

SCOOP!

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FADE IN:

EXT. LOUVRE - PARIS - NIGHT

The museum stands silent under a bright moon. The glass pyramid glows in the courtyard.

A security car drives past and turns the corner.

A MAN, dressed in black clothing and a black balaclava, steps from the shadows of the colonnade. He carries a small case. He moves fast but never runs.

A sly, jazzy motif underscores his every move -- too smooth to be suspenseful, too playful to be sinister.

He reaches a service door, connects a thin cable from his device to the keypad. A green light flashes.

The door CLICKS open.

He slips inside.

INT. LOUVRE - PARIS - NIGHT

Dark interior. Shafts of light from emergency fixtures stretch across the marble floor. The building is silent except for the faint hum of the ventilation system.

At the far end of a corridor, a GUARD walks his route, flashlight moving across statues and paintings. His footsteps echo in the vaulted space.

The Man in Black attaches a device -- thin wires, a blinking diode.

One by one, the small red security lights above the cameras go dark.

He moves quickly down the main hall, turning corners with practiced precision. Galleries slide past: Renaissance portraits, massive French battle scenes, gilded frames aligned in perfect rows.

In a smaller gallery, he pauses as another guard's keys jingle somewhere nearby. He presses himself flat against the wall until the sound dies off, then continues on.

He enters the Grand Gallery.

The space stretches long and empty, a corridor of masterpieces. At the center, under its protective glass, hangs the Mona Lisa.

The man kneels and opens his kit: suction grips, cutter, folded black cloth, and a slim metal tool.

The glass lifts cleanly.

He removes the frame and inserts a tool behind the canvas -- a few soft clicks -- then lifts it free.

He rolls it into the cloth and tucks it under his arm.

FOOTSTEPS echo faintly from another corridor.

He freezes for a beat, then moves into the shadows between two large paintings and waits.

The FOOTSTEPS fade.

He slips out of the gallery and disappears into a dim, side hallway.

The guard enters a moment later, walking slowly, flashlight sweeping the walls. He passes the Mona Lisa's frame without noticing.

He keeps walking.

A beat.

Steps backward into view. Raises the flashlight.

The beam settles on the empty frame.

He grabs his radio.

GUARD  
Patrouille Cinq à la Base!  
Patrouille Cinq à la Base!  
Urgence! Urgence!

Static crackles through the radio.

GUARD (CONT'D)  
Allô ? Allô ?

A black club swings into frame from behind. The guard drops instantly, collapsing onto the marble floor.

THUD.

EXT. AMERICAN NEWS - LONDON BUREAU - DAY

A soot-streaked relic wedged between modernity -- the old building leans into the gray, its windows choked with crooked Venetian blinds and rattling air conditioner.

A tarnished brass plaque clings beside the door:

AMERICAN NEWS.

INT. AMERICAN NEWS OFFICE - DAY

Cluttered desks groan under flat-screen monitors and stacks of old wire copy. A few dusty typewriters linger like ghosts.

The air buzzes with the hum of computers, the clatter of teletypes, and the occasional curse at a frozen screen. Coffee cups, yellowed Post-its, and decades of ink stains complete the picture.

Reporters type, talk, and tap through the clutter.

HELEN DARBY (30s), sharp-suited, sharp-minded -- types furiously at her computer.

Perched casually on the edge of her desk is VAN GASKELL (50), all charm and creases. Rumpled jacket, tilted fedora, tie hanging slack.

GASKELL

Friday night. I'll pick you up at seven.

HELEN

No.

GASKELL

Come on. We'll have a great time. Just tell me where you live.

HELEN

You're the ace reporter -- you figure it out.

GASKELL

Why are you playing so hard to get?

HELEN

I'm married.

GASKELL

But you said your husband's in  
Malta -- and you don't love him  
anyway, it's all over your face.

She stops typing, fingers hovering mid-air.

HELEN

Did anyone ever tell you you're  
annoying as hell?

GASKELL

Sure -- but they can't all be  
right.

She resumes, eyes locked on the screen.

HELEN

I'm loyal.

GASKELL

So wasn't Anne Boleyn, and look  
where that got her.

From somewhere across the newsroom, a shout:

OFFICE BOY

Holy shit! They nailed the Mona  
Lisa!

GASKELL

Oh, that's why she's smiling --  
what!?

Heads turn. Phones pause mid-ring. The OFFICE BOY (19),  
wiry, caffeinated -- stands frozen at the police radio,  
scribbles furiously, then bolts toward the editor's door.

Gaskell springs off the desk, giving chase.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

Hey, let me see that!

The Office Boy doesn't break stride.

OFFICE BOY

Mr. Gaskell, you know the rules!

HELEN

No, he doesn't.

Phones lift. Keyboards chatter. The hive comes alive.

The Office Boy skids to a stop, raps three times on a frosted-glass door:

GARDNER BASTAKOFF — EDITOR.

BASTAKOFF (O.S.)

Come in!

INT. BASTAKOFF'S OFFICE - DAY

A cramped office packed with organized chaos. Folders stacked high. A whiteboard lists deadlines and assignments in red marker.

GARDNER BASTAKOFF (50s), balding, sweating through his shirt, chews an unlit Cuban. His vest hangs open.

The Office Boy rushes in. GASKELL follows, uninvited.

BASTAKOFF

Who told you to come in!?

OFFICE BOY

You did!

BASTAKOFF

Not you! Him!

GASKELL

(shrugs)

The door was open.

The Office Boy hands him a scribbled note.

BASTAKOFF

When?

OFFICE BOY

Just now! It was just on the police radio! It happened last night -- the guard was knocked out!

Bastakoff glances at Gaskell.

BASTAKOFF

They stole the Mona Lisa.

GASKELL

Bastakoff, you gotta give me this story! I can get a charter and be in France in an hour!

Bastakoff cracks a dry smile.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

You know I'm the best you got!  
I'll get the whole scoop from the  
inside!

BASTAKOFF

I know you, Gaskell. You'd get off  
the plane, go to the Moulin Rouge,  
and before the night was out I'd  
get a bill for damages.

GASKELL

You're talking hypotheticals.

BASTAKOFF

No, I'm talking experience.

GASKELL

It only happened once!

BASTAKOFF

Once was enough. I'll give the  
story to Harry.

GASKELL

Harry? In Obituaries?

BASTAKOFF

It's time he moved up in the  
world.

GASKELL

Yeah -- he'll write everything in  
alphabetical order.

BASTAKOFF

I already have your next  
assignment.

GASKELL

I gotta have the Mona Lisa!

BASTAKOFF

You're getting Margot Dane.

Gaskell stiffens.

GASKELL

Who?

BASTAKOFF

The widow of the late Lord Muffy  
Pendleton Bacon, the Third.

GASKELL

You're making that up.

Bastakoff drops into his chair.

BASTAKOFF

She's been a widow for five years  
and this weekend, she marries her  
fiancé, Rodney Jinxpeel.

GASKELL

Wait... I've heard of this... hey,  
come on! I'm not a Society Page  
writer!

BASTAKOFF

I want to know what five years of  
loneliness did to her... How did  
she meet Jinxpeel? She doesn't  
need the money, so it must be true  
love. When did the bells go off --

GASKELL

The only bells going off are the  
ones shaking loose the bats in  
your belfry.

BASTAKOFF

Listen, you --

GASKELL

Give me a break, Bastakoff. We go  
back years.

BASTAKOFF

All right.

Gaskell leans forward.

BASTAKOFF (CONT'D)

You can cover the surge of wheat  
prices in Aberdeen. Or I can send  
you to Siberia. I hear the heat's  
not working -- could be a good  
story.

GASKELL

Now listen, you son of a bitch!  
Twenty years ago I won a Pulitzer  
for this paper!



BASTAKOFF

And twenty years ago I had a  
thirty-eight-inch waist and hair,  
so what's your point?

Gaskell exhales, shifting tactics.

BASTAKOFF (CONT'D)

It's Sussex or Siberia. You pick.

GASKELL

It wouldn't work anyway. Margot  
Dane won't let a reporter in for a  
story. I read somewhere she hates  
the press.

BASTAKOFF

And then some. She actually shot a  
reporter in the leg who snuck onto  
her property when her husband was  
dying.

Gaskell remains silent.

BASTAKOFF (CONT'D)

I have a way to get you in.

Bastakoff picks up his phone.

BASTAKOFF (CONT'D)

Send Mr. Lotoala in.

He hangs up.

Gaskell watches.

BASTAKOFF (CONT'D)

Ahh... the challenge intrigues  
you.

The door opens. TEVAKA LOTOALA (75) enters -- with the  
wind-worn look of a man who's lived by the sea and seen  
too much light. His camera rests on his chest like a  
pendant of purpose.

BASTAKOFF (CONT'D)

Tevaka, here, is one of the top  
photographers in London.

GASKELL

How do you do?

LOTOALA

Sir, I am fine. I hope you are well.

BASTAKOFF

Tevaka has been hired by Margot Dane to photograph the wedding and the estate.

GASKELL

So you want me to get the story somehow, and Lotoala takes the pictures?

BASTAKOFF

No. Lotoala is not going.

GASKELL

I don't get it.

BASTAKOFF

American News bought out Tevaka. We paid him more than Margot cut him down to. You will be going in his place.

GASKELL

You may not have noticed, Bastakoff... but we don't share a resemblance.

BASTAKOFF

Margot has never met Tevaka Lotoala. She's seen his work, but never him.

LOTOALA

I do not let myself be photographed since I lost my hair. I find it very depressing.

BASTAKOFF

Now, you take Lotoala's car and all his equipment, and you get your ass to Sussex, worm your way in as the photographer, and get me the story.

GASKELL

I have a feeling that if Margot Dane finds out about me, Harry in Obituaries will have something new to write about.

INT. PUB - LONDON

A Victorian pub with a curved wooden bar and deep red wallpaper. Stained glass panels line the windows. Hanging lamps cast soft light over carved wood and polished brass. Bottles fill mirrored shelves behind the bar.

A few patrons linger at scattered tables.

Behind the bar, STAN (30s), cheerful and chatty, wipes down the counter.

The door opens. Gaskell walks in, composed, but his jaw clenched tight.

STAN

Mr. Gaskell.

GASKELL

Stan, how are you?

STAN

Couldn't be better! We've got a blessing coming into our family.

GASKELL

Yeah? You're gonna have a kid?

STAN

No. A Doberman.

GASKELL

Oh.

STAN

A rescue dog. We're getting him from a shelter in Kent. You're here early for you.

GASKELL

I've got an assignment.

STAN

The Mona Lisa robbery? Hey, that's right up your alley, ain't it?

GASKELL

I need one for the road and don't be stingy.

Stan sets a glass on the bar and pours.

Gaskell watches the pour, then looks up at Stan.

GASKELL (CONT'D)  
It's less of a road and more of a journey.

Stan tops it off -- a triple.

STAN  
That's the scoop of a lifetime.

GASKELL  
If you're Harry in Obituaries.

STAN  
Huh? You're not going to Paris?

GASKELL  
Nope.

STAN  
That doesn't make sense! Where are you going?

Gaskell takes a drink.

GASKELL  
To the other side of the world, my friend.

He downs the rest in one go.

STAN  
They finally sending ya to Siberia?

GASKELL  
No. Sussex.

STAN  
Sussex? What's in Sussex?

GASKELL  
The estate of Margot Dane and her late husband, Lord Muffy Pendleton Bacon, the Third. And I'm sure she'll be as cold as Siberia.

Stan watches him. Then grabs another glass and pours.

