

MASTER THEFT

A dramatic comedy in two acts

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Cast of characters

Jake Greenberg, a banker in his early 30's
 Luisa, a Mexican cleaning lady, in her late 50's
 Paul O'Mara, a middle aged private detective; he is black
 Jorge, Luisa's grandson, in his late 20's, a hophead
 Lionel, a street punk, late 20's
 Danny, also a street punk, late 20's
 Mel, a not very successful pawnbroker, 30's
 Felipe, a gigolo who thinks he's an artist, 30's
 Mamie, Felipe's rich, sexy girlfriend, 30's
 Larry Turpin, a rich businessman, late 50's
 Alma, his wife, a woman in her 40's
 Moshe and Rachel Greenberg, in their 60's, Jake's parents
 Baggage Handler, early 20's
 Tom Goodwin, Mr. Turpin's lawyer, late 40's
 Woman, an attractive museum patron

Members of the cast may play more than one part. My recommendations are as follows: Luisa and Woman Museum Patron; Lionel and Baggage Handler; Danny and O'Mara; Tom Goodwin, Felipe, and Jorge; Mamie and Alma; Moshe and Mel; Jake Greenberg and Larry Turpin. In doing so, the cast will require eight actors instead of 16.

The play takes place in Baltimore and New York. Time is the present. The use of simple props and sound effects to indicate a change of scene is suggested.

PROLOGUE

Time: the present

Place: an upscale apartment in Baltimore, the Greenbergs' living room

Detective Paul O'Mara enters. He is in shirt sleeves, tie and a baseball cap. In one hand he has a baseball and in the other a baseball glove.

Sound effect: a crowd of fans at a baseball game

O'MARA

I'm a private detective. If it weren't for the seventh commandment, I'd be out of a job. People have this thing about their personal property. If they get ripped off and the ball gets in the wrong hands, they hire me to bring it back home. The rules aren't straightforward like they are in baseball. There's no path and no fans to cheer me on when I get shut out or lost and fail. Then I think of Willie Mays. His career on-base average was three eighty four out of a thousand and Mays was a giant. So what's the appeal if it's not about winning? I like being a free agent and I like solving puzzles. But most of all I like the suspense, the players good and bad. Here they come. Time for the first inning. Batter up.

(He tosses the ball to a plant in the audience and exits.)

ACT I

SCENE ONE

Rachel Greenberg enters with the mail. She is in her early 60's but is spirited as a girl. She waves an envelope at the painting which is on one wall beneath a spotlight. The painting faces away from the audience.

RACHEL

You wrote to me, Chagall, on cream colored stationery and signed your name. My son, Jake, said I was wasting my time. He said you'd only write back if you had a roomful of unsold canvases. Isn't that just what you'd expect from a banker who collects baseball cards? This painting is a scene from a Jewish fairy tale, a shtetl like my grandparents came from. How my Bubby laughed and cried when she told me stories about the old country, about animals flying between sky and earth, stories from the Cabbala.

(Laughs.)

Ah, Chagall. You're so down to earth. You have such feeling for the Russian peasants. And why not? Your father worked in a salted herring plant. I smell the borscht and gefilte fish, hear the fiddler at a country wedding. A cottage. A horse-drawn cart. Music. Lovers. I want to step right into this painting and dance with the bride and groom. May they live happily ever after.

(Dances to a waltz.)

(Humming as she works, she takes the Chagall off the wall, pulls out a letter opener, then carves her name in the back of the frame.)

Chagall, your name on the front and mine on the back. Luck has brought us together.

Lights fade to dark

SCENE TWO

A week later. The Greenbergs' living room

Enter Luisa with a shopping bag. She puts down the shopping bag, picks up an apple from a bowl and takes a bite. Then she takes off her coat and tosses it on the floor as though she were a dutchess with a retinue of servants. Next she puts on her mistress's hat and boa that are hanging from a nearby hat rack and struts around the room. At first she avoids the "TO DO" list that Mrs. Greenberg has left for her in its usual spot. But finally she grabs the list, scans it and tosses it over her shoulder.

LUISA

"Polish the silver. Clean the oven. Water the plants and don't forget to dust the Chagall!" That Chagall again. Such a fuss over a painting. A toothbrush to clean the frame. Special rags, special polish. Up and down, up and down. I could clean my whole apartment faster. Augh! And how many times have I straightened that frame? A hundred times a hundred. Always crooked. (Pause) Luisa, why are you complaining? The more paintings, the fatter your pocketbook.

(Taking a rag out of her shopping bag, she sees the empty hooks displayed on the walls where picture frames had been and looks around.)

Jorge! Not again. Trouble. You are all the time trouble. The police can't pin this one on me. Not this time. Oh yes, they can. Who else has a key?

(Luisa runs to the phone and trips over a broken vase. She picks up the vase only to put it down like a hot potato. After using the boa to wipe her fingerprints off the vase, she dials the phone.)

Mister Jake. It is Luisa. I am downstairs in your parent's apartment. Please. Come quick. The apartment -- is upside down.

(She quickly disposes of the apple and returns the hat and boa to their rightful places. Next she puts on her coat and picks up her shopping bag.)

(Sound effect: doorbell.)

(Enter Jake in a business suit. He's out of breath. He is not as successful as his father but would like to be.)

JAKE

Damn that elevator. I ran down all three flights. (Pause) What's going on, Luisa?

LUISA

Oh, Mister Jake. Your mother's... Her favorite painting gone...

JAKE

The Chagall? My inheritance!

(He runs to the wall with the spotlight.)

Robbed? Oh, my God. (Pause) What happened?

LUISA

I don't know, Senor Jake. The bus was late.

JAKE

Why did I take that blonde to Montreal? If I had stayed home this weekend.....

LUISA

I just got here.

(Relieved that he is not paying attention to her, she takes off her coat.)

Such a mess to clean up. It will take all day.

JAKE

You think you got problems. That painting was going to put my kids through college.

LUISA

You don't have any children, Mister Jake. You're not even married.

JAKE

Not now. But someday I will--

LUISA

Your poor Mother.

JAKE

I'll never hear the end of it.

LUISA

That painting was like her baby.

JAKE

As if I don't have enough guilt. The Chinese vases.

(He pulls open a drawer.)

The silver.

(Frantic, he exits. Luisa sees a man's cap on the floor and stuffs it in her shopping bag. She scours the room for other traces of her grandson. *Sound effect: vacuum cleaner.* Enter Jake.)

JAKE

Jewelry. Mink coat. Tapestry. (Pause) What were you looking for just now?

LUISA

Uh-I pieces of the vase. There's Super Glue in the kitchen. I-I thought I'd--

JAKE

Gluing a priceless vase? Here give me that.

(He picks up pieces of the vase and nicks himself on a shard.)

Worse luck. Where is my handkerchief?

(Luisa is crying into her dust rag. He pulls it away from her and uses it as a bandage.)

(Dialling)

911? I need to report a burglary. No. I can't hold. This is an emergency. (Pause) Then why did you ask me if I could hold? Be quick about it. I'm a taxpayer. (Pause) My life's about to fall apart and this cop's out taking a leak.

LUISA

(Crying)

All of her favorite things. The Senora will yell at me.

JAKE

This is Jake Greenberg. My parents' apartment has been broken into and they're out of the country. Please send someone right away. 3910 North Charles. Apartment 6B. Yes, I'll tell the doorman to expect you.

(He hangs up. Luisa keeps on wailing.)

JAKE

Luisa, what on earth are you babbling about?

LUISA

I'll get fired.

JAKE

No one's blaming you. Now pull yourself together and stop whining.

LUISA

I like it here!

JAKE

Luisa, I've got to call my office. Will you please pipe down?

LUISA

Your mother will blame me.

JAKE

You? My mother will be furious with me, that's who. Now stop crying and do something useful.

(Luisa starts picking up pieces of the vase.)

(The phone rings.)

Hello? Oh, hello, Dad.

(Luisa stops crying.)

Uh, uh, caught me on my way out the door. Overslept. Running a little late. Uh, are you and mother having a good time in Spain?

(Luisa gestures that he should tell them what has happened. Jake shakes his head no and waves her away. He speaks with his back toward Luisa.)

Sorry, Dad. I had to turn down the radio. Too much noise in the background. Glad to hear you're enjoying yourselves. What I wouldn't give to change places with you right now. Yes, yes, it's been very hectic downtown. Getting ready for a merger. You know, the usual thing.

(While she cleans and straightens the apartment, Luisa tries to wipe away fingerprints.)

Don't worry about the apartment. Luisa's due in today. Pick you up at the airport next month? American flight 731 at 4:30. Sure thing. My love to mother. See you then.

(Hangs up the phone.)

Luisa, for God's sake, stop cleaning. You're destroying all the evidence.

Fade to dark

Scene Three

An alley in Baltimore. The next day. *Sound effect*: city traffic, cars honking, etc. Jorge is pinned against a wall by two well-dressed thugs.

DANNY

Pay up, man. Or else.

JORGE

I just need a little more time. My daughter's been sick. Fever. Seizures. The medicine... Do you know how much drugs cost?

LIONEL

Did you hear what the man said? Your bill's past due and we've come to save you a stamp.

DANNY

No need for rough stuff, Lionel. Jorge knows we're serious.

JORGE

Look. I don't have the money.

(Lionel raises his hand)

I have something better.

(He pulls up his sleeve.)

DANNY

Where'd a hophead like you get a Rolex? Pickpocketing at the convention center?

LIONEL

Must be counterfeit.

DANNY

Nah. It's the real thing. See this here?

(Yanks the watch away from Jorge and puts it on his own wrist.)

He got lucky. Fell off the back of a truck.

JORGE

Keep the watch. There's lots more where that came from.

DANNY

You've been holding out on us, Jorge, and I don't like it.

JORGE

Not you guys. I'm one of your best customers. Right? You know I'm good for it.

DANNY

He's a stand-up comedian, Lionel. The guy'll be bleeding in a minute. But he's still cracking jokes.

