dinner.)

MOTHER

(stopping for a moment)

Look at that sunset Arthur.

ARTHUR

Addie, hand me the forks.

MOTHER

Arthur, really. Look.

ARTHUR

I saw it earlier Dear. Addie, lay out the
knives if you would.

MOTHER

But it's changing every moment. Addie.

ADDIE

It's really nice Mom. You're right.

MOTHER

See what happens when I catch a few moments
with your sister asleep? You can really
appreciate the world when your two year old
is passed out.

ARTHUR

Addie, put the rolls on the guest table.
Better yet, I'll put the rolls out. You go
in and get the pot roast.

MOTHER

There aren't even words to describe it. I
wish there were. Words better than orange,
blue, and gold.

ARTHUR

Dear. Martinez will be down any moment.
Can I please have the corn?

MOTHER

Yes darling. I'm sorry.

(Martinez arrives, glistening
from the walk)

MARTINEZ

I need a pipe and a good glass of Bordeaux.

ARTHUR

Well we have pot roast.

MARTINEZ

Too heavy. It's so hot, I can't eat anything warmer than an ice cube.

(Addie re-emerges)

MOTHER

There are rolls this time.

MARTINEZ

Thank heavens, but no. Just get me some wine.

(noticing a sunflower painting resting against the door)

Oh my. What pig made that?

VINCENT

(Vincent comes out, wiping off his hands with a rag)

It is me Monsieur.

MOTHER

Oh I'm so sorry.

MARTINEZ

No. Really, sir. The likeness is cartoonish. I've never seen a sunflower that color before and your line work is that of a toddler with a crayon. A toddler with chubby fingers.

VINCENT

Thank you.

ARTHUR

Sit down sir. Please take your dinner.

(Vincent does so)

MARTINEZ

Where's you learn to paint?

VINCENT

(waving a hand)

Everywhere.

MARTINEZ

That just figures. Every amateur with a rich uncle thinks he's a painter now.

I really will have that pot roast after all.

You have to go to academie to learn about the masters.

VINCENT

Thank you.

MARTINEZ

Academie Royale, or visit Salon.

VINCENT

I went to Academie Royale.

MARTINEZ

Oh.

Well done Adeline. This roast is just the right texture.

(he eats more)

Well a lot of good it did you.

MOTHER

I think it looks like a sunflower. But I don't know the first thing about art. How was your day Vincent?

VINCENT

I got a very dirty today.

(Addie chokes a little on her food)

ADDIE

May I be excused?

MOTHER

Not at all.

ADDIE

I'm feeling sick to my stomach.

MOTHER

Sit there then. We have guests.

ARTHUR

.....

we are sorry to hear that you felt unclean.

VINCENT

No. That is a good thing. I was able to get by the muddy river and paint thanks to your daughter.

MOTHER

You mean Addie?

VINCENT

Oh. Is that her name? Addie got my room so clean I got to spend my entire day outside. My hands were dirty. Full of paint.

ARTHUR

Good to hear.

ADDIE

(suddenly)

Yes.

ADDIE

I felt completely small for the next day, as if I was Germaine's age again. Vincent could easily have made sure my parents punished me. He could have yelled at me himself for throwing dirt in his face. But he chose differently and... I didn't know what to make of that. So at first, I wanted to continue avoiding Vincent.

(Vincent paints the town hall, a slightly lopsided building worse for the wear. He paints carefully but with haste, as if the building might not be able to hold its pose for him)

ADDIE

I came down the street that afternoon and found him deep in his work, right in the middle of the road.

(Addie tries to walk around him. As she does, she catches a look at his subject. Time slows down. A brush stroke takes an eternity. Ridges along the side of the town hall come to life as Vincent applies paint to canvas. This slowly bleeds into an aural discord that fills Addie with tension and won't let go)

ADDIE

(suddenly coming out of it)

Monsieur!

VINCENT

Hm.

ADDIE

I...I-I guess I came to say thank you. For not telling.

VINCENT

Very well.

ADDIE

You-
what you're doing there...
Is it, I don't know...right?

VINCENT

To paint your town hall?

ADDIE

Yes. I mean, it doesn't look like that. Is that why Martinez was so...why he doesn't like your paintings? Because they are...wrong?