STAN  
I'll join ya.

He fills Gaskell's.

GASKELL  
I won that paper a Pulitzer!

STAN  
You've told me.

GASKELL  
Yeah, someone should tell my boss.

He drinks.

GASKELL (CONT'D)  
I should go back to the States.

Stan tops off both glasses.

STAN  
You can't do that! Who would be  
here for closing?

GASKELL  
I should be covering a union brawl  
on Chicago's South Side.

He drinks again.

GASKELL (CONT'D)  
Pendleton Bacon. I ask you -- who  
the hell has a name like that?

STAN  
Muffy did.

Gaskell looks at him -- then bursts out laughing.

GASKELL  
Muffy! I mean, that's the name for  
a cat or something... hey, you can  
call your new Doberman "Muffy."

STAN  
Rescue dog. Already has a name.

GASKELL  
Yeah? What is it?

STAN  
Killer.

Gaskell breaks out LAUGHING again. Stan joins him.

STAN (CONT'D)  
Who is she marrying?

GASKELL

Ah -- Fruitpeel or something like that.

STAN

Fruitpeel?

He thinks.

STAN (CONT'D)

Oh! No, wait! It's Jinxpeel!

GASKELL

That sounds about right.

STAN

He owns the Jinxpeel Supermarkets!

GASKELL

That's wonderful. Hey, Stan, let me ask you something.

STAN

Sure. What is it?

GASKELL

Could I pass for a Tuvaluan photographer from the island of Funafuti?

Stan pauses. Then pours another round.

STAN

Maybe after a few more of these.

Gaskell lifts his glass.

GASKELL

Stan -- I love ya!

They toast.

CLINK!

EXT. DANE ESTATE - DAY

A grand stone manor perched above wide, manicured lawns. Ivy climbs the gabled walls. A lily pond glistens near a marble fountain. A long stairway leads to the main entrance, flanked by stone urns.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A spacious country kitchen. Dark wooden cabinets line the walls. A green range sits beneath a wall clock. Dishes, bottles, and small appliances crowd the counters. A long table stretches down the center, partially covered.

At the table preparing a tea tray, stands WINSTON (60s), the kind of butler who could announce the end of the world without creasing his collar.

The door opens.

MARGOT DANE (40s) steps in -- silk robe, tousled hair, effortlessly poised despite the hour.

WINSTON

Good morning, ma'am. You're awake quite early.

MARGOT

Don't confuse being up with being awake. What time is it?

WINSTON

Seven.

MARGOT

How do you look so pressed and folded at this time of day?

WINSTON

Ma'am?

MARGOT

Did we hire a new cook?

WINSTON

Yes, ma'am. Mrs. Clinstock. She'll be here shortly.

MARGOT

Did you see Mr. Jinxpeel, by any chance?

WINSTON

No, ma'am. Not today... and not last evening.

Margot gives a faint smile, then exits.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sunlight filters through tall windows and heavy drapes. Velvet sofas and gilt frames lend the room a genteel comfort -- the kind of luxury that's long since stopped trying to impress.

The phone RINGS.

Margot enters and picks up the receiver.

MARGOT

Yes?

PET (V.O.)

Darling! I'm so sorry for being out of the country and leaving you with all the preparations! I wasn't expecting a wedding so fast.

MARGOT

Mother. How are you?

PET (V.O.)

Jet lag kicking in. What time is it for real?

MARGOT

Seven.

PET (V.O.)

Feels like late afternoon.

MARGOT

Well, then you can have a highball.

PET (V.O.)

I will. Darling, I think there was an error in the email you sent me.

MARGOT

How so?

PET (V.O.)

You're surely not having the reception at your home?

MARGOT

This is my second marriage, Mother. The bloom is gone. It's going to be very low-key.



PET (V.O.)

What about Grosvenor House? Our friends expect it.

MARGOT

It's a small wedding -- I've only invited a couple of hundred.

PET (V.O.)

But the reception --

MARGOT

I am renting a large tent and an orchestra.

PET (V.O.)

A tent? Who have you invited -- the Ringling Brothers?

MARGOT

Mother.

PET (V.O.)

Darling... are you sure?

MARGOT

About?

PET (V.O.)

This Rodney Jinxpeel. You've been dating him for two months and we don't know anything about him!

MARGOT

Mother, he owns the Jinxpeel Supermarket chain and the Jinxpeel Home and Garden Centers. What else is there to know?

PET (V.O.)

What does he do besides squeeze melons and brag about his tool section?

MARGOT

He's an executive -- he doesn't squeeze melons.

PET (V.O.)

Well... I guess you would know.

MARGOT

Mother, is there anything else?

PET (V.O.)  
Just that I will be arriving  
tomorrow afternoon.

A door OPENS and CLOSES in another room.

MARGOT  
Mother, I need to go. I'll see you  
tomorrow.

PET (V.O.)  
Goodbye, darling.

Margot hangs up and exits.

INT. THE GREAT HALL - DAY

High windows pour light across carved beams and faded portraits. The vast room feels both grand and lived-in - elegance layered with history.

RODNEY JINXPEEL (40s) enters from deeper in the house, walking toward the front door. He wears a tailored suit, his hair slicked, his smile measured. Every inch of him is styled for show.

Margot enters.

MARGOT  
Rodney?

RODNEY  
Sweetheart!

He checks his watch.

RODNEY (CONT'D)  
It's seven!

MARGOT  
I know.

RODNEY  
You never rise before ten.

MARGOT  
When your snoring didn't wake me  
up, your silence did. Where are  
you going?

RODNEY  
To the office.

MARGOT

At seven?

RODNEY

Lots to do before the big day.  
Paperwork, meetings with  
supervisors...

MARGOT

Where were you last night? You  
never came home --

He starts to answer.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

And don't tell me you stayed at  
your place because I called at one-  
thirty and the butler told me you  
were not there.

RODNEY

If you must know... I came here  
from the office and it was quite  
late. You were in bed. I spent the  
night in the cellar.

MARGOT

What on earth for?

RODNEY

It was going to be a surprise...  
for a wedding gift, I am going to  
have a wine cellar built.

She looks at him, unmoved.

MARGOT

I don't drink wine. Only whiskey.  
And you should know that.

RODNEY

I do, dearest, but you will love  
it just the same... mood lighting,  
ancient dust on vintage bottles...

MARGOT

The spiders will love it.

RODNEY

There's no reason you can't store  
a whiskey bottle or two down there  
as well.

MARGOT  
And that took you all night?

RODNEY  
It's a big cellar.

He kisses her.

RODNEY (CONT'D)  
Did anyone ever tell you that you  
look lovely even at this hour in  
the morning?

He kisses her again.

MARGOT  
Yes...

Another kiss.

RODNEY  
Oh... I didn't know I had said  
that before.

One more kiss.

MARGOT  
It wasn't you who said it.

He steps back. A brief smile.

RODNEY  
See you tonight, love!

Rodney exits through the front door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Margot crosses to a side table. She grabs a cigarette,  
fits it into a long holder, and lights it.

She pours a drink from a crystal decanter -- neat.

Winston enters.

He catches sight of the raised glass.

WINSTON  
Ma'am...

MARGOT  
Pretend we're in Kiribati. It's  
evening there.

She knocks back the drink.

WINSTON

Oh, not the drink, ma'am. I was wondering if you would like an early breakfast.

Margot takes another swig.

MARGOT

I'm working on it.

EXT. YVONNE'S HOME - DAY

A red-brick manor with white columns sits beyond a broad, trimmed lawn. Dormer windows overlook a quiet pond rimmed with reeds.

MARGOT (V.O.)

I mean, what the hell am I going to do with a wine cellar? He's got one at his house!

EXT. YVONNE'S OUTSIDE GARDEN - DAY

A manicured garden arranged in circles and hedged paths. White blooms border a central planter. Umbrellas shade small tables.

Margot sits across from YVONNE MONTROSE, 50s, over lunch.

Sharp-eyed, warm-boned, Yvonne is the kind of woman who can spot a lie or a loose hem from twenty paces. A touch ruffled, always genuine.

Margot's truest friend.

YVONNE

Why question it? As long as he uses his money.

MARGOT

What if I want to do something else with the cellar!

YVONNE

Margot, it's been there for three hundred years... when were you planning on renovating?

MARGOT

I haven't been there for three hundred years. What an absurd thing to say.

YVONNE

Is he keeping his own house?

MARGOT

Yes.

YVONNE

Do you have a pre-nup?

MARGOT

Yes -- no -- I mean, he doesn't know yet.

YVONNE

When do you plan to enlighten him?

MARGOT

I have a photographer coming.

YVONNE

For the wedding? How nice.

MARGOT

I don't give a damn about wedding photos. He's going to photograph everything in the house -- every room, every corner.

YVONNE

Why?

MARGOT

So when the divorce comes there will be no arguments as to what was here and mine first.

A pause.

YVONNE

Isn't love wonderful?

EXT. ROAD IN SUSSEX - DAY

The tiny PHOTOGRAPHY BY LOTOALA car wheezes along a winding rural lane, coughing out blue smoke.

A pair of cyclists pedal peacefully ahead -- until Gaskell sputters past and blasts them with exhaust.

They swerve, coughing, shaking furious fists as the car limps away.

Around the next bend, a flock of sheep stands planted across the road, unbothered and immovable.

Gaskell taps the horn... which sounds more like the BEEP BEEP of a clown car.

One sheep slowly turns, unimpressed.

It does not move.

Gaskell sighs, defeated, as the engine gives a tired POP.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - DRIVE - DAY

Gaskell pulls up to the front door in a cloud of thick, blue smoke.

BLAM!

A flame pops from the tailpipe in a double BACKFIRE that echoes across the grounds.

At the front door stands Winston.

Gaskell's door creaks open. He spills out, brushing soot off his jacket as if this is all perfectly normal.

GASKELL

Ah! The reception committee! You must be psychic!

WINSTON

No, Sir. I just have good hearing. You were audible a mile away.

Gaskell squints back at the smoldering car.

GASKELL

Right.

He heads up the steps. Winston shifts aside with the grace of a drawbridge opening.

WINSTON

This way, Mr... Lotoala.

Gaskell flashes a thin smile and enters.

INT. THE GREAT HALL - DAY

Winston steps aside and gestures for Gaskell to enter.

WINSTON

This way, Sir.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Margot sits in a plush armchair, framed perfectly, cigarette balanced in a long holder.

Winston stops.

WINSTON

Mr. Lotoala, Ma'am.

Margot gives a polite nod. Winston exits, leaving Gaskell exposed under her cool, appraising stare.

MARGOT

You don't look like a Tevaka Lotoala.

GASKELL

Would you believe I get that a lot?

Nothing from her.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

You see... my parents were missionaries in Nukufetau, and were killed by the Communists on the island of Funafuti in the uprising. I was only seven months old.

MARGOT

Which uprising?

GASKELL

The Cultural Revolution. Late-stage, early seventies.

MARGOT

That wasn't exactly an uprising.

GASKELL

It was where my parents were standing.



MARGOT  
How is it you survived?

GASKELL  
I was off visiting friends.

MARGOT  
At seven months?

GASKELL  
No, no, of course not. My parents' friends... Tevaka Lotoala and his wife. When my parents were killed, they sorta adopted me.

MARGOT  
Ko tena se tala fakaofoofogia.  
(subtitled)  
That's a very interesting story.

GASKELL  
Hm?

MARGOT  
Kilo koe?  
(subtitled)  
Do you understand?

Awkward pause.

GASKELL  
I think you're speaking Tuvaluan.