LIONEL

He's getting on my nerves. It's time I let him have it, boss.

JORGE

My car. If you'll just let me inside.

DANNY

I've seen your car, Jorge. String and duct tape. Worth maybe two hundred. Your tab is two grand.

JORGE

I've got a stash, I'm telling you. Real loot.

DANNY

I don't believe you.

JORGE

Have a ring in my pocket that will knock your eyes out.

(He starts to lower his arm,
but Lionel prevents him.)

LIONEL

Don't even think about it.

(He reaches in Jorge's pocket
and pulls out a ring.
Whistles)

Whoa, mama. Now that's a sapphire.

DANNY

I'll take that. Lionel, get the man's keys and check out his car.

(He puts the ring on his
finger.)

Myomyomy.

LIONEL

Quit wasting time.

(Jorge points to his pocket.
Lionel removes the keys.)

The trunk?

(Lionel exits.)

JORGE

Hey, man, it ain't fair. The stuff in my car is worth a helluva lot more than what I owe you.

DANNY

Finder's keepers. You asking for a finder's fee?

JORGE

No. No. But I thought we could work together on this. You keep some; I keep some.

DANNY

Share? Like in kindergarten?

JORGE

Of course, you take what I owe you right off the top. But anything left over....

DANNY

There won't be any leftovers. You've been dodging us for two weeks. You got finance charges on top of finance charges. If Lionel hadn't spotted your car in the alley...

JORGE

I've been meaning to call you. But--

DANNY

Save it. We've heard your story a thousand times before. Just answer me this. Where did a loser like you get a sapphire and a Rolex?

JORGE

My grandmother has keys to this apartment, see. She don't know I had a duplicate.... Anyway, there's more rich people in Baltimore than you can--

DANNY

In my business, the rich people come to me. I don't need to worry about tiptoeing through a big old house, tripping an alarm system and looking down the barrel of a shotgun. Burglary's for punks. Of which I am not.

(Enter Lionel wearing a fur coat and carrying a large box)

LIONEL

Hey, boss, my home girl's gonna love this coat.

DANNY

Will you shut up? We gotta get out of here before the cops get nosy.

LIONEL

Just a minute, boss. I wanna see what's in this here box.

(He lifts out a large framed tapestry.)

A rug. Already got me a rug. Danny, you need a rug for your place?

DANNY

Nah. My girlfriend likes hardwood floors. Besides, old stuff like that don't appeal to me. I'm a contemporary guy.

LIONEL

Yeah. I know what you mean. Whoever heard of framing a rug?

(Lionel tosses the tapestry back in the box and pulls out the Chagall.)

Well now, would you look at that? A guy with a green face.

JORGE

Yeah. Makes me want to puke.

DANNY

Then why'd you take it?

JORGE

On my way out I see this painting with a fancy gold frame. Had a spotlight over it, like at a funeral parlor. Figured the frame was valuable.

LIONEL

Green Face looks like a traffic light. Nobody would do that on purpose. Would they?

(Danny and Lionel study the painting.)

DANNY

Look at that big-eyed kid with the horse. Has a key around his neck just like I used to wear. Probably goes home to an empty house. Isn't he pitiful?

LIONEL

Always wanted a horse.

DANNY

Look at that kid's Mama, the one in the red dress. She's not paying any attention to him. I know what that's like. My Mama--

LIONEL

You know when I was growing up, we never even had a goldfish.

(Jorge comes around to look at the painting with them.)

JORGE

My four year old could do better than that. I wouldn't give you five dollars for it.

LIONEL

I don't know. I'd go \$30 or \$40. Finally get me a horse.

DANNY

No. When I come to your place, I don't want to see that kid's mug on the wall. Reminds me--

LIONEL

I kind of like it.

DANNY

Where you gonna put a painting? Your apartment's the size of a closet.

LIONEL

I could cut out the picture of the horse and hang it over my bed. Wouldn't take up much room.

(He gets out a pocket knife.)

DANNY

What do you think you're doing? Give me that.

(He takes the pocket knife
away from Lionel.)

A grown man playing paper dolls. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

JORGE

Keep the painting, man. Keep the ring and the watch. But I want the fur coat.

(Jorge reaches for the fur coat
but Danny pushes him away.)

DANNY

Who do you think you're talking to? The Good Humor man? The coat and the jewelry stay with us.

JORGE

You can't keep all of it. I did the work.

LIONEL

Always agitatin, Jorge. You need to learn when to shut up.

DANNY

Give him a lesson, Lionel, and let's get out of here. I can smell the cops.

(Danny puts the jewelry in
his pockets and the fur coat
over his arm.)

LIONEL

Turn around and face the wall.

(Lionel picks up the
painting.)

DANNY

Forget the painting, Lionel.

LIONEL

Aw, boss. It's ours for the taking.

DANNY

I said, forget it. It's too hard to fence.

LIONEL

I want it. Not carved up. The whole thing. I'll get a bigger apartment.

DANNY

(Pointing to the painting)

That kid gives me the creeps. I'm not looking at his face the rest of my life. So pack up and let's get on with it.

LIONEL

(For a moment Lionel acts as though he might go out of character and challenge Danny. Then with a touch of reverence and regret he places the painting on the ground with one hand and with a glance in Danny's direction, hits Jorge over the head with the other. Jorge slumps to the ground.)

DANNY

Loser's weepers, man.

(Lionel and Danny exit with the box and the rest of the loot.)

FADE TO DARK

SCENE FOUR

Time: later that same evening

Place: a pawn shop in Baltimore

Sound effect: tinkle of a bell when a customer enters

There is a large sign that says, "Pardon our appearance. We're expanding to serve you better." Enter Jorge with the Chagall wrapped in a large burlap bag. He is nervous and looks over his shoulder. Mel has lowered the blinds and is getting ready to close the shop.

MEL

We're closed.

JORGE

Your sign outside says OPEN.

MEL

I said, "We're closed."

JORGE

Only take five minutes.

MEL

Manana, amigo. Manana.

JORGE

Two minutes is all I need. This gold frame is worth 10 times--

MEL

Come back tomorrow.

JORGE

This frame is a steal, I'm telling you. A bargain.

MEL

Tomorrow it'll still be a bargain.

JORGE

No. It'll be gone by then.

MEL

Why are you in such a hot hurry?

JORGE

Uh. Uh. Got a hot date. And I'm a little short of cash.

MEL

That's your problem, pal.

(Steers Jorge
toward the door.)

JORGE

So rich you can afford to throw away business? Okay. There's another pawn shop down the street.

MEL

All right. All right. Two minutes. Show me what you've got.

JORGE

(Pulls out the painting
and props it on the counter.)

Right out of my grandmother's attic. See all these gold curlicues and folderol.

(While Jorge talks about the
frame, Mel looks at the
painting.)

Must be worth five, six, seven hundred dollars. Easy.

(Mel puts on his glasses to
look at the signature line on
the canvas.)

MEL

Marc Chagall (Say SHAY-GULL).

JORGE

But because I'm in a hurry, you can have it for three twenty five.

(Mel looks at the renovation
sign, then at the painting.
Finally he coughs.)

JORGE

(Wipes the frame with his
shirt.)

Look at all the dust. This sucker has got to be an antique. Worth an extra hundred right there. I told you you were getting a bargain.

(Mel takes off his glasses, wipes them with his handkerchief, then takes a look at the signature line again.)

And did you feel this wood? This baby is HEAVY.

(Mel looks at the painting again.)

MEL

Well--

JORGE

You're getting quality merchandise.

(In the near distance a police siren whines. Jorge acts jumpy and looks at his watch. Mel checks the frame for nicks.)

One or two scratches. Hey, man, I'm reasonable. You can have the frame for three ten. Just cause I'm in a hurry.

MEL

Don't want to keep your sweetie waiting, eh?

JORGE

Deal?

MEL

Hey, amigo, I gotta get going too. My wife's waiting supper. (Pause while he takes another look at the painting) This painting's not my taste. But I have a brother-in-law who thinks he's an artist. Always hitting me up for money for one damn thing or another. Maybe the SOB can recycle the canvas and save me a few bucks. Sooooooo. I'll meet your price if you throw in the frame and the painting. (Pause) Otherwise, it's a deal at two ninety five.

(The police siren sounds closer this time. While Jorge deliberates, Mel opens the cash register and starts counting out money.)

JORGE

You drive a hard bargain, man. But...it's not my favorite painting either. Okay.

MEL

(Recounts the money and gives it to
Jorge.)

That's what I like. You give a little, I give a little. Now if all my customers were like you-
-

JORGE

You'd still have hair, right?

(Jorge exits
Mel follows Jorge to the
door, then shuts it.)

MEL

YES! Now I can put in an escalator, add a second floor, submachine guns, K47's.....

SCENE FIVE

Time: the next day

Place: the Greenbergs' apartment

At rise Paul O'Mara is taking a look around the living room when Jake Greenberg enters. There are two chairs.

JAKE

Thank you for being so prompt, Mr. O'Mara. Please sit down.

O'MARA

Mr. Greenberg.

JAKE

I'll get right to the point. The Baltimore Police Department is not making any progress in recovering my parents' stolen property. The police have enough trouble keeping this city from hemorrhaging from everyday street crime. Real valuables? Forget it.

O'MARA

You sound like a practical man, Mr. Greenberg. I charge \$500 a day plus expenses, with the first week paid in advance. If you need references...

JAKE

Please call me Jake. I'm not concerned about your fee. My friend, Charlie Sloane, recommended you highly. I trust his judgment. The question is: can you start right away?

O'MARA

Yes.

JAKE

Good. I want to wrap this up as quickly as possible. Before my parents get back from vacation.

O'MARA

I'll need a list of stolen property.

JAKE

I can get that for you. Furs, jewelry. All of which can be replaced. But there's one item I'm especially concerned about.

O'MARA

Underinsured?

JAKE

Unfortunately, yes. My father bought the Chagall for sentimental reasons. He's a very good businessman ninety-eight percent of the time, except where my mother is concerned. Then his heart overrules his head. Buying the painting was mother's idea.

