

Under Glass

Cast of Characters

- Sid, 42: Pretentious art aficionado.
- Barb, 41: Sid's wife, grounded shopper with a keen eye for real bargains.
- Tim, 56: Estate sale owner, a would-be grifter who stretches the truth so much it tears.

Scene

A simple set: An estate sale outside at Tim's house. Sundry sale items are displayed on card tables including a hand-blown glass paperweight that captures Sid's eye, an antique Steiff Teddy Bear Barb gravitates to and a thangka (*pronounced tonka*), an embroidered scroll painting depicting the Wheel of Life used to teach Buddhism or another thangka illustrating Buddha's life.

Time

Present

Under Glass

I-1-1

AT RISE: BARB creases her brow as she inspects a hand-blown glass paperweight. SID, eager to buy it, awaits his wife's approval with some trepidation.

BARB
It looks like a turd under glass.

(BARB sniffs the artwork and grimaces before handing it back to SID.)

BARB (Continued)
You're not buying it. I won't have this crap in my house.

SID
You don't know art. Look, it's signed. Could be a Picasso.

BARB
Being sold at a crummy neighborhood estate sale? Picasso didn't blow glass.

SID
He painted on glass. I remember in my college art history class seeing a short black and white film of Picasso painting a vase of flowers on glass. I actually stayed awake to watch. Spellbound. His deft strokes. His -

BARB
It's not a Picasso.

SID
Well, whoever made it is brilliant.

BARB
(*Inspecting glass again*)
Looks like swirls of green and yellow sludge, like someone scooped up sewage and packed it in a glob of glass.

Under Glass

I-1-2

SID

Easier said than done. I guess it takes a trained eye to discern those *swirls* are actually delicate flowers. (*Holds up glass*) See the petals? The artist first used a torch to sculpt little glass rods into flower shapes then encased them in molten glass.

BARB

I hope he didn't burn himself.

SID

How do you know the artist is a he?

BARB

A woman would have more sense than to play with -

SID

Don't say it! Just shows your ignorance, Barb. Trust me, someday you'll learn to appreciate beauty. And, speaking of learning something, watch me haggle.

(SID approaches TIM, the estate sale owner. He holds up paperweight.)

SID (Continued)

My wife thinks this is ugly as hell. Just to spite her, I'll buy it from you for twenty bucks.

(TIM, stoic, retrieves the paperweight from SID and pockets it.)

TIM

Not for sale.

SID

(*Incredulous*)

What do you mean, it's not for sale? You had it on display.

TIM

Mistake.

SID

Mistake?

Under Glass

I-1-3

TIM

Family heirloom.

SID

A paperweight? Can't be an heirloom. The glass is too symmetrical. This is a modern piece. I'll give you thirty bucks.

TIM

In your dreams.

SID

This would give me nightmares. I'm doing you a favor taking it off your hands.

TIM

(Sighing)

Why don't you check out my other prizes? I think your wife found something.

(TIM disappears and SID slogs over to another table where BARB has peeled back the ear of a small Steiff Teddy Bear to expose a metal button with an elephant imprinted on it.)

BARB

A Steiff Teddy Bear. You can tell by the metal button in its ear. There's an elephant printed on it. Means this is an antique. I know because I watch *Antiques Roadshow* and these Steiff bears are shown a lot.

SID

Looks like something I'd slop together at Build-A-Bear at the mall.

(SID grabs bear, sniffs)

SID (Continued)

Smells.

(BARB gingerly retrieves bear)

BARB

If you make it to a hundred, you'll smell, too. This could be one of the earliest Steiff Teddy Bears, a little ragged but still in decent shape, and the quality is good. Really good.

(BARB points to eyes then gently teases head and other parts of the little bear.)

BARB (Continued)

You can tell by the swiveling head, the plush paws. See the eyes? They're made of glass. And look at the nose and mouth, all hand-stitched with love. (*whispering*) This Teddy is worth more than a thousand bucks, Sid, and the fool who's selling it hasn't a clue. It's priced at twenty-five bucks. That's a steal. Don't tell him.

SID

Doesn't matter what the tag says. He probably will balk at selling claiming it's another family heirloom.

(TIM overhears that comment and saunters over.)

TIM

Speaking of heirlooms, I got a special one from the Dalai Lama of Tibet, and it's for sale. Come see.

(TIM shepherds SID and BARB to another table where Buddhist thangkas are displayed. These are painted or embroidered Buddhist banners or scroll paintings illustrated with scenes of the Buddha's life. TIM retrieves a small one from a shoebox under the table. He unveils colorful thangka, and SID is bedazzled.)

TIM (Continued)

A silk tonka. Hung in the Dalai Llama's personal monastery in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital. It's the [Wheel of Life](#) illustrating the Buddhist [Abhidharma](#) teachings, the Art of Enlightenment. Dates back to the 11th century, one of the earliest tonkas to survive.

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BARB

And how did you acquire this rare artifact?

TIM

(Yawning)

His Holiness gave it to me. We're buds. Of course, the Dalai Lama accepts everyone as a friend. But we forged a special bond. I was backpacking in the Himalayas in the 80s and trekked to Lhasa. I found this monk gardening and tried in my broken Standard Tibetan to ask him where I could camp for the night. Turns out he spoke decent English, and we struck up a great conversation. Talked about all sorts of stuff from the Beatles to landing on the moon. He noticed my watch was busted so he asked if he could fix it. I think deep down the Dalai Lama wanted to be an engineer. Anyways, I offered him my watch to tinker with, and he was so pleased he gave me this tonka. Beautiful, huh?