Margot glares.

GASKELL (CONT'D)  
Right after the uprising, Tevaka moved to Chicago... he had to learn English... and so did I. Funny how things work out.

MARGOT  
Chicago?

GASKELL  
For my formative years. Once I was all formed, we moved to London.

He forces a CHUCKLE.

GASKELL (CONT'D)  
Little ice-breaking humor there.

Her expression does not thaw.

MARGOT

So you are, in actuality, Tevaka Lotoala, Junior.

GASKELL

You got it.

MARGOT

What are your plans, Mr. Lotoala?

GASKELL

Long term?

MARGOT

No. Tonight. Were you going to get a room at the hotel in the village?

GASKELL

Probably...I haven't checked it out yet. Wanted to get here soon as I could.

Margot stands -- elegant, decisive.

MARGOT

You can stay here.

GASKELL

I wouldn't want to put you out.

MARGOT

There are fourteen bedrooms and I don't tend to any of them, so you are not putting me out at all.

She rings a small silver bell.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

You're not here to photograph only the wedding.

GASKELL

I'm not?

MARGOT

There is another assignment and you are not to discuss it with anyone -- especially my fiancé.

GASKELL

Mysterious.

Her gaze lands hard enough to pin him in place.

MARGOT  
Aren't we all?

Another awkward pause.

Winston enters seamlessly.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
Winston, Mr. Lotoala will be  
staying the weekend. Please help  
him with his luggage and show him  
to a guest room.

WINSTON  
Yes, Ma'am. This way, Sir.

Winston exits.

Gaskell watches Margot for a beat -- trying to read her --  
then follows.

INT. THE GREAT HALL - DAY

Winston and Gaskell move toward the front door.

GASKELL  
Why do I feel like I was supposed  
to bow or something?

They step outside.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - DRIVE - DAY

The boot of Lotoala's car hangs open. Inside: a jumble of  
mismatched gear.

Winston lifts a camera body, studies it.

WINSTON  
Vintage.

Gaskell nods.

Winston picks up a lens, inspects it like a jeweler.

WINSTON (CONT'D)  
Seventy to two-ten. Old Tokina.  
Soft in the corners.

GASKELL  
How do you know that?

WINSTON  
I'm a bit of an amateur  
photographer, Sir.

GASKELL  
Yeah?

WINSTON  
In fact, I've won several awards  
for my photographs.

GASKELL  
You don't say! That's very  
impressive!

Winston reaches deeper, pulls up a tripod with one leg  
missing its foot.

WINSTON  
This will sink into the grass.

GASKELL  
That's why I use it!

Gaskell takes it and leans it against the car.

Winston pulls out a colander.

WINSTON  
Part of the... lighting kit?

GASKELL  
Bounce filter.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Margot watches from the window, curtain pulled back.

Winston enters, remaining regal with a tripod and camera  
in hand.

WINSTON  
Miss Dane, will Mr. Jinxpeel be  
joining you for dinner?

MARGOT  
I don't know... probably not...  
depends on the melons...

WINSTON  
Miss?

Margot snaps out of it, turns toward him.

MARGOT

Sorry, Winston. We'll plan for three. Myself, Mr. Jinxpeel, and Mr. Lotoala.

WINSTON

Very well. Thank you, Miss.

Winston exits as Margot looks back out the window.

INT. STAIRWAY - DAY

Gaskell descends the grand staircase with a little too much swagger for a guest. Halfway down, he stops dead.

A painting hangs on the wall.

The Mona Lisa.

INT. MAIN HALLWAY - DAY

He steps toward the painting, drawn in. Up close, the frame is ancient, the scale exact. His eyes narrow.

A low WHISTLE escapes him.

MARGOT (O.S.)

Do you like it?

Gaskell turns. Margot appears beside him.

GASKELL

It was stolen last night...

MARGOT

Not this one. This is a copy.

Gaskell leans into it... studies it.

GASKELL

Looks old to me... even the paint is cracked.

MARGOT

Do you think I'm an art thief, darling?

GASKELL

I wouldn't know.

Margot steps closer to the canvas, slipping into lecture mode without losing an ounce of elegance.

MARGOT

This is a very good, seventeenth-century copy. Everyone who was important had one back then.

GASKELL

Copies that were actually painted? From scratch?

MARGOT

They didn't have printers in those days.

He continues to study it.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Look at the face. Too crisp. Leonardo painted like smoke. This one looks like she moisturizes with Windex.

She indicates the surface.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

See the crackles? The real one has tiny spiderweb lines. This one's cracks are big and chunky.

GASKELL

Amazing...

MARGOT

And the bridge in the background.

GASKELL

What about it?

MARGOT

Copyists always mess up the angle. This one leans slightly left. A Renaissance GPS error.

GASKELL

Does it have any value as a reproduction?

Margot shrugs with casual aristocratic insanity.

MARGOT

Not much. I think I only paid about a million and a half for it.

Gaskell's eyebrows raise.

GASKELL

That's a lot of coin, sister.

Margot shifts -- a little less socialite.

MARGOT

In confidence?

GASKELL

Yes?

She steps just close enough to make it personal.

MARGOT

I didn't bring you here for the wedding... even though you'll have to take pictures to justify your presence. I want every inch of my home photographed. Every lamp on every table and every nick on every knack.

Gaskell processes that.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Every inch. Even the cellar. You are to do all this discreetly. No one must notice. Especially Mr. Jinxpeel.

GASKELL

Well... I guess I can do that.

He lifts his camera and nods toward the painting.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

Do you mind?

Margot gives him a small, regal nod.

He aims at the Mona Lisa.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

Smile!

SNAP!

INT. BASTAKOFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Bastakoff bursts in like a storm, the Office Boy scrambling to keep up. Papers flutter.

BASTAKOFF

Where is this idiot!? He's been in Paris for six hours and not a single phone call!

OFFICE BOY

Sir, I was trying to tell you -- he's on line one.

BASTAKOFF

What!?

OFFICE BOY

Line one.

BASTAKOFF

What about it?

OFFICE BOY

It's the idiot, Sir -- I mean, Harry from Obits.

BASTAKOFF

Why didn't you say so! Get outta here!

The boy practically disappears. Bastakoff slams the door shut, snatches up the phone, and jabs the button.

BASTAKOFF (CONT'D)

Where the hell are you!?

(pause)

I know you're in France, you moron! I sent you there! What have you found out?

(pause)

I don't care if the guards are very upset! What did the head of the museum tell you?

(pause)

Okay... okay... that's good. What's the headline?

(pause)

"The Mona Lisa, aged 500 plus, passed quietly from the Louvre into another place...." Are you out of your mind!? I can't use that crap!

INT. AMERICAN NEWS OFFICE - DAY

The Office Boy stands at Helen's desk while she types at full speed.



OFFICE BOY  
I've never seen him this mad!

HELEN  
You're new.

OFFICE BOY  
It's a good thing Harry is in  
France. He's safe there.

HELEN  
It's his own fault. He should have  
sent Gaskell.

OFFICE BOY  
Why?

HELEN  
He's the best there is.

OFFICE BOY  
Oh. I thought he annoyed you.

HELEN  
Who told you that?

OFFICE BOY  
Everyone knows.

HELEN  
I haven't heard anything.

OFFICE BOY  
They stop talking when you come  
'round.

She pauses, lights a cigarette.

HELEN  
Listen, kid. What I say about Van  
Gaskell and what I think of him as  
a reporter are as different as a  
straight scotch and a flat beer.

She exhales smoke and keeps typing.

HELEN (CONT'D)  
And I'll tell ya something else I  
know.

OFFICE BOY  
What?

HELEN

Harry will end up turning that story in.

OFFICE BOY

How?

HELEN

I don't know. But you watch.

She types. The boy glances toward Bastakoff's door -- his voice explodes from behind it:

BASTAKOFF (O.S.)

I want a double column for the morning edition, you hear me? No excuses -- I want a story, and a damned good one!

EXT. DANE ESTATE - NIGHT

The manor glows faintly under a full moon. Only a few windows show light. The rest sink into shadow.

INT. GASKELL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A solid oak room built for silence. Gaskell sits by the window, listening to the night -- crickets, wind, the faint toll of a distant clock.

GASKELL

How can anyone sleep with all that racket?

He glances at the alarm clock -- 1 AM. He rises, grabs his jacket, and heads out.

INT. STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Gaskell moves carefully down the stairs in the dark.

INT. MAIN HALLWAY - NIGHT

He pauses at the painting -- the Mona Lisa. Steps closer, studying it in the low light.

GASKELL

Amazing.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Gaskell enters and heads straight for the crystal decanter. He pours himself a generous glass of whiskey, then takes a slow, deliberate sip.

His eyes drift across the paintings lining the hall. A 19th-century portrait catches his gaze -- a stern figure, eyes cold and filled with disdain.

Gaskell smirks, holding the stare for a beat, then turns and heads off, the glass still in hand.

EXT. THE PATIO - NIGHT

Gaskell steps onto the moonlit patio, the vast grounds stretching before him. He takes a seat, gazing out into the night.

Another sip.

MARGOT

Do you mind if I join you?

He stands, momentarily startled. Margot appears in the doorway, draped in a silk gown, an elegant robe wrapped around her. A drink in hand.

GASKELL

Not at all. I was just admiring the countryside -- I mean, your backyard.

She joins him, her presence effortlessly commanding.

MARGOT

Thank you.

GASKELL

Can't sleep, or are you a night owl?

MARGOT

A little of both. How is the photography coming along?

GASKELL

Fine, just fine. Why do you want everything photographed... down to the brick on the brack?

MARGOT

I'm a fan of still photography.

Gaskell shakes his head.

GASKELL

Uh-uh. I've been around too long.  
That's not the reason.

MARGOT

Do I have to give a reason?

GASKELL

In the daylight when you're Margot  
Dane, stiff upper-lip and running  
your castle -- no. But in the  
moonlight when the world sleeps...  
I thought you might be so  
inclined.

She offers the smallest of smiles, then takes a sip.

MARGOT

Cheekiness creeps out of the  
shadows.

GASKELL

Nah. With me it's always in the  
sunlight -- even in the moonlight.

MARGOT

I'm looking forward to your  
meeting my mother tomorrow.

GASKELL

Why's that?

MARGOT

She's a force. You're a force. And  
when forces clash -- it's fun to  
watch.

GASKELL

Well... you're a force to be  
reckoned with, and you're avoiding  
the question.

She takes another drink, a beat of silence.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

You're second-guessing the  
wedding.

Margot locks eyes with him. A pause.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

I know I'm just the hired  
photographer, but it's all over  
your face. I'm good at faces.

MARGOT

Are you?

GASKELL

It's easier than reading minds,  
which, in actuality, is  
impossible. But reading a face  
that's out in the open for all to  
see... that's a gift. And I'm good  
at it.

MARGOT

You're not very good at humility,  
though, are you?

GASKELL

Never had much use for it.  
Humility is just another word for  
beating around the bush. I like to  
get right to the point. Saves  
time.

MARGOT

Perhaps you're in the wrong  
profession. With an eye like  
yours, you should be a journalist.

Gaskell stirs, hiding a flash of discomfort. He takes  
another sip.

GASKELL

You need a good eye for  
photography, too. Capture the  
right moment that deserves to be  
frozen in time and outlive us all.

MARGOT

Sounds a bit fatalistic when you  
put it that way.

GASKELL

Don't confuse fate with reality,  
Miss Dane.

MARGOT

I'll keep it in mind.

She finishes her drink, another pause.

GASKELL

So?