O'MARA
Painting? Chagall?

JAKE
Yes, a priceless work of art.

O'MARA
Hmm. I don't know about that.

JAKE
There's a ten thousand dollar bonus in it for you if you locate my parents' property before they return from Europe. Five thousand if you find it afterward.

O'MARA
That's quite a sweetener. Why so generous?

JAKE
I promised to stay here while my folks were away. Well, to make a long story short, an old friend was in town and I-I didn't. If I had, maybe the painting would still be here.

O'MARA
(Rising as if to leave)
Jake, I can't help you. My specialty is bank robberies.

JAKE
Art and money. Same difference.

O'MARA
Wrong. I'm a beer and peanuts kind of guy. As in baseball.

JAKE
Baseball. My favorite sport.
(He crosses to the sofa and sits next to O'Mara.)

Charlie says you had a great record before you left the Bureau.

O'MARA
Yes, and I plan to keep it that way.

JAKE
Make me a winner. Find the painting.

O'MARA
Art is out of my league. When you say gallery, I think of heroin addicts. The only museum I've ever been to is the Baseball Hall of Fame.

JAKE

Charlie says you like a challenge.

O'MARA

Challenge. Sure. Turning myself inside out is something else.

JAKE

Then make believe it's a few months from now. The case is all wrapped up. You're at a cocktail party telling your friends how you solved the most challenging case of your career. They're hanging on your every word.

O'MARA

I don't go to cocktail parties. And I don't know anything about art.

JAKE

My mother's been dragging me to galleries and museums since I was a baby. I'll see to it that you get all the Cliff notes you need.

O'MARA

I'm better off working with numbers. Baseball stats. Serial numbers of missing bills. Stuff like that.

JAKE

I hear you. Numbers are what I do all day long. But if I can appreciate art, you can too.

O'MARA

I'm too old to learn something new. Flunked art in high school. Took shop instead.

JAKE

You won't need to start from scratch. Baseball is a craft and a discipline. Art is a craft and a discipline. They both require skill, concentration, intelligence and observation.

O'MARA

Never thought of it that way.

JAKE

Those are the same qualities you need as a detective.

O'MARA

Sounds like a snow job to me. I'm a fan, not a player.

JAKE

(Starts pacing. He's really struggling. *Sound:* a crowd at a baseball game)

Remember the seventh game of the 1979 World Series? Pirates were down one to nothing against the O's. In the bottom of the sixth inning, Willie Stargell hits a two-run homer off Scott McGregor to turn the game around for the Pirates. They went on to win the Series and Stargell got MVP.

O'MARA

A beautiful game. Stargell was a hero.

JAKE

To my mother, Chagall is a hero. A hero for Russian Jews. (Pause) Just like Mays and Robinson and McCovey and Tony Gwynn may be for you.

O'MARA

Pulling out all the stops, aren't you?

JAKE

Some people might say Willie Stargell was lucky. But that's just sour grapes. Three home runs in his first World Series after 18 years in the majors. Talk about patience. That series was his masterpiece.

O'MARA

This is different.

JAKE

Chagall worked for years in obscurity before he achieved recognition.

O'MARA

What does that got to do with me?

JAKE

(Getting more and more excited, he acts like he's about to pull out his hair.)

In baseball there are giants and in art there are giants. Giants need to be in the right spot to be appreciated. Right now the Chagall, my mother's favorite painting, is not in the right spot. For all I know it's floating around in space. Who knows where it will land? Probably in Kansas, in the middle of a cornfield, home of the next second rate farm team.

O'MARA

You don't need a detective. You need a geiger counter.

JAKE

Don't give me that "why me?" look. You know how to locate stolen property and you're familiar with the criminal mind. Cars, money, art. Doesn't matter. To an experienced detective like you, they're all the same. Ask yourself what's the next step.

O'MARA

Hot property? That's easy. How to get rid of it.

JAKE

I bet you know every fence in Baltimore.

O'MARA

Yup. But this baby of yours is probably out of the area by now.

JAKE

Somebody had to have seen it. I'm sure you have plenty of contacts all over the country. Time to call in a few chits.

O'MARA

Yeah. Well... I don't know.

JAKE

I need you to find the Chagall. I don't have time to find anyone else. I'm a banker, for God's sake. Will you take the case?

O'MARA

I've dealt with bankers before.

JAKE

Then you're halfway home. Look, O'Mara. I have a friend who's on the board of the Museum of Art. He says he learned all he needed to know about painting in a few hours. It's just a matter of asking the right questions. My friend owes me a couple of favors. He'll be available if you--

O'MARA

All right. All right. (Pause) Do you have a photograph of the painting?

(Jake hands O'Mara a photograph.)

That tree is upside down. This guy has green fingers and (pause) his hand is out of proportion to the--. What is that? (turning his head sideways) This painting doesn't make sense.

JAKE

You don't have to understand the Chagall. Just find it.

O'MARA

This friend of yours who knows about art. What's his name and phone number?

Lights fade to dark

SCENE SIX

Lights up on a sleazy pawnshop in Baltimore. The blink of a neon sign. There is a door with the shade pulled down. Mel is on the phone.

MEL

All right, Augie, you got a buyer for the Chagall? Of course, I can deliver. All right. So we had a few problems in the past. That's all over now. Nah. Nah. This one's different. What do you mean I gotta store it for a week? Here. Are you crazy? This town is lousy with cops. Okay, okay. Give me 24 hours to find a parking place for this baby. I'll call you tomorrow.

(He hangs up the phone and starts pacing.)

This is the biggest deal of my life. I'm not gonna blow it. Not this time. I could double the size of my shop if this sale goes through. I can see it now. "Rated Best Pawn Shop by Baltimore Magazine."

(He picks up the Yellow Pages, thumbs through it and throws the book on the floor.)

EZ Mini storage? Yeah. Right. My luck the painting will get soaked in a hurricane.

(A buzzer sounds. Mel goes to the door and pulls back the shade. Enter Felipe who is dressed in a showy way to suggest he is an artist.)

MEL

You're late.

FELIPE

I had a hard time getting away.

MEL

You think I got all day? Just because you're my wife's brother doesn't mean you can walk in whenever you feel like it. I got a business to run.

FELIPE

The lady insisted. She is very beautiful and her husband is very rich.

MEL

You gigolos are all alike.

I am an artist.

FELIPE

You work in a frame shop. (Pause) Did you bring the necklace?

MEL

Yes. Of course. Do you have the money?

FELIPE

MEL
(He pats his pocket.)

Your lady friend can't be too bright if she doesn't know you're stealing her jewelry.

FELIPE

She is in love.

MEL

That won't last long. Then what?

FELIPE

As far as Mamie is concerned, nothing's missing. I replaced the necklace with an impostor.

MEL

Yeah. Well, I know the difference between an original and a fake. Let me see the necklace.

(Felipe hands him a paper bag.)

FELIPE

I wouldn't try to con you, Mel. The pearls checked out, didn't they, and the diamond earrings?

MEL
(He looks inside the bag.)

Yeah.

(He hands Felipe an envelope.)

Since we're so thick, you don't need to count it. Right, bro?

(Sound effect: a cash register. Felipe counts the money and puts it in his pocket.)

What if your lady friend gets suspicious?

FELIPE

Then the necklace will disappear over the side of her yacht and the insurance company will take care of it.

MEL

You're such a sleaze ball, Felipe. (Pause) Did you say yacht?

FELIPE

A hundred feet long. I finally hit the jackpot.

MEL

Hold on a minute.

FELIPE

No time for chitchat, Mel. Mamie's waiting.

MEL

Does your lady friend know anything about art?

FELIPE

No. That's why she hired me. I'm her "decorating consultant." She's from the wrong side of the tracks and wants to fit in. To get some respect.

MEL

What about her husband?

FELIPE

He's too busy making money. We have the boat to ourselves. What's this all about?

MEL

There's this painting I gotta hold of. A private deal through a friend. I have a potential buyer in New York. But--

FELIPE

Since when are you interested in art? Oh, I forgot. To cover up the holes in the wall. Did you ever hear of toothpaste? Or spackle? Works wonders.

MEL

All right, smart guy. A fat lot you know. It just so happens my accountant has uh, uh, encouraged me to diversify.

FELIPE

Yeah. Right. Guns, porn, banjos and old watches.

MEL

Look, Bro. I'm in a little bit of a jam. I need a place to uh, store this painting until the deal goes through. A few days. A week at the most. Now about this yacht--

FELIPE
What about it?

MEL
A few hundred bucks for storage and another couple hundred for pickup and delivery.

FELIPE
I'm busy right now.

MEL
All right. Just cause you're family, I'll bump it up to a thousand. For a couple hours' work. You don't make that framing pictures.

FELIPE
Who's the artist?

MEL
You wouldn't recognize the name.

FELIPE
Try me.

MEL
A Russian guy who's just getting started. Trotsky. Gorbachev. Baryshnikov. I don't know and I can't pronounce it. The name's not important. Let's talk about a parking fee.

FELIPE
Twelve hundred.

MEL
Talk about highjacking. I could rent a four-bedroom apartment for that price.

FELIPE
You're buying peace of mind. It'll be safe with me.

MEL
Uh-huh. What will you tell your lady friend?

FELIPE
I'll tell her that the painting came into the shop and I immediately thought of the large empty space above the settee on Blossom Girl.

MEL
Blossom who?

FELIPE
Blossom Girl. Her yacht.

MEL

What if she won't give up the painting when it's time to deliver?

FELIPE

I'll tell her that it's not for sale. The artist changed his mind. He wants his old widowed mother to have it.

MEL

What if she doesn't like the painting?

FELIPE

I can be very persuasive.

MEL

What if she gets mad at you and decides to throw the painting overboard?

FELIPE

It's a love boat. She fights with her husband, not me.

MEL

Eleven hundred.

FELIPE

Twelve. Why don't you keep it here?

MEL

Too much traffic. Somebody might walk off with it.

FELIPE

Your customers? Nah. What's the real reason?