VINCENT

I paint as I see.

ADDIE

Then there must be something wrong with your eyes too.

(Silence.)

VINCENT

(breaking into a smile)

Maybe you are right Addie. Maybe I have given up Martinez's way of looking at things. Or never had it at all.

ADDIE

I mean...I know you aren't blind.

VINCENT

Did you come out here to poke fun at me Addie?

ADDIE

No.

My mother sent me to the butcher's to buy meat and I stopped when I saw you.

VINCENT

Very well.

ADDIE

And I couldn't understand why you paint the town hall this way. It's just a boring building. Why give it all that color? And the squiggly lines.

VINCENT

Did you ever draw the sun as a child?

ADDIE

Yes.

VINCENT

And how did you do it?

ADDIE

I made a yellow circle I guess.

VINCENT

Look at the sun now. Is that a yellow circle?

ADDIE

No.

VINCENT

No. What do you see?

ADDIE

Just...brightness I guess.

VINCENT

How does the sun make you feel?

(silence)

There isn't a correct answer to this question. How does the sun make you feel?

ADDIE

Warm I suppose.

VINCENT

And what else makes you feel warm?

ADDIE

Fire.

VINCENT

Ok. What else makes you feel warmth? Who is warm to you I mean?

ADDIE

My mother.

VINCENT

And what color is her hair?

ADDIE

Reddish brown.

VINCENT

How would you feel if the sun faded away?

ADDIE

Bad.

VINCENT

Yes bad, but how?

ADDIE

Lonely or gray I guess.

VINCENT

And when the sun comes out on a gray day,
what colors do you see?

ADDIE

Blue and violet.

VINCENT

And when the sun comes out on a gray day,
how does that make you feel?

ADDIE

It makes me want to celebrate a little.

VINCENT

And at celebrations what do you do?

ADDIE

Eat. Dance.

VINCENT

Movement. Exactly.

(He goes back to painting)

ADDIE

I don't understand.

VINCENT

If you were to really paint the sun Addie,
you might choose to give it your mother's
hair, loneliness, and blue all at once. You
could choose to make it dance on the canvas
like God himself is playing with its puppet
strings. To find a way to capture every
single ray of light and every memory you
have of the sun burning your skin on a hot
summer day, the sun warming you on a
desperate winter morning, and your favorite
birthday party. This is the way the sun,
when you paint it, through your eyes...might
have blue and violet and the color of your
mother's hair, and it might not be round at
all but rather so big it takes up the entire
painting just like the sun hugging the earth
right now and helping it grow like a mom
holding her child.

Or you can paint a yellow circle.

Neither way is wrong.

ADDIE

I wish I could express myself like that.

VINCENT

You can. That's my point. You just have to fight through any illusion that you are inadequate.

ADDIE

I definitely do not feel that way.

VINCENT

I know.

ADDIE

How do you know?

VINCENT

Because you threw dirt at me.

(silence)

It's OK Addie.

ADDIE

I am sorry. I really am. I just- I have no friends here. I miss my friends in Paris and my parents are...

VINCENT

I know the feeling.

ADDIE

Do you like it here?

VINCENT

The light is good. Marvelous actually.

ADDIE

That definitely isn't a yes.

VINCENT

I have no models here. For paintings.

ADDIE

Like bowls of fruit? I've seen artists paint those.

VINCENT

No. People.

ADDIE

Oh.

VINCENT

Nobody in Auvers will sit for me.

(Renee and Paul appear and
secretly eavesdrop)

ADDIE

I think you do an interesting job just
painting sunflowers and old buildings.

VINCENT

But even ancient monuments were built by
human beings.

ADDIE

I don't under-

(Renee and Paul emerge. Paul
takes Vincent's palette)

VINCENT

Hey!

(Distracted by chasing Paul,
Vincent does not notice Renee
grabbing his canvas until it is
too late.)

PAUL

Come and get us!

RENEE

Come on Addie!

(Addie does not move, paralyzed.
Paul exits, chased by Vincent.
Renee waits a second for Addie
and then follows after them with
the canvas)

ADDIE

I couldn't move. Something wouldn't let me.
When I finally did, I took Vincent's easel
home with me, completely forgetting about my
errand. The butcher was closed by the time
I remembered. By then I was only steps away
from home.