MARGOT

I just wonder if I'm moving too fast.

GASKELL

How long has it been since your first husband...

MARGOT

Five years.

GASKELL

Seems like a respectable amount of time.

MARGOT

I only met Mr. Jinxpeel three months ago. You know -- love is blind and all that -- but lately the cracks are showing... and I think I may be making a mistake.

Gaskell listens intently, his expression soft.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

That's why I want things photographed. If it doesn't work out, there won't be any property dispute.

Another swig.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

I think he's the type. I wish I had seen it earlier.

Gaskell nods slowly, a quiet understanding passing between them.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

I should have had you here to tip me off.

GASKELL

Why go through with it?

MARGOT

If I cancel now I'd look like a fool. And... who knows, I may be wrong.

She glances at her empty glass, standing up.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
The whiskey's gone, and I have  
said too much.

Gaskell stands.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
Goodnight, Mr. Lotoala.

GASKELL  
Goodnight.

Gaskell watches as she walks back into the house, her  
silhouette fading into the darkness.

GASKELL (CONT'D)  
(to himself)  
What. A. Story.

INT. STAIRWAY - MORNING

Gaskell descends the stairs with a spring in his step and  
a camera around his neck.

INT. MAIN HALLWAY - MORNING

He steals a glance at the Mona Lisa as he passes by, and  
stops. His brow furrows as he steps back to the painting.

Gaskell's puzzled as he leans in closer.

RODNEY (O.S.)  
Quite remarkable, isn't it?

Gaskell, startled, turns to see Rodney -- poised and  
smiling as usual.

GASKELL  
Yes... it is...

Rodney joins him at the painting.

RODNEY  
An almost perfect reproduction.

GASKELL  
Is it?

Rodney takes his eyes from the painting and turns them on  
Gaskell as his smile dissipates.

RODNEY

And you are?

GASKELL

I'm the photographer... Tevaka  
Lotoala.

A blank stare from Rodney.

RODNEY

You don't look like a Tevaka.

GASKELL

Many say I resemble Lotoala more  
than Tevaka.

Rodney arches an eyebrow.

MARGOT (O.S.)

His parents were missionaries in  
the wrong place at the wrong time.

They turn to see Margot as she sweeps down the stairs.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

He was adopted by Lotoala, who  
later moved here as a world-class  
photographer, thus the name.

She kisses Rodney. More like a cold peck.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Darling. Where were you last  
night?

RODNEY

In the cellar.

MARGOT

Of course.

Gaskell raises his camera to photograph the painting.

RODNEY

Eh-eh-eh! Please do not photograph  
the painting.

MARGOT

Why not?

GASKELL

Yeah --



RODNEY

Every flash creates more damage.

Rodney holds out his arm.

RODNEY (CONT'D)

Darling?

Margot takes his arm and they depart.

Gaskell takes another look at the painting. His face contorts in suspicion.

He follows Margot and Rodney.

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Sunlight streams through tall windows onto polished oak and brass. Breakfast rests under silver warmers on a sideboard, Winston standing at attention.

At one end of the long table, Margot and Rodney eat in poised silence; at the other, Gaskell sips his coffee, the space between them echoing with formality.

Suddenly -- a rapid exchange like a blast of frigid wind.

MARGOT

Rodney, dearest, about the wine cellar --

RODNEY

Yes?

MARGOT

I don't want one --

RODNEY

But my dear... why not --

MARGOT

I had other plans for the cellar --

RODNEY

Like what?

MARGOT

A gymnasium, perhaps --

RODNEY

You've never been in a gymnasium in your life --

MARGOT

I know. Time to start --

RODNEY

Darling, that's nonsense --

MARGOT

It may be -- but it's my nonsense  
and my cellar. And you should have  
asked me first. When were you  
planning on telling me? When the  
wine cellar makers showed up --

RODNEY

I thought it would please you --

MARGOT

It doesn't --

RODNEY

All right. No wine cellar --

MARGOT

Thank you.

The bombardment ends. They eat in silence.

Gaskell takes another sip.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Mr. Lotoala?

GASKELL

Hm?

MARGOT

You have a very busy day ahead --  
taking photographs.

GASKELL

Yes. Yes, I do.

RODNEY

The wedding's in two days...  
pictures today?

MARGOT

No need for concern, Rodney. You  
are not in them.

RODNEY

Doesn't your mother arrive today?

MARGOT

Yes. She's not in them, either.

RODNEY

So, no one is in these pictures but you?

MARGOT

Nor I.

RODNEY

I don't understand...

MARGOT

I don't expect you to. I want pictures taken, is there anything wrong with that?

Rodney doesn't answer.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

You said you wanted to live here before we were married, but every night you're gone.

RODNEY

I'm very busy at work, darling.

MARGOT

I don't know many supermarket and garden centers open for business at one in the morning!

RODNEY

Maybe that's why mine are so successful and -- wait. Hold a moment.

He glares across the table at Gaskell.

RODNEY (CONT'D)

Now I understand all this fake Lotoala business.

GASKELL

Fake?

RODNEY

You're not a photographer.

GASKELL

I'm not?

Rodney points to Gaskell as he turns to Margot.

RODNEY

You hired a private detective to snoop on me?

MARGOT

I did nothing of the sort!

RODNEY

"Tevaka Lotoala." What a fake identity cover!

GASKELL

Now, hold on --

RODNEY

Margot! I trust you -- I would never dream of hiring a private detective to follow you!

MARGOT

Why would you need to!? I never go anywhere!

RODNEY

Maybe you have "company" when I'm not here!

He turns to Gaskell.

GASKELL

(innocently)

Leave me out of this.

MARGOT

You're the one out gallivanting every night and I haven't hired a private detective! *He is a photographer not a lover!*

A calm in the storm.

Rodney rises, and with brisk steps, exits.

Gaskell turns to Winston.

GASKELL

Any whiskey on that side table, Winston?

MARGOT

Make that two.

Winston exits.

The phone RINGS.

Margot rises and answers it.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Yes?

(pause)

Yvonne. Hello.

(pause)

Mother is due in this afternoon,  
not sure of the time. She'll ring  
from the station.

(pause)

Right... Pierre is coming, too.  
Can you make it?

(pause)

Wonderful. Yours is the only  
opinion I trust.

(pause)

Of course. Goodbye.

She hangs up.

Winston enters with two glasses of whiskey.

As he serves --

GASKELL

Miss Dane. About the painting --

MARGOT

Not now, Lotoala. I couldn't care  
less about that thing.

GASKELL

It's just that --

MARGOT

I said not now.

She knocks one back.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - DRIVE - DAY

Margot waits on the front steps, dressed to travel.

She checks her watch.

Winston opens the door.

WINSTON

Here you are, Ma'am. Miss  
Clinstock was wondering about  
dinner --

MARGOT

Where is Reinhart?

WINSTON

At the garage, Ma'am.

MARGOT

The garage? I need it and -- oh,  
damn. I forgot that was scheduled  
for today.

WINSTON

Shall I call a taxi?

MARGOT

It will take a taxi an hour to get  
here.

WINSTON

Correct, Ma'am.

MARGOT

Mother doesn't like to be kept  
waiting.

She sees Gaskell's car.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Go get Mr. Lotoala.

Winston glances at the car.

He closes his eyes in silent prayer.

WINSTON

Yes, Ma'am.

EXT. TRAIN DEPOT - DAY

A small country platform under a green-trimmed canopy.  
Benches, handcarts, and a bicycle rest beside the brick  
station wall. Signs mark Platform 5 and the Way Out.

Seated on a bench surrounded by three large suitcases, is  
PETUNIA DANE (75), Elegant, sharp-tongued, and impossible  
to fool. Her wit is as polished as her pearls, her gaze  
cool but perceptive.

Margot approaches, brushing dust from her jacket, smoothing her hair.

MARGOT

Mother!

Pet rises. They share a brief embrace.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Oh, it's so good to see you. Have you been waiting long?

PET

Yes.

Pet sees Gaskell a short distance off.

PET (CONT'D)

There is a strange man staring at me.

MARGOT

That's Mr. Lotoala -- from Tuvalu.

PET

Lotoala, you say?

She takes another look.

PET (CONT'D)

He doesn't look Tuvaluan.

MARGOT

He's not. I'll explain later.

PET

Why are you... out of sorts?

MARGOT

Well, Mother, my normal car is in the shop and Mr. Lotoala was kind enough to drive me here in his -- which is, as you are about to discover -- an experience.

PET

Ah. Lotoala!? Bags.

Gaskell tips his hat.

EXT. A ROAD IN SUSSEX - DAY

Lotoala's car rattles along the road, coughing out thick exhaust. It backfires -- a sharp BANG blasts from the exhaust pipe.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY BY LOTOALA CAR - DAY

Gaskell drives.

Margot sits up front, trying to brace herself between potholes. Her head knocks lightly against the roof.

Pet is squeezed into the back seat, upright and unimpressed. The interior rattles with every jolt.

PET

Mr. Lotoala, is there money in photography?

GASKELL

Um -- yes.

PET

Then perhaps you can purchase a larger and more stable car!

BANG! Another explosion from the tailpipe.

Margot flinches, bumping her head.

MARGOT

Oh, God!

PET

Something blew up!

GASKELL

Just one of its quirks!

EXT. ANOTHER ROAD IN SUSSEX - DAY

Continuing to belch smoke, the car sputters past a parked police cruiser.

The cruiser pulls out, siren WAILING.

Another BANG from the car -- a burst of flame jets from the exhaust.



INT. PHOTOGRAPHY BY LOTOALA CAR - DAY

Margot glances back, squinting through the smoke-filled rear window.

Red and blue lights flicker behind them.

MARGOT

I think there's a police car  
behind us.

GASKELL

Yep.

PET

Well, pull over and let him pass!

Gaskell guides the car to the shoulder.

EXT. SIDE OF A ROAD IN SUSSEX - DAY

The police cruiser idles behind the Lotoala car.

The POLICE OFFICER (20s) steps out -- young, alert, and already frowning.

BANG!

A final backfire from Gaskell's car. A burst of flame shoots from the exhaust.

The officer ducks, then straightens and approaches the driver's window.

He taps on the glass. Gaskell rolls it down.

GASKELL

Good afternoon, Officer.

POLICE OFFICER

Is it? I can't tell with all the  
smog out here.

GASKELL

Must be a front coming in from  
Scotland.

POLICE OFFICER

Is this your... vehicle?

GASKELL

Yes.

PET  
What does he want?

MARGOT  
Mother --

POLICE OFFICER  
May I see your driver's license  
and proof of insurance, please?

Gaskell stiffens. A flicker of panic.

GASKELL  
Yes... um... may I get out?

The officer steps back.

Gaskell climbs out and walks a few steps away with him.

He hands over his license and an insurance slip.

The officer reads.

POLICE OFFICER  
Mr. Gaskell?

Gaskell leans in, low voice.

GASKELL  
Yes, but you can't call me that.  
You see, they think my name is  
Tevaka Lotoala.

POLICE OFFICER  
You're being serious?

GASKELL  
They think I'm filling in for him  
because Tevaka Lotoala is a famous  
photographer. I only work for him,  
but they wanted a Lotoala, so I  
told them I was adopted.

POLICE OFFICER  
What are you on about?

GASKELL  
It's true, I swear on a stack of  
tickets to the Policeman's Ball!  
If you call me Gaskell in front of  
them, my poor, ancient, father  
will die of a broken heart because  
we let Margot Dane down.

POLICE OFFICER

Margot Dane? The famous Margot Dane?

GASKELL

That's her in the front seat.