MEL

I'm telling you there's been a lot of breakins in the neighborhood. Makes me nervous.

FELIPE

The security system you've got here is as tight as Fort Knox. Let me see the painting.

(Felipe sees a large package against the wall. He starts to remove the wrapping when Mel tries to grab it away from him.)

MEL

Hey, keep your hands off that.

(He wrestles the painting

away from Felipe but Felipe is too quick for him.)

FELIPE

You've been holding out on me, Mel. Big time.

MEL

What-what do you mean?

FELIPE

"A Russian guy just getting started." Yeah. Right.

MEL

What do I know? I'm just the middle man.

FELIPE

His name's right on the canvas. You think I can't read?

MEL

Okay. Okay. Help me keep this baby under wraps for a few days and we'll both have a chunk of change.

FELIPE

Will you shut up? Chagall's a real master. Show some respect.

(Points to elements of the painting while Mel paces. Felipe speaks haltingly as though he were discovering the painting for the first time, which he is, but with the insight of a critic. The two men are on different planets. Sound effect: a flute)

See how the eye is drawn to the tall Woman in Red. Chagall's put her at the center of the painting. Notice how all the other characters are clustered around her in the shape of a loose pyramid.

(While he talks, he uses his hands, and moves up close to the painting.)

This painting was built. It didn't just happen. Classic composition. And yet there's a sense of spontaneity. Of motion. Look at the sweep of her hands. Peasants facing different directions. The bows of the violins going up and down. The forward motion of the pony cart. It's realistic. Probably a scene from his childhood. Part memory. Part caricature.

MEL
It'll just be for a few days.

(He goes to the door and
takes a peek outside.)

FELIPE
(Starts jumping up and down)

But just when you think you have him pegged, he throws in a few surprises. See that tree falling out of the sky, the half-man, half-chicken, all those uprooted houses floating around in space. Look. The bride and groom are off to the side when it's their wedding and you'd think they'd be the center of attention. (Pause) And his choice of colors. Earth tones. Vibrant reds, yellows and purples. Chagall, you rascal. A very warm, sensual painting.

MEL
Sensual? Did you say sensual?

FELIPE
Look at the bridegroom gently caressing his wife's breast.

MEL
The guy's only using one finger. You gotta get in there...

(He gestures with his fist.)

FELIPE
He's shy. See the expression on his face and hers. They're young and very much in love. It's their first time.

MEL
(He puts his hand on Felipe's
shoulder and they stare at the
painting together.)

All wrapped up in each other. Don't see what's going on around them. (Pause) I wonder if me and Teresa could get back to that. She's talking about starting a family. (Pause) Do you think there's something in this tenderness crap?

FELIPE
I could stand here for an hour, just trying to figure out his technique.

MEL
What are the bride and groom doing now?

(Craning his neck to get a

better view of the Chagall)

FELIPE

I can't tell. They've shut the door to the cottage. And pulled down the shade.

(The two men look at each other and shrug. Mel sniffs, then glances at his watch.)

MEL

Later. We gotta get moving.

FELIPE

(He's still staring at the painting.)

I'll bet the tall redhead represents Mother Russia.

MEL

Are you listening to me?

FELIPE

Chagall once said he was "against painting as a trade whose sole purpose is to adorn people's homes."

MEL

(He looks at the painting one last time, then at Felipe.)

You could pretend you own it.

FELIPE

I could pretend I painted it.

MEL

If I could afford it, I'd keep it. Hang it in the bedroom. (Pause) Nah. Teresa would expect me to use mouthwash.

(Mel breaks away and picks up the renovation sign.)

Are you in?

(When Felipe doesn't respond, he positions himself between Felipe and the

painting and waves his arms to block Felipe's view of the Chagall.)

ARE YOU IN?

FELIPE

(He turns his back to the painting and faces Mel.)

I'm in.

MEL

Are you sure she's really that dumb?

FELIPE

Who?

MEL

Your girlfriend.

FELIPE

Mamie grew up in Brooklyn Park. She's never set foot in a museum.

MEL

When are you coming back?

FELIPE

Later tonight.

MEL

No. That's too dangerous. I'll meet you at the rear of the frame shop at seven.

FELIPE

With the money. Small bills.

MEL

I don't know if I can arrange the cash that quickly.

FELIPE

Sure you will, man. You're a magician when it comes to money. Otherwise, you'll blow the biggest deal of your life. All because of a lousy storage fee? I don't think so.

MEL

I guess I can pull a few strings.

FELIPE

I've kept the lady waiting long enough. So long, Mel.

(He starts for the door.)

MEL

Don't get any ideas about running out on me, Felipe, and going into business for yourself.

FELIPE

Will you relax? We're almost blood brothers.

MEL

I'll blow the whistle on you so fast you'll be making license plates for the rest of your life.

FELIPE

Yeah? I guarantee you'll be in the next cell.

MEL

Just so we understand one another.

FELIPE

Small bills or the deal's off.

(He exits to the sound of the
cash register.)

Fade to dark

SCENE SEVEN

Time: the next day about 6 pm

Place: a cabin aboard a yacht in Baltimore

Sound effect: a fog horn blows

Mamie enters. She wears a short, sexy outfit, is wearing headphones and much jewelry. She is carrying a large painting of Elvis on black velvet and sings offkey to "Love me tender." On one wall, away from the audience, is a large hook. Mamie tries to hang her picture but the hook is just out of reach. She puts it face down on the floor and is in the process of dragging a chair across the room and turning it into a stepladder when Felipe enters. He is carrying the Chagall in brown wrapping paper.

FELIPE

Hello, gorgeous.

MAMIE

Felipe, you precious man. You're going to be so proud of me.

FELIPE

I have a surprise for you.

MAMIE

Good. I love surprises. But let me go first.

FELIPE

Ok, sugar.

MAMIE

I can't wait for you to see it. I bought my first painting.

(She holds up Elvis.)

Isn't he great?

FELIPE

Well. Well.

MAMIE

This wall is the perfect spot for it, what with the track lighting and all. (Pause) Aren't you going to say something?

FELIPE

Uh. Darling, I'm delighted with your enthusiasm. But your first major purchase. I thought we had agreed to go together to pick out--

MAMIE

It was too good to pass up. A real steal. The clerk gave me a discount because it had been in the window and the King was starting to oxidize.

FELIPE

Crushed velvet will do it every time.

MAMIE

They had it in red but I thought black was more dignified.

FELIPE

Uh. Huh.

MAMIE

I thought you'd be more pleased.

FELIPE

I'm speechless.

MAMIE

Me too. The King takes my breath away. Come give me a kiss.

(They embrace.)

Now you can help me put Elvis back up on the wall.

(She hands him Elvis.)

What's your surprise?

FELIPE

Darling, this is such a coincidence. Our planets must be in the same orbit. Today I found a great painting, uh, just like you did.

(He puts Elvis down and unwraps the Chagall.)

I was mad for it the moment I saw it. I know you'll love it.

(He puts the Chagall on the hook and takes a step backward.)

MAMIE

Whoa, sugar. This cabin has room for just one painting and that there's the King's spot.

FELIPE

(He measures the Chagall with his hands and tries to fit it in another part of the cabin. But there is no space for it.)

Mamie--

MAMIE

Take it down this minute.

(She picks up Elvis, pushes the chair next to the wall and reaches for the Chagall.)

This is my boat, my hideaway. I'm in charge here.

FELIPE

Aye, aye, skipper. No mutinies intended.

(He puts Elvis on the hook.)

MAMIE

You're beginning to sound like my husband, Felipe. He made me take down a giant poster of the King in our family room. Says he hates Elvis. But you know what I think? He's jealous.

FELIPE

Probably so. All that money. All those women.

MAMIE

Elvis is my idol. I have every record he ever made.

FELIPE

That's the art biz. You know what you like.

MAMIE

Yes.

FELIPE

A good approach. So many first-time buyers do exactly that. Starter homes. Starter paintings. But you don't want to plateau there, Mamie. You want to go on to the next level.

MAMIE

Just what are you getting at, Felipe?

FELIPE

I want you to look at the painting I brought. It matches the sofa and drapes. What more could you ask for?

MAMIE

The King stays, Felipe.

FELIPE

You said you wanted to learn about art. Right?

MAMIE

Elvis and I have the same roots. I'm not giving him up.

FELIPE

I'm not asking you to.

MAMIE

Sounds like you're leading up to it.

FELIPE

I want you to look at this painting for two minutes and tell me what you see.

MAMIE

I can't turn my back on the King.

FELIPE

Fine. Stay right where you are. We'll look at them side by side.

(He picks up the Chagall and stands next to Elvis.)

Two minutes is all I ask.

MAMIE

Next you'll be having me listen to opera.

FELIPE

Concentrate. What do you see?

MAMIE

The man in your painting has a green face.

FELIPE

Perfectly understandable. He's hallucinating. When I'm not with you, I keep seeing you undressed.

MAMIE

I never saw a man with a green face except at Halloween and he was drunk. And my cousin Lisa. She wears cucumber mud packs.

(She puts on her glasses.)

The horse is yellow and the tree is upside down. Don't you think that's a little odd?

FELIPE

Darling, that's what makes this such an interesting painting. He's different. Just like you. Unpredictable. One of a kind.

MAMIE

So is Elvis.

FELIPE

As a performer. Ok. All right. I'll go along with that.

MAMIE

Good. I'm glad we agree on something.

FELIPE

Darling, your house, this yacht say something about you.

MAMIE

Yeah. My husband makes a lot of money.

FELIPE

Darling, I know you're one classy broad. But other people will judge you by your surroundings and your possessions. There are three million Elvises exactly like yours in family rooms all over this country. In your house you want an original.

MAMIE

Yes, but Priscilla beat me to it.

FELIPE

This painting will help you stand out from the crowd. It's unique.

MAMIE

You really think I'm a classy broad?

(With a wiggle she puts on her glasses and turns back to the Chagall and spends a few moments really looking at the painting.)

I like the woman in the tight red dress who's wearing too much lipstick.