BARB

And so well preserved considering it's a thousand years-old.

TIM

That's because it's pure silk. All natural produced by Himalayan silkworms raised on the freshest yak dung.

(BARB touches the scroll, but TIM hurriedly snatches it away.)

TIM (Continued)

Too delicate to play with. You'll have to take me at my word.

BARB

Feels like nylon. If it was real silk, it would shimmer. This has a sheen.

TIM

You think I'm shining you on?

SID

Barb, don't insult the man. He knows his business.

Under Glass

1-1-6

TIM

As do you, a fellow man of culture. I'm glad you stopped by.

SID

Me, too. The wife and I love going to weekend estate sales in the neighborhood. Never know what treasures we'll discover and bring home.

TIM

Well, you can bring this tonka home.

SID

If the price is right. We're on a budget. We can barely afford healthcare.

TIM (Continued)

I hear you. Still, I can't afford to give away my possessions, especially something so exquisite. This tonka belongs in a museum. And it has so much provenance -

BARB

I'm sure Customs asked for papers when you returned to the States. Can we see proof documenting the tonka's authenticity?

SID

Barb!

TIM

(Ignoring challenge)

I really should donate the tonka to a Buddhist temple to preserve the Tibetan culture. And, yet, the Dalai Lama would want me to share it with the world as a teaching tool - 'Share your knowledge. It is a way to achieve immortality.' That's what he says. *(TIM scrubs his chin)* Hmmm...How about a dollar for each of the tonka's years?

SID

That's a thousand dollars!

TIM

I'll throw in that smelly bear your wife was ogling...I'll let you two think about it...By the way, my name's Tim. It's a pleasure to meet a real art aficionado.

(TIM leaves; BARB erupts)

BARB

No way, Jose. It's a scam. Can't you see?

SID

That you have no appreciation for true art? The design is so elaborate. Like your stupid bear, all handmade. Probably took a village of craftsmen a year to paint that scroll.

BARB

More like seconds in a Chinese factory. For starters, it sure as hell ain't silk. And silkworms eat mulberry leaves not yak dung.

SID

It belonged to the Dalai Lama, one of the world's great spiritual leaders, the leader of the Tibetan people -

BARB

Who's been in exile in India since 1959. He's on the news now and then when the Chinese crack down on Tibetan autonomy and religious freedom. There's no way Tim could've met the Dalai Lama in Lhasa in the 1980s.

SID

(Sighing)

Woman, you take the J out of Joy. It was a mistake to bring you to the estate sale. You pooh-pooh everything.

BARB

Not the bear. It's actually worth something. I want to buy it. You can haggle for me if that makes you happy.

SID

We're on a budget. We can only buy one item today.

BARB

Forget the tonka. It's faker than my eyelashes.

SID

Alright, the paperweight.

BARB

The bear.

Under Glass

1-1-8

SID

Tomorrow. The estate sale goes thru Sunday. It will be marked down. Anything more than free is a rip-off, but I'll buy you the bear. Because I love you.

BARB

(Shuddering)

Tim doesn't want to sell the paperweight! You heard him.

SID

Everyone has a price...

(SID drags BARB over to TIM)

TIM

So, you taking Buddha home?

SID

Not today. But I'll take the paperweight off your hands. I figure if you're willing to part with the Dalai Llama's gift...

TIM

Squeezing me like a vise, Man.

SID

Tag says forty bucks.

TIM

Told you it's a family heirloom. I used to play with it as a kid. Parting with it would be like tearing away a piece of my childhood. No, sorry, not for sale.

SID

What if I up the ante?

(TIM inspects paperweight, tugs his chin as he considers offer.)

BARB

I can't watch this. I'll wait in the car, Sid.

(SID grabs BARB's arm, whispers)

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1-1-9

SID

I got him on the ropes.

BARB

And he has you hog-tied!

(SID turns to TIM)

SID

A hundred bucks. Final offer.

BARB

I'm going to throw up. Maybe you can put my vomit under glass.

TIM

(Shaking head)

Now you're adding insult to injury.

SID

Two hundred. And that really is my final offer. All I got on me.

BARB

Oh, Geesus.

(SID, anxious, shoots BARB a
conspiratorial look.)

SID

And throw in that *worthless* Teddy Bear.

(BARB calms slightly. TIM grimaces.)

TED

Two fifty.

(BARB wrests herself free, edges
away from the fray.)

BARB

I'm driving home. You can walk, Sid. In shame.

TIM

Alright, alright. I don't want to cause a scene. Two hundred.
And don't tell anyone I'm a softie.

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I-1-10

BARB

Rest assured, we won't.

(BARB retrieves Teddy Bear, cuddles it as SID forks over cash. TIM hands SID his beloved glass paperweight.)

TIM

She's one of a kind. Treasure her always, Sid. Put her someplace special.

SID

I know just the place - on Barb's nightstand.

BARB

(Glowering)

Animal.

(Brightening, BARB kisses her bear on its forehead as the couple exits. TIM smiles smugly as he pockets bills then reaches under table for a box of similar glass paperweights and pulls one out for the next sucker sale.)

TIM

(Musing to himself)

Every fool has his price....

(Lights slowly dim on TIM and his paperweight.)

END OF PLAY