The officer walks up to the car and peeks in the window. Margot meets his gaze with a polite smile.

He returns the smile, then walks back to Gaskell.

POLICE OFFICER

Why do you have Margot Dane in a shitbox like this? She's the pride of Sussex.

GASKELL

It's a long story, but this was the only car available and we had to get her mother at the train station.

The officer considers.

POLICE OFFICER

All right. Promise me you'll get that exhaust fixed and I'll let this one pass.

GASKELL

Bless you, Officer!

Gaskell hustles back to the car and gets in.

The engine turns over – BANG!

A thick cloud of blue smoke erupts from the back, swallowing the officer.

COUGHING is heard as the car pulls away, trailing smoke.

INT. THE GREAT HALL – DAY

Margot strides toward a decanter on a sideboard. Pet follows close behind, still mid-complaint.

PET

How could you have picked me up in that car? I'll be forever covered in bumps and bruises and smelling of exhaust fumes.

MARGOT

You would have been angrier if you had to wait for a taxi.

PET

It was the most annoying experience of my -- speaking of which, where is this Rodney Jinx?

MARGOT

Jinxpeel, mother.

Margot pours two drinks. She hands one off.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Can you at least pretend to like him?

PET

Like you?

MARGOT

I happen to love him.

PET

No, you don't. It's all over your face.

MARGOT

What is it with my face!? I have never been an open book. I love Rodney and that's the end of it.

PET

If you say so, my dear.

MARGOT

You don't believe me?

PET

I believe you believe, but I don't believe it to be true.

MARGOT

We have a busy afternoon, Mother. Yvonne is coming over, as well as Pierre, from Paris --

PET

Who is "Pierre" when he's not in town?

MARGOT

He's a Paris designer and is bringing my wedding gown.

PET

Oh? What's it like?

MARGOT

I haven't seen it yet.

PET

What about prior fittings?

MARGOT

He makes all my clothes. He doesn't need to see me until the final fitting.

PET

Between that, the circus tent, and that Supermarket King you're marrying --

MARGOT

Mother?

PET

Yes, dear?

MARGOT

A truce. Just until Sunday night?

Pet studies her for a moment.

PET

Ah -- what the hell.

She lifts her glass and knocks back the whiskey.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - DRIVE - DAY

A Rolls Royce pulls in beside the Photography by Lotoala car. Yvonne steps out, greeted by Winston, who opens the front door.

YVONNE

Good afternoon, Winston.

WINSTON

Good afternoon, Ma'am.

YVONNE

Lovely day.

WINSTON

So they tell me.

INT. MAIN HALLWAY - DAY

Pet, now changed into a fresh outfit, appears just as Yvonne steps inside.

YVONNE

Mrs. Dane! How nice to see you again!

PET

Yvonne -- oh, you look beautiful!

Yvonne smiles. Pet waits -- a half-second too long -- for a return compliment that doesn't come.

YVONNE

How was your trip?

PET

Arduous. I'm exhausted.

MARGOT (O.S.)

Mother, it's only a ninety-minute train ride.

Margot descends the stairs, wearing a striking new dress. She and Yvonne meet with an air kiss.

YVONNE

Any word from Pierre?

MARGOT

He said two and I've never known him to be late. Should be here any moment.

YVONNE

(to Pet)

Wait until you see it. I was there when Margot placed the order. It's sensational.

PET

Is it white?

MARGOT

Of course, it's white.

PET

White symbolizes purity and  
innocence. You've already been  
married.

MARGOT

If we go by those rules, I  
shouldn't have worn it the first  
time around.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - DRIVE - DAY

PIERRE (60s) stands at the door, holding a large dress  
box. Thin, stylish, and unmistakably theatrical.

Margot opens the door.

MARGOT

Pierre!

PIERRE

Darling!

INT. MARGOT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Dark wood paneling. A white bed. Tufted bench. Tall  
windows with heavy drapes. Gilt chairs. Writing desk.

Pet and Yvonne stare -- mouths slightly open.

MARGOT (O.S.)

I thought it might look better...  
on.

Margot wears a black wedding gown. Elegant. Dramatic.  
Completely the wrong color.

White diamonds shimmer near the cuffs.

Pierre stands nearby, expectant.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Pierre... it's...

PET

Black.

MARGOT

Oh, dear...

PET

If white symbolizes purity and  
innocence, what does black  
symbolize?

YVONNE

Been there, done that.

MARGOT

Pierre, what happened?

PIERRE

Don't blame me! You requested a  
black dress with white diamonds on  
the sleeve.

MARGOT

No, I ordered a white dress with  
black diamonds on the sleeve.

PIERRE

You specifically said --

YVONNE

Oh, it doesn't matter who said  
what. Right now we need to know  
what can be done.

MARGOT

There's no time to make another  
gown.

PET

We'll have to call off the  
wedding.

Margot turns -- sharp look.

PIERRE

I have a beautiful gown at the  
shop. With a few alterations --

MARGOT

Me? Wear something off the rack?

PET

Just hold your breath and think of  
England, darling.

INT. MAIN HALLWAY - DAY

Gaskell snaps a photo of the Mona Lisa copy as Pierre  
storms down the stairs in a flurry of indignation.



PIERRE

Never have I been so insulted!  
She'll blab it across the  
continent and my reputation will  
be ruined, even though I had  
nothing to do with it!

He reaches Gaskell and fires the next line directly into  
his face.

PIERRE (CONT'D)

I took the order down exactly as  
she said!

Pierre suddenly turns to the painting.

His voice drops, breathless.

PIERRE (CONT'D)

Calm me down, Mona... deep  
breaths...

He inhales. Deep. Twice.

PIERRE (CONT'D)

Mona... you always know just what  
I need... bless you... bless  
you...

He centers himself. Opens his eyes -- and finally notices  
Gaskell watching him like he's just met a lunatic.

PIERRE (CONT'D)

I just love this painting. Don't  
you?

GASKELL

I like it.

Pierre's gaze softens. Loving. Familiar.

PIERRE

It's a brilliant copy and every  
time I'm here we have a little  
visit. Mona and me.

GASKELL

Well, three's a crowd.

Gaskell takes a step to leave when --

PIERRE

Odd. The shadows on her face...

GASKELL

What about them?

PIERRE

They don't look Windex crisp anymore.

GASKELL

What?

PIERRE

They melt like candle smoke... and the craquelure... now it's like tiny frost patterns.

GASKELL

I knew something wasn't right.

PIERRE

She must have got that 18th century repro she was eyeing. I'd ask, but I'm not speaking to her.

Pierre breezes off. Gaskell turns back to the painting.

INT. MARGOT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Margot stands in front of the mirror, staring at her reflection in the black gown.

MARGOT

I look like Lizzy Borden.

YVONNE

Look on the bright side -- you have next year's costume for your Halloween Ball. All you need is an axe.

MARGOT

I'll borrow mother's.

PET

Margot, sit down, please.

Margot sits at the edge of the bed, holding back emotion.

PET (CONT'D)

You're holding back tears... but they are not for the gown.

Margot glances up.

PET (CONT'D)  
I've known you since the day you  
were born.

MARGOT  
I would hope so.

Pet lowers her voice. Honest, even.

PET  
Why are you marrying Rodney?  
You're not in love with him.

Margot's eyes brim.

MARGOT  
He asked me and I said yes,  
without thinking.

PET  
Why?

The tears spill.

MARGOT  
It seemed like a good idea at the  
time.

PET  
After how many whiskeys?

MARGOT  
Three... and a half... and the  
next morning it was all over town.  
I thought... I could fall in love  
if I tried... but he makes it very  
difficult...

YVONNE  
You don't have to go through with  
it, Margot.

MARGOT  
If I don't, I'll be a laughing  
stock. I thought... just go  
through with it, and after a year,  
get a divorce like everyone else.

Pet sits beside her. Margot leans into her shoulder.

PET  
There, there.

MARGOT  
I've made an awful mess of things.

PET  
No, no you haven't... there,  
there... tears never made anything  
right.

Yvonne joins them, sitting at Margot's other side.

YVONNE  
Margot, we need to call this off.

Margot straightens. Wipes her face.

MARGOT  
No. No... I can't.

The bedroom phone RINGS. Yvonne rises to intercept --

YVONNE  
I'll have them call back...

MARGOT  
No!

She moves quickly to the phone.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
I'll get it. It might be Rodney.

She answers.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
Hello?

INT. BASTAKOFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Bastakoff, cigar in mouth, sits behind his desk.

BASTAKOFF  
Hello? Who is this?

INT. MARGOT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Margot turns to her mother and Yvonne.

MARGOT  
Margot Dane. You called my house.  
What do you want?

INT. BASTAKOFF'S OFFICE - DAY

The cigar drops from his mouth.

BASTAKOFF

(mouths)

Oh, shit!

(then, stammering)

Uhh, this is... Filo Tuipea at  
Tevaka Lotoala's Photography. I  
was looking for Tevaka Lotoala.

INT. MARGOT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Margot's brow furrows. Suspicion flickers.

MARGOT

You need him right now?

INT. BASTAKOFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Bastakoff holds a newspaper:

Headline: MONA LISA TAKEN BETWEEN 3 AND 7.

BASTAKOFF

Yes... I really need to speak with  
him.

INT. MARGOT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Margot straightens. The emotion drains.

Her poise returns.

MARGOT

Hold a moment.

She presses a button on the phone, hangs up, and heads  
for the door.

YVONNE

Who was that?

MARGOT

Filo Tuipea for Tevaka Lotoala.

She exits.

INT. MAIN HALLWAY - DAY

Gaskell stands at the wall, Mona Lisa in hand, inspecting the back.

MARGOT (O.S.)  
What are you doing?

She descends the stairs, composed, and approaches him.

GASKELL  
Is black in for weddings?

MARGOT  
Be quiet!

She snatches the painting.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
You are spending too much time  
gawking at this. Every time I see  
you, you gawk!

GASKELL  
Not every time.

MARGOT  
Don't change the subject!

GASKELL  
I'm not changing the subject. Why  
are you so protective of it?

MARGOT  
Oh, let's see, could it be that it  
cost 1.5 million pounds and I  
don't need your grubby hands all  
over it!

GASKELL  
Or maybe you don't want me to see  
the detail?

MARGOT  
What are you talking about?  
Detail?

She rehanga the painting, quickly adjusting the frame.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
Fingerprints all over the frame...

GASKELL  
Yours are too.

MARGOT

Mine paid for it! They have a right to be there! I -- never mind. You have a call.

GASKELL

Me?

MARGOT

Pick up any phone and press two.

GASKELL

Who is it?

MARGOT

Filo Tuipea. And he doesn't have an accent. Was he adopted, too?

Gaskell moves off toward the Great Hall, confused.

INT. BASTAKOFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Bastakoff fumes over the newspaper. Gaskell's voice crackles from the speakerphone.

GASKELL (V.O.)

Hello?

BASTAKOFF

Where the hell are you!?

INT. THE GREAT HALL - DAY

Gaskell speaks low, eyes on the archway entrance.

GASKELL

I'm at the Margot Dane home, and you know that since you just dialed it.

INTERCUT - BASTAKOFF'S OFFICE / THE GREAT HALL

BASTAKOFF

Well, get back here! I need you on the Mona Lisa case!

GASKELL

Why?

Margot steps into the archway, arms folded, listening.

BASTAKOFF

Because Harry in obits can't handle the story! Everything he writes sounds like grieving guards and visiting hours!

GASKELL

Yes, it's going well here! I am taking lots of photographs!