FELIPE

Just my type. Sexy as all get out.

MAMIE

Purple. Green and red. The colors kind of grow on you.

(He lowers the Chagall, takes down Elvis from the wall and hangs the Chagall in its place, then stands next to her.)

MAMIE

What does it mean?

FELIPE

It represents the artistic transformation of the natural scene with a poetic vision.

MAMIE

Huh?

FELIPE

It's a celebration of life in a small Russian town, kind of like Brooklyn Park. The joys of marriage, music, ritual.

(He starts to nibble her ear.)

MAMIE

(She continues to study the painting.)

There's a moon that looks like a banana and a chicken flying upside down. Is that chicken a man? Or is the man part chicken?

FELIPE

(To himself)

I've often asked myself that same question, especially when walking down a dark, unfamiliar street.

MAMIE

Completely different from what you'd expect. I like it. (Pause) We'll have to find a place for Elvis.

FELIPE

(He hums "Love me tender.")

The master berth. I know the perfect spot.

(He picks up Elvis and takes her hand. They both exit to the sound of a fog horn.)

Scene Eight

Time: the next day

Setting: the ball park. Sound effect: a baseball game in progress

While the stagehands are setting up, O'Mara enters. He is still wearing a baseball cap but has his sleeves rolled up and his tie is loosened. He looks tired and frustrated and overburdened. He is carrying several books on art.

O'MARA

All you need to know about art is the right questions to ask. Bullshit! Never trust a banker to give you a straight scoop on anything. All he wanted was to get it off his desk and onto mine.

(He shuts the books, sits down on a bench, opens the program and looks around him.)

Time for the seventh inning stretch already?

(He gets up and checks an imaginary scoreboard. The books fall to the ground.)

The home team's losing. What else is new?

(He raises his arms and yells)

Hot dog!

(O'Mara exits. The scene changes to a cargo area at Kennedy Airport. A baggage handler enters with several boxes and bags. Perhaps because of his job, he views almost everything in life as cargo. A sign overhead reads G.O.D., Guaranteed Ontime Delivery. There's also a smaller one which says "Tips appreciated." Enter Felipe. Sound effect: noisy conveyor belt .)

Help you?
BAGGAGE HANDLER

I'm here to pick up a shipment.
FELIPE

(He hands him a ticket.)
The baggage handler is clumsy in retrieving the crate which is heavy and awkward.)

Jesus Christ! I've got a priceless antique inside that crate.

Yes, sir. Sorry, sir. I'm sure it was just a bump.
No harm done.
BAGGAGE HANDLER

FELIPE
(Looks at his watch)

You clumsy oaf! If my client wasn't about to arrive, I'd make you open that crate.

Will do, sir.
BAGGAGE HANDLER

Never mind. Never mind. Let's get this over with.
FELIPE

Roger that.
BAGGAGE HANDLER

Here's your receipt. Just sign here.
(He hands Felipe a form.)

(While Felipe signs, the Baggage Handler shifts the crate from one hip to another. When Felipe hands the form back to him, the Baggage Handler points to the "Tips" sign and in so doing the crate slips to the floor.)

You asshole! Look what you've done. A tip? Must be out of your mind. I'll get your job for this.
FELIPE

BAGGAGE HANDLER

Calm down, mister. They pack these crates very well. I'll just pry it open and see if everything's all right.

FELIPE

(He pulls the crate out of the baggage handler's hands.)

No. Get out of my way before you do any more damage.

(When Felipe turns his back on the baggage handler, the man gives him the finger.)

(Enter Larry Turpin, a well-dressed businessman who is used to being in charge of any situation. He is carrying a large attache case. While he and Felipe talk, the baggage handler goes about his work but edges closer to overhear their conversation.)

LARRY

Mel. Do you have the merchandise?

FELIPE

Right here, Mr. Turpin. Mel couldn't make it. Do you have the money?

LARRY

What do you mean he couldn't make it?

FELIPE

He got sick. Violently sick at the last minute. He sent me instead.

LARRY

Who are you?

FELIPE

I'm his brother-in-law, Felipe.

LARRY

This is a very important business deal. How do I know you are who you say you are?

FELIPE

Uh, look, Mr. Turpin. Will you calm down? Mel's in the hospital. And he can't come to the phone. The merchandise is right here in front of you. What more do you need to know?

LARRY

Do you have ID?

FELIPE

Mr. Turpin, you're probably a great guy. But I got a plane to catch. You want the merchandise or not?

LARRY

This is a sensitive business transaction. Surely you have some ID--

FELIPE

(Digs out his wallet)

All right. All right. Here's a picture of me at my sister's wedding. One of the worst days of my life. There's Mel and Teresa. Let's wrap this thing up.

LARRY

I assume there were no mishaps in shipping.

FELIPE

Huh? Nah. Let's trade.

(He reaches for Larry's attache case. The baggage handler comes between them.)

BAGGAGE HANDLER

Look, mister. I'm sorry about your property. But these things happen. That's why G.O.D. invented insurance.

LARRY

What?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

(To Felipe)

Didn't you tell him? (Pause) It's very simple, mister. All you need to do is file a claim. G.O.D. will make good on it.

FELIPE

Will you shut up?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

Did you say antique? That could be a problem. But you probably have papers.

FELIPE

You idiot. Get out of here. Mr. Turpin, he's exaggerating.

BAGGAGE HANDLER

Let me open the crate and you can see for yourself.

FELIPE

That won't be necessary. My client is in a hurry. If you'll just carry the box to his car.

(He hands the baggage handler a large bill. The man takes it and is about to pick up the box when Larry cuts in front of him.)

LARRY

I'm not paying top dollar for damaged goods. Open the crate.

FELIPE

Are you crazy? With cops all over?

(With a wave of his hand he tells the Baggage Handler to keep the change. He exits.)

I can't risk---

LARRY

Fork over the money sight unseen? What do you think this is, a grab bag at a country fair?

FELIPE

All right. All right. But not here.

LARRY

Where?

FELIPE

The parking lot.

LARRY

At Kennedy Airport? Why don't you just send out an invitation to everyone in Queens?

FELIPE

You got a better place?

LARRY

The elevator. We'll ride to the basement and lock the doors.

FELIPE

(Picks up the crate)

Give me a hand, will ya? I got a bad back.

LARRY

Of all the--

FELIPE

You want the merchandise or not? I'm sure I can find another buyer.

LARRY

You bastard.

(Both men lift the crate.)

If you drop it, the deal's off.

FELIPE

You sure you got the money?

LARRY

I need to see the title first.

FELIPE

Look, man. There is no title with this merchandise. You get it AS IS.

LARRY

Oh yeah? You just lost yourself a sale.

FELIPE

You're passing up one of the great masters of the 20th century because of a scratch?

LARRY

I expect perfection.

FELIPE

I'd do anything to keep this painting for myself.

LARRY

Fine. You keep it.

FELIPE

My brother-in-law would kill me. And my sister would stop inviting me over for dinner.

LARRY

Take five grand off the top and I'll reconsider.

FELIPE

You're getting a bargain basement price as it is.

LARRY

There's a cop. You want to stand here arguing or you want to do business?

FELIPE

All right. All right already.

LARRY

Let's go. Let's go. I don't have all day.

(Felipe reaches for the valise
but Larry keeps it out of his
reach. They exit with the
crate.)

ACT II

SCENE ONE

Time: one month later. Sound effect: a flute playing a few bars of whimsy

O'MARA

Chagall is the painter of happiness in love. It is a recurring theme in his work. He believed in the power of transformation, the power of art, the mystery and power of love. In his paintings, embracing couples appear again and again and again. Men and women are so taken with one another that they leave the everyday world behind them, if only for a few hours. Like fans at a baseball game.

(Pause)

But although many of his paintings were light in texture and subject matter, other works showed a darker side. Remember when the Chicago White Sox threw the 1919 World Series to the Cincinnati Reds and Shoeless Joe Jackson and others got indicted? One of the blackest days in baseball history.

(Exit O'Mara.)

Lights up on: Larry Turpin's NY apartment

There is one armchair in the room. Enter Larry Turpin in a dressing gown. There is a ritual to his behavior. He turns on classical music and pours himself a brandy. Then he ceremoniously removes the Chagall. He holds it for a long moment, then gently rests the frame on an easel and sits down to admire the painting.

LARRY

All mine.

(He toasts the painting and takes a drink.)

(Turpin's wife, Alma, enters. She is very chic, sarcastic and efficient. She carries a pencil and a legal pad. As she takes an inventory of the room, she puts tags on the items she wants. Sound effect: cash register)

ALMA

This. And this. And that. And of course, that vase. And the silver service. And the leather sofa.

LARRY

Get out of my house, Alma.

ALMA

There's nothing I'd like better, dear. But my lawyer said I should write down what I want before signing the separation agreement. You know what the judge said--

(She stands in front of the
Chagall.)

LARRY

Yes. Yes. Hurry up. You're blocking my view.

ALMA

What a fabulous frame. Gold has always been my favorite color. Feast your eyes one last time, Larry. I'm taking the Chagall.

LARRY

The hell you are.

ALMA

Have you forgotten we're still married? What's yours is mine.

LARRY

This painting is special to me. You can't have it.

ALMA

Such a connoisseur. Until you met me, you never even heard of Chagall.

LARRY

(Walks to the painting.)

It's the one thing I'm grateful to you for. See the way the bride looks at her husband? And the loving way he looks at her? There's a kind of glow about them...That's what I wanted our marriage to be like.

ALMA

Of course she adores him. She's still in her wedding dress, for God's sake. Did you expect the honeymoon would last forever, Larry?

LARRY

Longer than it did.

ALMA

You? A romantic? For 20 years your one and only passion has been collecting property and making deals.

LARRY

I was busy earning a living, Alma. If you had been more receptive the times I was available, we might have...

ALMA

I got tired of waiting.

(Turns to the painting.)

So you had an affair with an Amazon in a red dress.

LARRY

I don't know what you're talking about.

ALMA

Just like the redhead in this painting. There's always a fatal femme in the background, ready to pounce on the groom if the bride runs out to borrow an egg.

LARRY

You mean femme fatale.

(Studies the painting)

She's not. She's a singer. See. She's standing right next to the violinist. She's singing at their wedding.

ALMA

No. She's talking to the moon overhead. Probably an Amazon werewolf. She's ready to pounce, I tell you. The bride and groom are oblivious.

LARRY

I envy them. So wrapped up in each other. Content with a small cottage, a horse-drawn cart and some music.

ALMA

Let me get out my violin and a shovel. Cause you're piling it high and deep, Larry. Save that line for cocktail parties when you're trying to impress a sweet young thing with your sensitivity. I ain't buying it.

(Mimicking him)

"Alma, I got such a deal on this painting. Like finding a designer dress for five dollars in Filene's basement."

LARRY

Some people have a good eye for value. Others don't. It doesn't take much talent to spend money, Alma. (Pause) Now if you'll excuse me, I'm busy.

ALMA

Dismissing me like one of your employees? Not very hospitable of you, Larry.

(She waits for him to get up and give her his chair. He does not. She crosses to the painting.)

I'm sure the judge would be very interested to know the Chagall is stolen.

LARRY

Stolen? I paid a small fortune for that painting.

ALMA

Small in comparison to what it's worth. Yes.

LARRY

Too many trips to the hairdresser, dear. Your brain finally melted.

ALMA

You wish. I happen to know you paid a third of the Blue Book price for the Chagall. Why?

LARRY

Twenty years, Alma, you're still doing it. You never want to give me credit. I do my research. Learn where the client is vulnerable. Then press my advantage. How do you think I became a successful developer? Wishing upon a star?

ALMA

You don't get an original Chagall at a fire sale, Larry. You knew it was hot from the very beginning. Who do you think I am -- that dumb blond who calls herself your secretary?

LARRY

I'd never confuse you with Justine, Alma. Among other things, you have no sense of humor.

ALMA

Pull in your fangs, darling. When the divorce is final, I'll be laughing all the way to the bank.

LARRY

Yeah, right. Don't slam the door on your way out.

ALMA

How many of your friends do you think will visit you in jail, darling?

LARRY

I refuse to be blackmailed. And I'm not going to jail.

ALMA

You never were a very good listener, Larry. But that's all right. I'll tell my lawyer instead. Then our side will have all the aces.

(She starts to leave.)

LARRY

Tell him what?

ALMA

That you've insured all of my jewelry, the cars, all of our property, except the Chagall.

LARRY

A simple oversight. I was planning to call my broker next week.

ALMA

You're too good a businessman, darling, to make those kinds of mistakes.

LARRY

This divorce has me distracted. Just haven't gotten around to it.

ALMA

That's a lie and you know it. The insurance company would insist on a photograph and sooner or later they'd start asking questions.

LARRY

What do you want, Alma?

ALMA

First, I want to sit down.

(Reluctantly he gives her his chair.)

Now I'd like a brandy please. No ice.

LARRY

(He pours her a drink.)

Open your mouth about the painting and we'll both have nothing.

ALMA

Such a wheeler dealer. I had nothing to do with buying the Chagall. You'll go to jail, not me.

LARRY

If the court takes over our assets, I may be in jail but you won't have a nickel.

ALMA

It might almost be worth it to see you--

LARRY

You have expensive tastes, Alma. What do you want?

ALMA

The house in Easthampton, this apartment and all of the furnishings and of course, the Mercedes. Plus ten thousand dollars a month for life.

LARRY

And I keep the Chagall. Nothing more said about the painting to your lawyer or anyone else.

ALMA

You drive a hard bargain, darling. But yes. I learned from the best, you know.

LARRY

How flattering. It's unlike you, Alma.

ALMA

My lawyer will call yours in the morning.

(Exit Alma.)

LARRY

(Slowly he covers the canvas and repeats the earlier ritual - in reverse. Then he sits down and lights a cigar.)

You're right, Alma. I'm not a romantic. You have your shopping sprees. Every now and then I have a moment of impracticality. But I always return to my senses. You will soon find out, for example, that the house in the Hamptons is a white elephant. This apartment will go to foreclosure. And the Mercedes will have a mysterious case of vandalism. Salt water in the radiator and the engine. Damage irreversible. As for your allowance, my dear, I'll think of something.

ACT II

SCENE TWO

That same day. The Greenbergs' apartment. Sound effect: vacuum cleaner in use

Luisa is cleaning when the doorbell rings. Enter O'Mara.

O'MARA

Luisa, I need to talk to you about the burglary.

LUISA

I've told you everything I know.

(She continues cleaning.)

O'MARA

You've been very helpful, but I still have a few questions. Please. Have a seat.

LUISA

No. Senora Greenberg is very fussy. Bad enough she loses her favorite painting. But if she sees all this dust, I will surely lose my job.

O'MARA

The Greenbergs would want you to help me find their stolen property.

LUISA

No time. My ride will be here in a few minutes.

(While Luisa dusts the furniture, O'Mara opens the door and looks down the hall, then returns a moment later.)

O'MARA

We can talk while you finish. You've worked for the Greenbergs a long time?

LUISA

Four years. I clean Mister. Jake's apartment too. Very neat, just like his mother. All the latest gadgets. Whatever you need, Luisa. Tell me and I'll buy it, he says.

O'MARA

I take it you have a key to both apartments.

LUISA

Yes, but the senora usually lets me in.

O'MARA

It must be very pleasant to work in such elegant surroundings.

LUISA

Very lucky. All my friends are jealous.

O'MARA

Luisa, where were you the night before the burglary?

LUISA

Me? Burglary? No. No.

(Nervously starts dusting
O'Mara)

Luisa is an honest person. All my customers give me their keys. Leave their money on the table. No problem.

O'MARA

Then you won't mind telling me where you were.

(He looks at his watch.)

LUISA

In church. Praying a novena to the Holy Mother. You think I--?

O'MARA

Calm down, Luisa. I'm not accusing you of anything. (Pause) I understand your grandson and his family live with you.

LUISA

No. I live alone. Nobody but me and the cat.

(Pushes past him and packs
up her cleaning supplies)

O'MARA

Is your address 2000 North Bond Street, apartment 3B? According to the police, your grandson, Jorge, lives at the same address.

LUISA

No. The police make a big mistake.

O'MARA

No mistake. Jorge's been picked up several times for peddling drugs. The address the police have for him matches yours.

I got to go.

LUISA
(Putting on her coat)

Hold on.

O'MARA

Late for my next job.

LUISA

Where was your grandson the night of the burglary?

O'MARA

I don't work. I don't eat.

LUISA
(Picks up her shopping bag and pushes past O'Mara)

O'MARA
You've been through this before, haven't you, Luisa? Wealthy employers. Missing valuables.

LUISA
No. Excuse me. I must go.

JORGE
(Offstage)

Abuelita? Are you ready?

(Enter Jorge, dressed as a cab driver.)

JORGE
Who are you?

O'MARA
Paul O'Mara. I've been expecting you, Jorge.

LUISA
No le digas nada.

(To O'Mara)
(Luisa and Jorge start to leave.)

O'MARA

Not so fast, Jorge. Security has you on video entering this apartment complex at nine o'clock the night the Greenbergs were robbed.

JORGE

This is a free country, man. What's it to you?

O'MARA

How did you get in just now?

JORGE

I don't talk to no cops.

O'MARA

I'm not a cop. I'm a private investigator.

JORGE

Same difference.

O'MARA

What were you doing here the night the Greenbergs were robbed?

JORGE

I'm a cab driver. I was dropping off a fare, not that it's any of your business.

O'MARA

Then your company will have a record of it.

JORGE

I drive a gypsy cab. We don't keep records. Let's go, Abuelita. The air in here is starting to smell.

O'MARA

Jorge, the day after the burglary, your fingerprints were all over this apartment.

JORGE

(He looks at Luisa.)

You're bluffing.

O'MARA

Tell me where the Greenbergs' property is and I'll talk to the district attorney on your behalf.

JORGE

I don't know what you're talking about.

O'MARA

I'm talking about the Chagall. Return the painting and I'll make you a deal.

JORGE

No deals.

LUISA

I am innocent. Believe me. A piece of fruit disappears. OK. But this -- this? Never.

O'MARA

Jorge, your grandmother may lose her job on account of you. Then what will your family do? You'll be in jail and your grandmother will be out of work. Your daughter--

JORGE

Go to hell, gringo. And keep my daughter out of this.

(Luisa starts to wail.)

LUISA

My little granddaughter. That painting is all the time trouble. Bad luck for me.

JORGE

Abuelita. Relax. This guy has no case. He's just trying to frighten you. Let's go.

(Enter Rachel and Moshe
Greenberg with their
suitcases.)

RACHEL

It's so good to be home among our own things.

MOSHE

I can't wait to eat simple food. The Spanish put garlic in everything, including eggs. Talk about heartburn.

(Jorge starts to bolt. O'Mara
blocks him. They scuffle.)

JORGE

Get out of my way, gringo. Come on, Abuelita.

(Jorge pushes his
grandmother toward the
door.)

O'MARA

Not so fast. I'm not finished with you yet.

(Jorge collides with Moshe and the suitcases. In doing so, he loses contact with Luisa. She signals for Jorge to run. O'Mara is torn between stopping Jorge and keeping the Greenbergs away from the missing Chagall. In the melee, Jorge exits.)

MOSHE

What's going on here?

(To O'Mara)

Who the hell are you?

O'MARA

Paul O'Mara. Your son, Jake, hired me.

MOSHE

Isn't that just like Jake? Getting someone else to take care of his responsibilities while he's out having a good time. I better not find your dirty socks under my bed, Mr. O'Mara.

(He heads toward the empty space where the Chagall had been. O'Mara tries to prevent him.)

O'MARA

Don't go there, Mr. Greenberg. It's a mess. Crumbs all over the rug. I'm kind of a, uh, sloppy eater. Luisa was in the middle of-- Please sit down.