BASTAKOFF

What? What the hell are you talking about? Gaskell --

GASKELL

Yes, yes, and thank you for checking in... you will be happy with my work, I'm sure.

BASTAKOFF

You sound like you're going to hang up and you better not, because I'm not through with --

GASKELL

Thank you, goodbye!

He hangs up.

BASTAKOFF

You're fired, you son of a bitch!

INT. THE GREAT HALL - DAY

Gaskell turns to find Margot staring him down. Arms folded. Expression fixed.

MARGOT

Is everything all right with Filo Tuipea

GASKELL

Oh, yes, yes, just fine. He called to remind me that I only took two rolls of film.

MARGOT

Film?

GASKELL

For the camera.



MARGOT

You don't use a digital camera?

GASKELL

No, of course not. The pictures always look better on film.

MARGOT

Why is that?

GASKELL

Well, I don't want to get technical... something to do with the light...

MARGOT

Because film captures light in crystals, not pixels. There's depth – a softness – like it remembers, not just records. Is that right?

Gaskell falters, just for a second. Then covers.

GASKELL

Yes... that's basically it. Anyway, I need to run into the village. There must be a chemist?

MARGOT

Mm-hm. On Main Street. You can't miss it. There's a sign out front that says "Chemist."

GASKELL

Ah! Good!

She walks toward him -- direct, measured, cold.

Gaskell tenses.

She stops inches from him. Eyes locked.

MARGOT

I am only going to ask this once.

Gaskell stays still.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Why were you holding the painting?

No response.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
Were you looking at the back... or  
were you securing it into place?

GASKELL  
(innocent)  
I was just looking at it.  
(beat)  
Hey, I gotta get to town and grab  
that film.

He turns and walks off fast -- no backward glance.

GASKELL (CONT'D)  
Be right back!

The front door opens and shuts.

Margot stays where she is. Listening.

EXT. A ROAD IN SUSSEX - DAY

Gaskell's smoke-belching car rattles past the same  
roadside Officer.

Gaskell offers a polite wave.

The Officer hesitates... then gives a reluctant one back.

INT. MAIN HALLWAY - DAY

Pet and Yvonne approach the front door.

PET  
Margot?

No answer.

PET (CONT'D)  
Where is she?

Winston steps in from a side corridor.

PET (CONT'D)  
Winston, have you seen Margot?

WINSTON  
No, Ma'am. I have not.

PET  
Odd.

YVONNE

She must be outside. She has a lot to think about. I'll be by tomorrow. Goodbye, Mrs. Dane.

Pet takes her hand.

PET

Please. Call me Petunia.

Yvonne smiles.

YVONNE

Petunia. We'll look out for her.

Winston pulls open the heavy front door.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - DRIVE

Yvonne steps out... and stops cold.

The driveway is empty.

YVONNE

Where's my car!? Somebody stole my car!

EXT. MAIN STREET IN A SMALL TOWN - DAY

Gaskell leans inside a red phone booth, fedora pushed back, coat collar up -- full reporter mode.

GASKELL

Now listen, Bastakoff! You almost blew my cover!

INT. BASTAKOFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Bastakoff dumps whiskey into his coffee like it's cream.

BASTAKOFF

Your cover is no longer needed! I want you in Paris, now!

INTERCUT - PHONE BOOTH / BASTAKOFF'S OFFICE

GASKELL

Harry ain't working out for ya, eh?

BASTAKOFF

Listen, wise-guy -- I know you're enjoying watching me squirm, but I need the Mona Lisa story before we get scooped by the Times!

GASKELL

That won't happen.

BASTAKOFF

How do you know?

GASKELL

Because I know where it is.

Bastakoff freezes mid-sip, eyes locked wide on nothing.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

That shut you up, didn't it? Now don't you fret. I'll deliver this story to you in a nice little package... and don't worry about getting scooped. Even Sherlock Holmes doesn't know what I know.

Gaskell turns -- and finds himself nose to nose with Margot. Only the phone booth glass separates them.

He jumps.

She smiles.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

I gotta go. Don't call me. I'll be in touch.

He hangs up and pulls open the door.

MARGOT

I thought you might not find the chemist.

Their eyes meet -- not with warmth, but with suspicion.

EXT. OUTSIDE CAFÉ IN TOWN - DAY

Margot and Gaskell sit at a wrought-iron table, teacups steaming. From behind newspapers and teapots, eyes lift. Conversations dip. Spoons pause mid-stir.

MARGOT

This is why I don't like coming into town. Everyone knows who I am and stares.

GASKELL

I think they're staring at the black wedding gown.

MARGOT

Oh, damn! You left so fast I forgot to change!

A WAITER sets their tea down gently, trying not to gawk.

WAITER

Can I get you anything else?

MARGOT

No, thank you.

He walks away -- with one last glance at the gown.

GASKELL

So, I should have delayed my departure from your home so you would have had time to change?

MARGOT

Don't be smart. You think you're so smart. You took my Mona Lisa down from the wall. Why?

GASKELL

You said it was a copy.

MARGOT

It was. Until it wasn't.

GASKELL

So you agree it's not your 1.5 million pound copy?

She sips. Calm, measured.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

You think I swapped it?

MARGOT

Your hand was in the cookie jar.

GASKELL

What if you swapped it?

MARGOT

Why would I want the original when I have a perfectly brilliant reproduction?

GASKELL

Because it's just a reproduction.

MARGOT

Are you really a photographer, Mr. Lotoala?

GASKELL

Are you really in love with Rodney Jinxpeel?

MARGOT

Don't answer a question with a question!

Gaskell's tone sharpens. The game is over.

GASKELL

Listen. I believe that the Mona Lisa currently on your wall is the original. Now, I can account for my whereabouts at the moment it was stolen. Can you?

MARGOT

Of course. I was at home.

GASKELL

Any witnesses?

MARGOT

I wasn't throwing a party. I was in bed. Alone.

GASKELL

What time did Winston see you the following morning?

MARGOT

Ten... eleven...

GASKELL

Enough time to have flown back from Paris.

MARGOT

You are out of your mind!

She stands. Fast.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
I am not going to be subjected to  
this from a... a photographer!

She storms off.

He watches her vanish down the street.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - DRIVE - DAY

Gaskell leans against his car, arms folded, eyes scanning  
the fields. Yvonne approaches, arms crossed, tension in  
her stride.

YVONNE  
She's been gone much too long.

Gaskell doesn't respond -- his thoughts elsewhere.

YVONNE (CONT'D)  
You should go look for her.

GASKELL  
Where?

YVONNE  
I don't know. You're the  
policeman.

GASKELL  
Me!?

YVONNE  
Mr. Tevaka Lotoala -- the son of  
missionaries. Margot told me.  
(beat)  
I can't believe she believed  
you... then again, maybe she  
didn't and wanted to see where  
you'd go with it.

GASKELL  
You have me at a disadvantage --  
and I am not a policeman.

YVONNE  
I know you are not Tevaka Lotoala.

GASKELL  
How?

YVONNE

I know Tevaka Lotoala. He's in his seventies, balding, and has a lot more wrinkles than you do.

GASKELL

You're forgetting one thing. I'm a junior. Lotoala Jr.

YVONNE

(skeptic)

Oh?

GASKELL

Did you ever meet his whole family?

YVONNE

No.

GASKELL

There you have it.

YVONNE

I could call him.

GASKELL

Why don't you?

Yvonne ponders.

YVONNE

Margot has enough to worry about. And, she seemed to like you.

GASKELL

How can you tell?

YVONNE

She lowered the frost level for you a few times, didn't she?

Gaskell stays silent.

YVONNE (CONT'D)

That's a definite indication.

EXT. BEACHY HEAD LIGHTHOUSE CLIFF - SUSSEX - DAY

High on the chalk cliffs, Margot stands alone -- her black gown caught in the wind, hair whipped around her face. Below, the red-and-white lighthouse juts from the surf like a lone sentinel.



She raises her phone, her fingers white around it.

MARGOT  
(into phone)  
Hello. Rodney Jinxpeel, please.  
This is Margot Dane.

She waits. GULLS cry overhead as she waits.

RODNEY (V.O.)  
Hello, darling.

MARGOT  
Rodney, you need to come home,  
right away.

INT. RODNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

All glass and chrome. Cold. A plush leather chair. A sleek desk.

Rodney reclines in it -- polished, rehearsed -- across from a VOLUPTUOUS BLONDE (20s), dressed more for cocktails than corporate.

RODNEY  
That's impossible, dear. I'm in a meeting with the head of Consolidated Grapes.

The Blonde smirks, her manicured fingers tracing slow circles up his sleeve.

INTERCUT - MARGOT / RODNEY

MARGOT  
I suggest you come home or I'll consolidate your grapes!

Rodney sits bolt upright.

RODNEY  
What's the emergency?

MARGOT  
I don't want to say over the phone. I'll tell you in person.

RODNEY  
I'll... I'll get there as soon as I can...

MARGOT  
How long will that be?

RODNEY  
An hour.

The Blonde pouts. Holds up three fingers.

RODNEY (CONT'D)  
Three hours... I forgot I have to  
meet with my endowment -- chief.  
I'll be there as soon as I can.

CLICK!

He hangs up.

MARGOT  
Rodney!? Hello? You bastard!

She hurls the phone -- a clean arc into the wind -- and  
over the cliff's edge into the waves below.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - DRIVE - DAY

Yvonne glances at her watch.

GASKELL  
How long have you known Margot?

YVONNE  
Forty years.

GASKELL  
Long enough to know if she'd  
ever... oh, I don't know... steal  
something?

YVONNE  
Margot? She once returned a  
library book nine years late and  
sent them a handwritten apology.

GASKELL  
Imagine the fine.

YVONNE  
Theft isn't in her blood.

GASKELL  
Even if the thing stolen couldn't  
be bought?

Yvonne studies him.

YVONNE

You think this is tied to the Mona Lisa?

GASKELL

Why would you say that?

Yvonne turns away.

YVONNE

Because Margot's been... off.

GASKELL

Dishonest?

YVONNE

No. Just... hiding something. And I don't know what it is. Or who she's hiding from.

Gaskell's expression shifts. New information.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Pet stands behind a curtain, watching the exchange outside. She lowers the edge of the drape and steps away.

EXT. BEACHY HEAD LIGHTHOUSE CLIFF - SUSSEX - DAY

The cliff stretches out in both directions, wind whipping off the channel.

Margot walks the edge, her black gown tugged by the wind, hem snapping at her heels.

Lost in thought, she doesn't notice a boy watching her from a few paces off -- VINCENT (10), local, curious, watchful, with a quiet confidence.

She turns -- finally seeing him.

MARGOT

What is it?

He doesn't answer. She looks behind her, then back.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Why are you staring at me like that?

VINCENT

Are you a ghost?

Margot squints, confused.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

My Dad says these cliffs are  
haunted by women who threw  
themselves over the side because  
of their broken hearts.

MARGOT

That's what your dad tells you,  
eh?

VINCENT

Yes. And you sure are dressed like  
one.

MARGOT

This is my wedding gown.

VINCENT

Black?

MARGOT

I'm trying to start a new trend.

VINCENT

I don't think it will take, Miss.  
You sure you're not a ghost?

She points toward the road.

MARGOT

That's my car. Would a ghost drive  
a car?

Vincent stays suspicious.

Margot holds out her arm.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Pinch my arm.

Vincent approaches slowly, cautious. He gives her arm a  
quick pinch.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

That was very brave of you.

VINCENT

It's just that you were walking  
like you were going to jump.

MARGOT  
How does one do that?