MOSHE

This is my house and he's telling me to sit? Of all the--

LUISA

We did not expect you till next week. The house is not ready.....

(Luisa starts wailing.)

RACHEL
Luisa, what's wrong?

O'MARA
Uh, she has a toothache.

MOSHE
(Moving toward the spotlight)

Excuse me, this is my house.

RACHEL
Luisa, where is the tapestry that belongs on that wall?
(Luisa keeps on wailing.)

O'MARA
Uh, it's at the cleaners, Mrs. Greenberg.

RACHEL
You don't send a 200 year old tapestry out to be dry cleaned. What were you thinking of?

O'MARA
To brighten the uh, colors. It was very dusty.

RACHEL
And my Chinese vases? Luisa?

LUISA
Jorge is a good boy. He was in New Jersey.

MOSHE
What's going on here, Mr. O'Mara?

O'MARA
Mrs. Greenberg, I have some bad news. Your son wanted to spare you. I shouldn't be the one to tell you this but under the circumstances...Please sit down. Mr. Greenberg.
(O'Mara makes Luisa and Moshe sit down also.)

Mrs. Greenberg. Sir. I'm a private detective. I'm very sorry to be the one to tell you this. But, uh, you've been robbed.

MOSHE
What? That fancy burglar alarm. Why didn't Jake tell me?

He didn't want to spoil your vacation.

O'MARA

My Chagall? Gone?

RACHEL

Yes, I'm afraid so.

O'MARA

Moshe, do something.

RACHEL

I'm selling my technology stock. First thing in the morning.

MOSHE

Mr. O'Mara, you've got to find my painting.

RACHEL

LIGHTS FADE TO DARK

ACT II

SCENE THREE

The next day. Paul O'Mara's office. Props such as an ironing board, clothes basket, and household cleaning products suggest that he works out of his basement. At rise he is reading at a desk strewn with papers; in front of him is a PC. There are books and telephone books on the floor and around the room, a beer poster on one wall. He is on the phone. Sound effect: clothes dryer, noisy furnace

O'MARA

What do you mean you don't know? You're supposed to be the expert on this.

(He slams down the phone.)

Dumb snob.

(He looks at the photograph..)

Where the hell are you? Not in Baltimore. That's for damn sure. LA? Chicago? Naw. Gotta be New York. But where? Museums. Out. Too chancy. New York art galleries. Must have called each and every one of them in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Helping a detective. Hah! They could care less. Come on, O'Mara. You're starting to whine.

(He gets a bottle of whiskey out of a desk drawer and takes a swig.)

Think. Think. Turn the sucker upside down and look at it again.

(He drums his fingers on the desk, then looks at his computer.)

You're not the first person who's tried to locate a piece of stolen art. The Net! A registry of stolen art. All right!

(As the curtain falls, O'Mara can be seen typing madly on his computer.)

ACT II

Scene Four

Larry Turpin's New York apartment. Turpin is disheveled and unshaven. He is seated with his lawyer who is dressed in a three-piece suit.

LARRY

Tom, I need you to lay it out for me.

GOODWIN

Alma wants the Chagall, Larry.

LARRY

You've already told me that. That's not what I want to hear.

GOODWIN

You sabotaged yourself. If you had honored your original agreement, you wouldn't be in this position...

LARRY

OK. So I made a mistake.

GOODWIN

What were you thinking? You should have consulted me first.

LARRY

Well, I'm consulting you now.

GOODWIN

Technically since it wasn't in your separation agreement...

LARRY

That's it. I don't want Alma to have this painting.

GOODWIN

Don't go flying off the handle. I'll need to check the statutes first.

LARRY

I love this painting. She's not getting it. I tell you.

GOODWIN

Alma claims it's stolen.

LARRY

Well...

Is it? GOODWIN

Sort of. LARRY

Sort of? GOODWIN

I didn't steal it. LARRY

Jesus! How did you get it? GOODWIN

I bought it from a guy in Baltimore. LARRY

Good God! Stolen property across state lines. You could go to jail for this. GOODWIN

Fine. I'll give it back. LARRY

What? GOODWIN

Give it back. Then Alma won't get it. LARRY

Have you lost your mind? GOODWIN

Find out who it was stolen from and give it back. LARRY

(Goodwin slumps in his chair.)

I'm depending on you to cut me a deal. That's why I pay you the big bucks.

FADE TO DARK

SCENE FIVE

A week later

The Greenbergs' apartment. Sound effect: whimsical flute

A small table is set with wine glasses and dessert dishes. Rachel Greenberg is standing in front of the empty space that contained the Chagall. She is crying as she lifts a large mirror in place of the painting.

RACHEL

Forgive me, Chagall. My heart belongs to you and the bride and groom. But I can't stand this empty space one minute longer.

(She adjusts the mirror, looks at herself and starts to cry again.)

Moshe can't see me like this.

(She wipes her eyes and tries to smile.)

Keep busy, Rachel. Keep busy.

(She crosses to the table and finishes setting it.)

(Enter Moshe; he is carrying a cake box and a small supermarket bag.)

RACHEL

Darling. Did you get the cheesecake?

MOSHE

Is there water in the mikvah? Of course I got it.

RACHEL

And the cherry topping?

MOSHE

You asked me to get it. I got it.

(He holds up the bag. She gives him a kiss on the cheek and straightens his tie.)

RACHEL

Jake says he has a surprise for us when he comes down. I wonder if he's getting engaged.

MOSHE

Will you stop fussing? You said a cup of coffee. Now we're having cake and champagne. Too many stars in your eyes, Rachel. Jake is not ready to settle down.

(He tries to sneak a piece of cheesecake but she shoos him away.)

RACHEL

At his age you were married and had a child.

MOSHE

Leave it alone. Stop meddling.

RACHEL

He's been seeing that Loeb girl for the past six months.

MOSHE

Let Jake handle his own life. You and I need to have a talk about something else.

RACHEL

What could be more important than our only son?

MOSHE

That painting. The Chagall.

RACHEL

(Starting to cry)

I keep trying to forget. But nothing can take its place.

MOSHE

Sometimes I think you love that painting more than you love me.

RACHEL

That's ridiculous. We've been married for over 35 years. Have I ever so much as looked at anyone else?

MOSHE

How do I know? I could compete with another man. You're obsessed with a painting.

RACHEL

Jealous. You're jealous of a painting. Whoever heard of such a thing?

MOSHE

I am not.

RACHEL

You ought to be happy it's gone.

MOSHE

Happy? You're still obsessed.

(Pointing to the mirror)

You try covering up the space where it was. But that painting still haunts this house.

RACHEL

Robbers. The bastards. They took my family. My heritage.

MOSHE

No, Rachel. The family is still here.

(He points to her head, then her heart.)

RACHEL

I am so angry, Moshe.

MOSHE

I know, my darling.

(He pulls her close.)

But you must let go of this thing.

RACHEL

I can't.

MOSHE

It's not healthy. You toss and turn all night long. Pull the covers this way and that. Sigh and grind your teeth. Keep me awake.

RACHEL

I don't grind my teeth.

MOSHE

Yes, you do.

RACHEL

Well, you snore. So we're even.

MOSHE

And my beautiful wife, you have circles under your eyes.

(He steers her in front of the mirror.)

Look at yourself.

RACHEL

Oh, dear.

MOSHE

If the painting comes back, I'm getting rid of it. (Pause) A Chagall for sale on the open market? A couple of million. Easy.

RACHEL

What?

MOSHE

It's gone. Out of here.

RACHEL

Over my dead body.

MOSHE

I paid for it.

RACHEL

With **our** money.

MOSHE

It's my decision.

RACHEL

Then plan to spend the rest of your life sleeping on the couch.

MOSHE

Don't play that card, Rachel.

RACHEL

You're being a dictator. You're shutting me out.

MOSHE

Me or the painting, is that it? I don't want this to be an either or decision.

RACHEL

You'll lose me either way.

(She turns her back on him, crosses to the mirror and struggles to take it down from the wall.)

MOSHE

I love you, Rachel.

RACHEL

If you loved me, you wouldn't do this thing.

MOSHE

We're talking about a canvas. A piece of cloth, for God's sake, and some-some paint. How does that compare with a human being?

RACHEL

I need you both.

MOSHE

And I need you to be safe. That good for nothing security system. I have nightmares about coming home and seeing your beautiful face on the floor and our apartment ransacked. Over what? Objects. Possessions. Things?

RACHEL

Art is more than a "thing." It's history and emotion and--

MOSHE

I am a businessman, Rachel. If I want history, I'll read a book. Emotion? I talk to you. We were lucky this time. Next time? I don't want to think about it.

RACHEL

Moshe, you're getting all worked up for nothing. What makes you think we'll get the Chagall back?

MOSHE

That detective is a smart cookie. My luck. He'll find it. Mark my words.

RACHEL

(Speaks haltingly, in a loud whisper. She hasn't told him this before.)

The painting is about our marriage, Moshe. The bride and groom, so young, so much in love. Remember the violinist who played at our wedding? We couldn't afford a band. Not a pot or a window. But always there was music. Just like in the painting. That's why I can't bear the thought of selling it.

(They embrace. He kisses her hand and asks her for a dance. They waltz around the

room while he hums and
sings off key.)

MOSHE

Okay. Okay. Forget the money. What am I saying? Forget the money!

RACHEL

We've got plenty. More than enough... if we live to be a hundred.

MOSHE

(Pulls out a pocket calculator;
sound of a cash register)

Say we sell the Chagall for two to three million. In our tax bracket we'd net maybe 40 percent. But the IRS would clean up. (Pause) That makes about as much sense as that crazy tree in the painting. Flying upside down. Who ever heard of it? And the violin as big as a house. Ach. Rachel, I'm starting to think like you.. Sell the Chagall? Forget it. Sleep I need. Money we don't need. But what? We'll give it away. That's it. Wish I had thought of it sooner.

Sound effect: whimsical flute

RACHEL

What do you mean?

MOSHE

We'll donate the Chagall.