VINCENT  
All lonely and depressed. Like  
this --

He pantomimes a sad, heavy walk.

Margot laughs.

MARGOT  
Is that how I looked?

VINCENT  
Yes, Miss. I don't know who you  
are, but I was worried, just the  
same.

They walk together, slowly.

MARGOT  
My name is Margot.

VINCENT  
I'm Vincent. I live on Plumb Road  
in the village.

MARGOT  
Nice to meet you.

VINCENT  
Nice meeting you! Where do you  
live?

MARGOT  
Out in the countryside. And you  
needn't worry. I am not lonely or  
depressed.

VINCENT  
Something is wrong, though.

MARGOT  
Oh?

VINCENT  
Did you lose something? People can  
look sad when they lose something  
they can't get back.

MARGOT  
I suppose that's true.

VINCENT

I don't believe it, though. I think they just don't know where to look.

Margot stops.

MARGOT

Vincent? Did anyone ever tell you you're a genius?

VINCENT

Genius?

Margot tousles his hair.

Then bolts toward her car – urgency returning.

MARGOT

Remember that if the world ever tells you different!

Vincent watches her... and smiles.

VINCENT

Goodbye, Miss!

EXT. DANE ESTATE – DRIVE – LATE AFTERNOON

Gaskell and Yvonne sit on the front steps. They watch as Margot pulls up in Yvonne's Rolls Royce.

YVONNE

Finally!

Margot steps out, windswept and determined.

MARGOT

Yvonne, please forgive me, but there wasn't time to ask your permission -- and your car refuses to recognize second gear without an introduction.

YVONNE

Why didn't you call? You've had me worried sick.

MARGOT

My phone fell in the Channel.

She throws a pointed look at Gaskell.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
Shouldn't you be taking pictures  
somewhere?

Gaskell smirks and disappears inside.

Margot waits until he's out of sight.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
So annoying.

Yvonne catches her watching him walk away.

A quiet beat.

YVONNE  
You were at the coast?

MARGOT  
Yes! And I was able to think  
clearly for the first time in  
days.

YVONNE  
Tell me?

MARGOT  
Not just yet. I've got a committee  
meeting in my head.

They start for the house.

YVONNE  
What's on the agenda?

MARGOT  
Who Rodney Jinxpeel really is.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - NIGHT

The house sits mostly dark. Only a couple of windows glow  
against the night.

INT. THE CELLAR - NIGHT

A narrow beam of light cuts across rough stone. The torch  
quivers in Margot's hand as she steps carefully through  
cobwebbed shadows.

She's dressed in business-black.

Tarps rustle as she moves past them, brushing aside webs like memories.

She finds an old table buried under papers and dust. Shoves the clutter aside and reveals a canvas -- frameless, and eerily familiar.

She quietly sets down the torch and lifts the painting to the light.

GASKELL (V.O.)

Bingo.

Margot GASPS and spins around. The overhead bulbs flicker to life as Gaskell hits a switch.

MARGOT

Jesus, Mary and Winston Churchill!

(a beat)

What are you doing here?

GASKELL

Waiting for the thief.

MARGOT

Well, it's not me!

He tilts his head toward the painting still in her hands.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

I just found this!

GASKELL

I know. I watched.

MARGOT

I didn't know it was here!

GASKELL

You just have incredible E.S.P.

MARGOT

This is my painting. The one upstairs is not.

GASKELL

So, why snoop in the cellar?

MARGOT

Because I agree that the painting upstairs is the original, and I wanted to find mine.

He looks at her, unconvinced.



MARGOT (CONT'D)  
That's the truth, and I don't care  
if you believe me or not.

This throws him a moment -- Margot spots it.

MARGOT (CONT'D)  
How do I know you're not the  
thief?

GASKELL  
Because you're the logical choice!

MARGOT  
You're the one driving around in a  
piece of junk telling strangers to  
"smile." That gives you more of a  
motive than me!

GASKELL  
Then why would I leave yours  
sitting down here?

MARGOT  
Because --

GASKELL  
You said it was worth 1.5 million.  
Imagine the car I could buy with  
that?

MARGOT  
I'll tell you why!  
(a pause)  
I don't know why! What motivation  
would I have for stealing the  
original? I couldn't sell it!

GASKELL  
For the sport of it.

She steps closer. Voice steady.

MARGOT  
The only sport I indulge in is a  
game of snooker, every Christmas.

He steps in.

Their voices soften.

GASKELL  
What's your highest break?

They're nearly nose to nose.

MARGOT  
One hundred.

GASKELL  
Impossible.

MARGOT  
Every Christmas.

Close enough to kiss...

PET (O.S.)  
Oh! It's you!

They both turn.

Pet stands at the door, robe over her nightgown.

PET (CONT'D)  
Winston said there was shouting,  
so I thought I'd see who was  
murdering whom.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Pet is at the stove with the steaming kettle as Margot and Gaskell wait at the table.

PET  
Honestly, it's been so long since  
I've done this, I'm amazed I  
remember how.

MARGOT  
Boil water?

PET  
That part is relatively easy. It's  
when the bags come in that the  
process gets confusing.

GASKELL  
I'm sorry if the raised voices  
woke you up.

PET  
Nonsense. Winston heard them, not  
I... and by the time I arrived...

She glances at Margot.

PET (CONT'D)

I once knew someone I trusted and loved with all my heart... but in the end, the curtain fell off the façade and the true colors were exposed.

Pet readies the tea.

PET (CONT'D)

It was your father.

MARGOT

But you always seemed so happy together.

PET

Oh, darling, that was for your benefit. In truth, I was miserable. He chased more skirts than Don Juan.

MARGOT

Father?

PET

We'd go to parties and I was the only woman in the room he hadn't slept with that month.

MARGOT

Mother, I had no idea...

Pet sets the teapot down with a soft clink.

PET

The only good thing about the day he died was that he would finally get some rest.

She pours with grace for such a blunt sentiment.

PET (CONT'D)

Which brings us to Rodney. Honestly, I thought the shouting Winston heard was you and the Sultan of Supermarkets having it out once and for all. What were you doing in the cellar?

MARGOT

I met a young man today who told me I looked sad.

PET

You were wearing the black wedding dress?

MARGOT

Yes.

PET

Well, that explains it.

MARGOT

No, Mother. He said people look sad when they lose something they can't get back.

PET

What did you lose?

MARGOT

My painting. I saw it had been replaced. I knew it was stolen.

GASKELL

But you found it in the basement.

MARGOT

And you suspected me of stealing it myself.

GASKELL

You have to admit it was strange you just showed up there.

MARGOT

The same young man said people are sad because they just don't know where to look.

PET

The young man told you to look in the cellar?

MARGOT

No, Mother. But it was at that moment I knew the painting was in the cellar.

Gaskell and Pet -- blank stares.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

And who has been spending lots of time down there planning his so-called "wine cellar?"

A charged silence.

PET

I knew I disliked him for a reason.

MARGOT

You dislike him for many reasons.

GASKELL

You think Rodney stole the painting?

MARGOT

I am not going to say Rodney committed the actual theft, but I am certain he's behind it. He never comes home at night, and the night he did the following morning saw the painting replaced...

GASKELL

It all makes sense! Hot damn! What a story!

He catches himself -- and so does Margot.

MARGOT

Story?

GASKELL

Yeah! For a reporter... should a reporter... stumble onto it...

Margot pins him with a stare. Arctic.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

What?

MARGOT

Mr. Lotoala... I just saw a reaction from you that is not in keeping with a photographer, but instead a gentleman of the press.

Gaskell exhales, cornered but not crumbling.

GASKELL

Gentleman? No, not me. Rest assured.

A tense pause.

MARGOT

Very well.

PET

Now that's all settled, shall we  
telephone Scotland Yard?

MARGOT

Yes.

GASKELL

Eh-eh-eh...

MARGOT

Why not?

GASKELL

You don't have any proof.

MARGOT

Of course, we do!

GASKELL

You have the real Mona Lisa in  
your hallway, and a 17th century  
reproduction in your basement.

MARGOT

What's your point?

GASKELL

Your basement. Your hallway. Your  
house. At the moment, it's all on  
you.

MARGOT

But I didn't do anything!

PET

Of course you did! You became  
engaged to that little weasel.

MARGOT

Mother, you're not helping.

GASKELL

The fact is, all the evidence is  
here. Rodney will claim it's your  
house and he had nothing to do  
with it.

MARGOT

Fingerprints!

GASKELL

You mean yours... that are all over the original upstairs and the reproduction in the cellar? Rest assured, a pro like Rodney used gloves. You didn't.

MARGOT

The fact that I didn't should prove I'm innocent!

PET

Or not very bright.

MARGOT

Mother!

GASKELL

Don't panic yet.

MARGOT

You have an idea?

GASKELL

Not yet, but I'm good at bluffing.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - MORNING

Catering trucks idle in the drive. Workers hustle -- tables, trays, linen -- a wedding in motion.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Pet sits at a small table, porcelain cup poised in her fingers like royalty.

Margot strides in, eyes on the whiskey decanter.

PET

Really, dear, it's seven in the morning! What will people think?

MARGOT

There's no one here but you and me, Mother, so if anyone blabs, I know who done it. Besides, I've been up all night so it doesn't count as a morning slug.

PET

Has Lotoala come up with any bluffering?

MARGOT

Not that I know of.

Margot drops into the chair beside her.

PET

You're calling off the wedding?

MARGOT

Am I doing the right thing?

(beat)

Look who I'm asking.

PET

Now, now... my personal feelings  
for the little cockroach aside, I  
only want what you want. If you  
want to marry Rodney, then you  
should.

Margot stares upward.

PET (CONT'D)

What are you looking at?

MARGOT

That bolt of lightning that's  
supposed to strike you down for  
telling a lie.

PET

All right, so I don't want you to  
marry him. But that's me. That's  
something I have to accept and  
live with. Darling... I want you  
to be happy... truly happy. And if  
that means I have to suffer in  
misery until they nail the lid  
down... I will do so. For you. My  
lovely daughter.

A beat.

MARGOT

You're only saying that because  
you know I'm not marrying him.

Another beat.

PET

Very true -- but it's the thought  
that counts.



INT. GASKELL'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Gaskell stands at the window, phone to his ear. Below:  
trucks unload like clockwork. Workers swarm.

BASTAKOFF (V.O.)  
Do you know what the hell time it  
is?

GASKELL  
Time? Time is fleeting, Bastakoff.

INT. BASTAKOFF'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Plain room. Rumpled pajamas. Bastakoff half-sits in bed,  
the glow of a table lamp casting long shadows.

BASTAKOFF (V.O.)  
And so's your job!

GASKELL  
Yes, how is Henry doing?

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION - GASKELL / BASTAKOFF

BASTAKOFF  
Henry is back in Obits where he  
belongs. Where's my story? I  
called the hotel in Paris and they  
said you never arrived.

GASKELL  
That's because I'm still in  
Sussex.

BASTAKOFF  
What!? Can't you follow orders --  
just for once?

GASKELL  
You have to trust my instincts on  
this one.

BASTAKOFF  
You and "trust" don't go together.  
Now listen, you told me you knew  
where the stolen painting was --  
so why aren't you in Paris?

GASKELL  
Because the painting isn't in  
Paris. It's right here. In Sussex.

BASTAKOFF

Where in Sussex?

GASKELL

You'll find out when I turn in the story.

BASTAKOFF

When?

GASKELL

Soon.

BASTAKOFF

Soon! What's "soon?" An hour? A day? A week!? What's "soon!?"