RACHEL

Donate where?

MOSHE

To—to, uh, ah, a museum.

RACHEL

No. I won't get to see it.

MOSHE

To a **local** museum. You know the one I mean.

RACHEL

The Museum of Art.

MOSHE

You can go any time you like. I'll even go with you.

RACHEL

You've always hated going to museums. You said they were like tombs.

MOSHE

Given a choice between going to one and your being in one, I'd rather go to one and come home.

RACHEL

Will you stop about the burglar alarm? Talk about a broken record. You keep telling me I'm obsessed. But you're more obsessed than I am.

MOSHE

Yes, on this one subject, you are right.

(He uncharacteristically raises his voice. He has never told her this before.)

For 35 years you have given me more joy, more pleasure than any one man is entitled to. At my age...

(He starts to cry.)

I don't want to lose you.

RACHEL

Oh. Mush. Does it mean that much to you?

MOSHE

Yes. It will be our gift. Thousands of people will fall in love with your favorite painting. How does that sound to you?

(She starts to cry.)

RACHEL

No more Chagall? Like cutting my heart out.

MOSHE

Rachel, you have a heart as big as Ocean City. We're not really giving away the painting. Instead of hoarding it, we'd be sharing. Just like Chagall did with us and you have with me. What do you say?

(She sniffs.)

RACHEL

All right. But now that you're retired, we need to do more dancing.

MOSHE

Fine.

(She shakes her head yes.)

And you and I. We'll still sleep in the same bed. No? Yes?

(She nods again. They embrace.)

(Knock at the door.)

(Enter Jake and Paul O'Mara. O'Mara is carrying a large box.)

JAKE

Mother. Dad. You remember detective Paul O'Mara. I have good news. He's recovered the Chagall.

(O'Mara takes the painting out of the box and hands it to Rachel.)

RACHEL

Oh, Mr. O'Mara. I had given up hope. Bless you.

(Rachel hugs the painting, then hands it to Jake. He is about to put the Chagall under the spotlight on the wall when his father interrupts.)

MOSHE

Rachel, remember our agreement.

RACHEL

Darling—

JAKE

What agreement?

MOSHE

Your mother and I have decided not to keep the painting. We're donating it to the Museum of Art.

JAKE

Why? I thought you couldn't wait to get it back.

MOSHE

It's not safe for us to keep valuables here in the apartment. We were lucky to be away. Next time... I don't want to think about it.

JAKE

Dad, I've gone to a lot of trouble. So has Mr. O'Mara--

RACHEL

We appreciate it, Jake, Mr. O'Mara. Really we do. More than we can say. Your father has his reasons.

MOSHE

Run the risk of having my dear wife's head bashed in on account of some jewelry and a couple of fancy chatchkeys? No.

JAKE

Get a better security system, Dad. We have one at the bank that's so sensitive you can program it to detect unfamiliar breathing patterns.

MOSHE

No. I don't want to be a prisoner of our possessions. Let the museum worry about security. They're equipped for it. I'm not.

JAKE

But.. But.. This is insane. The Chagall is your painting, Mother. Surely you want to keep it.

RACHEL

The painting was meant to be enjoyed by many people, not just your father and me. I like the idea of sharing it.

JAKE

But home is so much more convenient.

RACHEL

The museum is close by. I can go there as often as I want. It will be great fun to people watch, listen to what they say as they pass by the Chagall. I'll make believe I'm a fly on the wall.

JAKE

I was kind of expecting that the Chagall would be part of my. Hm. Never mind that. I hope you're getting a generous tax deduction. You are taking one, aren't you, Dad?

RACHEL

Mr. O'Mara, I'm sure there's a story to tell about the recovery of this painting. And I want to hear all about it.

JAKE

Excuse me, Mother. Dad hasn't answered my question.

MOSHE

Tax deduction? Oh, yes. Well. I haven't really thought about it.

O'MARA

The man who bought the Chagall was a wealthy real estate developer in New York. He used to keep the painting in a vault.

RACHEL

In a vault? Please. Tell me more.

JAKE

Dad, if you don't want a tax deduction, how about giving the painting to me? I'll take the deduction. You can think of it as a down payment on my inheritance. Dad, did you hear me?

MOSHE

Speak to my accountant in the morning, Jake. Right now I want to hear what Mr. O'Mara has to say.

FADE TO DARK

SCENE SIX

Sunday afternoon a year later.

A gallery at the Museum of Art. Sound effect: whimsical flute

There is a bench opposite the Chagall. Enter Mamie, dressed conservatively in pearls and flat shoes. She is leading a group of visitors on a tour of the museum. Among the crowd are Mel who is pushing a baby carriage, and Lionel and Danny who have dressed up for the occasion. In one corner of the room is a security guard. While Mamie speaks, Lionel furiously takes notes while Danny scopes out the room with a hidden camera, steering clear of the security guard.

MAMIE

(Speaks as though she has
memorized it from a book)

Next on our tour I'm pleased to introduce you to the great Russian artist Marc Chagall. Chagall's contemporaries in Paris called him the "painter poet" because of his use of religious symbols, his love of literature and (pause) folk tales. He was intent on projecting the artistic liberation of the avant garde on the great myths of his people and (pause) reinterpreting the traditions of Jewish culture in a (long pause) universal, visual language. Recently the museum was fortunate enough to acquire one of Chagall's later works....

(She moves in front of the
painting and does a double
take)

Oh my God. That green face! Elvis!

MEL

(To the baby)

Another Elvis sighting. The King is like Santa Claus. He's everywhere.

MAMIE

(Banging her head against a museum wall)

Chagall was in my living room and I let Felipe talk me out of--. This close. Pfft. I came this close to owning a--

MEL

How much?

MAMIE

(Sensing the crowd, she works quickly to pull herself together)

I beg your pardon.

MEL

How much is it worth, the painting I mean? How much would it go for on the street? You know... without the frame.

MAMIE

I don't know. Now then, what's so interesting about Chagall..

MEL

More or less than a mill?

MAMIE

The museum expressly forbids its staff, including volunteers like myself, from appraising items in its collection. We are solely concerned with the intrinsic nature of these works, not their monetary value. (Pause) Do you catch my drift?

MEL

Gotcha. More than a mill.

MAMIE

(Mamie turns away from Mel and addresses the group once more with something she's memorized.)

What's paradoxical about Chagall is although his paintings are full of symbols, he did not want to be judged by them. He said, "Judge me by form and color, not by the separate symbols. Everyone can see them in his own way and interpret what he sees and how he sees. For me, logic and illustration have no importance."

(Her voice trails off.)

(Aside)

If I ever see Felipe again, I'll strangle him with my bare hands and feed him to the sharks.

MEL

Me too.

(The tour moves on. Mel stays behind with the baby carriage.)

Hey, Buddy, look at all these beautiful pictures. When you grow up, I want you to become a famous artist. Then your dear old dad can retire, move to Atlantic City and play the slots. Forget football. For your first birthday I'm buying you a box of paints.

(They exit..)

LIONEL

(Whispering)

Check this out. The security guard's falling asleep. And he doesn't have a gun.

DANNY

Piece of cake. Right through the skylight and bingo, we're in fat city.

LIONEL

Ain't we got class.

DANNY

The big leagues.

LIONEL

Big bucks. Yeah.

DANNY

The cops would be here in a heartbeat. We've got to think about this some more.

LIONEL

I got an idea. We wait till the room dumps out just before closing time. You call the security guard over and ask him a question about one of the paintings to make him feel smart. We're about the same size. I bop him over the head and steal his uniform. Then we go about our business.

DANNY

(Looking through a museum
guide)

I might keep one for myself.

LIONEL

Yeah?

DANNY

A small one. "Come up and see my etching," I'll say. Chicks go for that kind of stuff.

LIONEL

We gotta get busy. Exits, hiding places, the lay of the landscape so to speak.

DANNY

I was pretty good in art in high school. Teacher said I should take up watercolors instead of stealing cars. Maybe I can get back to it, take a class.

LIONEL

We got work to do.

(As they exit, Felipe enters
with an attractive woman on
his arm.)

FELIPE

It is a wonderful exhibit, dear. Come see the Chagall.

WOMAN

Darling, who cares about a bunch of dried up canvases?. I came to be seen by the important people in this town. Anyone who's anyone is here. (Pause) Did you see Connie Lawrence just now? She's dating Harry Smith. His wife died only a month ago. You'd think he could have waited till her body got cold. And there goes Phoebe Lattimore. Someone should tell her she looks mousey in gray. And that hat. So outdated.

FELIPE

I want you to see this masterpiece.

WOMAN

There's a band playing a tango in the next room. Let's not waste another minute.

(As they exit, Rachel and
Jake Greenberg enter the
room. While Jake inspects
several nearby paintings,

Rachel sits on a bench in front of the Chagall. She looks at the painting and smiles. Jake crosses to the Chagall.)

JAKE

Gift of Moshe, Rachel and Jacob Greenberg.

(He gets out a tape measure and compares the plaques on either side of the Chagall.)

Our plaque is smaller than the others.

RACHEL

Yes, dear.

JAKE

Mother, did you hear what I just said?

RACHEL

Marvelous. I feel right at home.

JAKE

(Makes a notation in a small book)

It's a snub. I can't stand it. Coming, Mother?

RACHEL

No. I'm staying here. You go along.

JAKE

(He pulls out his notebook and a magnifying glass.)

My bank has a lot of influence in this town. Donations to the new modern art wing? Grants. Foundation support. The curator will hear about this.

(Jake exits.
O'Mara enters, wearing casual clothes and a baseball cap. Sound effect: a crowd at a baseball game. He stands off to the side and speaks to the audience.)

O'MARA

This painting's finally in the right spot. My work is done. (Pause) Cocktail parties? Friends hanging on my every word? Nah. I'll leave the story telling to you.

(He opens a canvas chair, takes out a sketch pad, pulls out a pencil and starts drawing, using the painting as a model.)

As Chagall once said, I prefer a life of surprises. Good night.

The End