GASKELL

Soon. Now, listen. You just keep those printers nice and warm for daddy's story.

BASTAKOFF

My patience is running thin with you.

GASKELL

Go back to sleep and dream of scooping the Times.

He hangs up.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Gaskell strides in like a man late for breakfast. Heads straight for the whiskey.

GASKELL

Good morning!

MARGOT

Mr. Lotoala.

GASKELL

May I?

Margot gives a nod. He pours.

PET

Were you up all night, too?

GASKELL

Slept like a log.

Pet eyes the glass.

PET  
At this hour.

GASKELL  
Get's the blood going.

PET  
Have you come up with a plan?

Gaskell exchanges a look with Margot. Not yet.

Winston enters.

WINSTON  
Excuse me, Miss Dane. Mr. Jinxpeel  
has arrived. Shall I show him in?

MARGOT  
No. No, I'll see him in the great  
hall.

WINSTON  
Ma'am.

He exits.

GASKELL  
The Great Hall? Formal.

MARGOT  
Isn't it.

She heads out.

INT. THE GREAT HALL - MORNING

Rodney poses near the fireplace -- groomed to perfection,  
down to the shine in his shoes.

Margot enters.

RODNEY  
My dear...

He sweeps toward her -- and smacks into a raised hand.

RODNEY (CONT'D)  
My darling -- what is it?

MARGOT

Before you go out in the morning,  
always check for a hint of  
lipstick under your ear.

Rodney bolts to a mirror in panic.

RODNEY

Oh! Oh this... this was my  
grandmother giving me a kiss for  
good luck on my wedding day  
tomorrow.

MARGOT

Did she nibble your ear as well?

RODNEY

No. Margot, my love, I sense  
something is... off... between us.

MARGOT

I couldn't have put it more  
succinctly, Rodney. It's off.

He goes still.

RODNEY

What is?

MARGOT

Our wedding. Over. Done. Finí.

RODNEY

But... the trucks are outside.  
They're setting everything up!

MARGOT

It's too late to cancel, so I'll  
be having a "Margot's seen the  
light" party for all my friends.

RODNEY

Wait -- is this because I told you  
yesterday I would be here in three  
hours... and never showed up?

MARGOT

It certainly didn't help your  
case.

RODNEY

I had a major issue with  
Consolidated Grapes.

MARGOT  
I'll bet you did.

RODNEY  
I thought you loved me?

MARGOT  
I think several women love you.

RODNEY  
I can't help it if they find me attractive. That's no reason to cancel the wedding!

MARGOT  
It's enough for me.

RODNEY  
If you cancel, I shall sue you.

MARGOT  
For what?

RODNEY  
Tarnishing my good name in social circles.  
(beat)  
It's defamation -- or something like that.

MARGOT  
Sue, Rodney. Sue. In the meantime, I'm having the cellar bricked up.

RODNEY  
Why? I already told you I wouldn't build it if you didn't want it.

MARGOT  
It will be bricked up because it reminds me of you.

RODNEY  
Margot --

MARGOT  
I will also be selling my 17th century Mona Lisa reproduction.

Rodney's eyes flare.

RODNEY  
Why?

MARGOT

Because it reminds me of you.

RODNEY

How?

MARGOT

Because she has a devious smile.  
Just like yours.

RODNEY

Very well. Instead of suing you, I  
shall accept the Mona Lisa  
reproduction.

MARGOT

You're joking.

RODNEY

You'll be getting out of it cheap.

MARGOT

Anyone but you.

Rodney straightens his jacket, a last shot of pride.

RODNEY

Margot. I'm only going to say this  
once. If I walk out that door, I  
shall never return.

MARGOT

Let me put it in a way you'll  
understand. I just did a cleanup  
on aisle six. Hit the road.

He hesitates... then storms out.

The front door slams. The echo lingers.

Pet appears in the archway, clapping without clapping.

PET

That was magnificent, dear!

Margot drops into a chair. Her poise cracks.

Gaskell enters in time to see the tears.

GASKELL

He didn't steal the painting --  
it's still on your wall.... Hey,  
what are you crying for?

MARGOT

Everything just hit me. This is a disaster.

Pet joins her, perching gently on the arm of the chair, one arm wrapped around her daughter.

A rare act of softness.

PET

No, dear, quite the contrary. The disaster would have been your unhappiness had you gone through with it.

Margot places her hand over Pet's. A fragile truce.

Gaskell watches from a distance -- the hardened reporter giving way to something warmer, quieter.

EXT. THE PATIO - DAY

Margot stands alone, staring out at the rolling countryside. Quiet. Calm.

Gaskell approaches.

GASKELL

How much of that do you call your own?

MARGOT

Pretty much all you see.

GASKELL

How does it feel to have everything?

MARGOT

You're asking the wrong woman.

GASKELL

If I owned all that land --

MARGOT

No one really "owns" land, Mr. Lotoala. We're merely curators while we're here.

A flick of amusement from Gaskell.

GASKELL

Good crying routine.

MARGOT

Was it too much?

GASKELL

Just perfect.

MARGOT

I hope it threw mother off the trail.

(beat)

I can't believe Rodney. I thought I knew him. I didn't know him at all.

Gaskell shifts slightly. Watches her.

There's a moment -- not guilt exactly, but recognition.

GASKELL

Sometimes people... hide who they really are --

MARGOT

Why? I don't.

GASKELL

You don't have to. You're Margot Dane. Rodney, on the other hand... well, there's more money in art theft than frozen foods and garden supplies.

She turns. Looks at him.

MARGOT

And what about you?

GASKELL

What about me?

MARGOT

Are you hiding?

He sidesteps it with a half-shrug.

GASKELL

I'm just a guy with a camera and... questionable instincts.

MARGOT

Sadly, I won't need those photos after all. No divorce.

(beat)

(MORE)



MARGOT (CONT'D)

Of course, you'll be paid  
regardless.

GASKELL

You don't have to --

MARGOT

It's the least I can do.

A look passes -- sharp, uncertain.

It lingers but says nothing.

She turns, leaving Gaskell with the land.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - NIGHT

The countryside estate sleeps beneath a heavy sky.

Clouds drift across a swollen moon.

The manor looms in silhouette.

A black sedan, headlights off, rolls silently into the  
gravel driveway and eases to a stop behind the hedges.

The same Man in Black steps out. Black gloves. Black  
balaclava. Same small case.

That sly, jazzy motif -- Too smooth to be suspenseful,  
too playful to be sinister, slinks in under the scene.

The Man moves swiftly along the shadows of the house,  
hugging stone and brick.

He pulls a slim cable from his kit, connects it to the  
alarm panel near the service door.

Green light. Click.

He slips inside.

INT. DANE ESTATE - SERVICE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Darkness. Stillness.

Emergency lights throw soft golden lines across the tile  
floor. The hum of distant refrigeration.

The Man in Black moves with surgical precision.

No rush. No wasted motion.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

He edges past gleaming countertops and hanging copper pans. Every footstep muffled by rubber soles.

INT. MAIN HALLWAY - NIGHT

The long gallery corridor.

Gilded portraits line the walls.

And at the center -- illuminated just enough to be seen --

The Mona Lisa.

Framed. Hung with care.

Still behind glass.

He stops. Removes his case. Kneels.

Unfolds a black cloth -- revealing the same slim metal tool used in the Louvre.

He hesitates.

Reaches into his jacket and pulls out a small flashlight.

Flick -- a narrow beam cuts across the canvas.

He scans the painting closely... carefully...

RODNEY

What the hell...?

CLICK!

Margot, Gaskell, and INSPECTOR HARRIS (60s) stand on the stairway landing. Harris holds a small, framed portrait.

MARGOT

Something wrong, Rodney?

Rodney yanks off his balaclava.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Meet Inspector Harris, Scotland Yard.

INSPECTOR

What have you to say for yourself?

RODNEY

It's not what it looks like...

GASKELL

Not a good answer, but quick.

RODNEY

You switched the painting back!  
This is your cheap knockoff!

The Inspector turns around the portrait he holds.

INSPECTOR

And this... is the original.  
Officers!

Two POLICE OFFICERS step out from the Great Hall.

As they cuff him --

INSPECTOR (CONT'D)

Rodney Jinxpeel, I'm arresting you  
on suspicion of theft. You do not  
have to say anything, but it may  
harm your defense if you do not  
mention when questioned something  
which you later rely on in court.  
Anything you do say may be given  
in evidence. Take him away.

Rodney struggles as the Officers take him out.

RODNEY

But I have a meeting with  
Consolidated Grapes at nine!

Pet, watching from several steps above, descends.

PET

Why was I not in on this sting?

MARGOT

Mr. Lotoala and I thought the  
fewer people who knew, the better.

PET

So I can't be trusted, is that  
what you're saying?

MARGOT

Inspector... why would Rodney want  
the painting?

INSPECTOR

We've been looking into Mr. Jinxpeel for some time on suspected bank fraud. His supermarket chain is nearly bankrupt, and this painting *and* your money through marriage would've been the icing on the cake -- enough to keep his empire wobbling along a bit longer.

He tips his hat to the ladies.

INSPECTOR (CONT'D)

Ladies...

And to Gaskell.

INSPECTOR (CONT'D)

Mr. Lotoala.

PET

Well. It seems my instincts remain impeccable.

Winston enters in his robe.

WINSTON

Is everything all right, Ma'am?

MARGOT

Yes, Winston. Everything is just perfect.

WINSTON

Shall I put a kettle on?

PET

No. Bring the decanter... and four glasses.

WINSTON

Four, Ma'am?

PET

Yes -- you deserve a drink, too.

WINSTON

Thank you, Ma'am.

He exits.

EXT. DANE ESTATE - DRIVE - MORNING

The black sedan remains in the drive, beside the Lotoala Photography car.

Yvonne's Rolls Royce sits at the front door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Margot paces. Pet and Yvonne are seated on the sofa.

YVONNE

So, yes... the word is out about Rodney. The good news? Everyone's more excited about coming.

Margot glances at her.

YVONNE (CONT'D)

Well, you did say it was going to be a party, right?

INT. GASKELL'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Gaskell, dressed to leave - trench coat, hat, luggage ready -- speaks into the phone.

BASTAKOFF (V.O.)

I'm not here, so leave a message.

BEEP!

GASKELL

Bastakoff... listen to what I'm about to tell you. Listen carefully...

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Margot pours a whiskey.

PET

Really, dear, it's only nine.

MARGOT

The whiskey doesn't know that.

PET

You drink too much, dear.

MARGOT

Only on special occasions.

DOORBELL RINGS.

PET

Margot, I've been thinking. You should come back to London with me. You need to get away.

MARGOT

My idea of getting away is not London. A tropical island, maybe, but not the city.

PET

What's wrong with a city?

MARGOT

It's filled with dishonest people... like Rodney.

PET

Tropical islands most likely have their fair share of dishonest people as well.

MARGOT

Yes, but you don't care when you're surrounded by palm trees and coconuts.

Winston enters with Pierre, who carries a dress box.

WINSTON

Pierre, Ma'am.

MARGOT

Who? Oh! Pierre.

WINSTON

Yes, and there are three men at the front door. You telephoned them about bricking up the cellar entrance?

MARGOT

Oh! Right! Show them where it is, please, Winston.

Winston exits as Pierre glides into the room.

PIERRE

I have found the perfect replacement gown for you, Miss Dane.

MARGOT

Pierre, I don't wear off-the-rack.

Pierre opens the box, reverent.

PIERRE

It was never on the rack. It was made for the Countess of Devon. She never wore it.

PET

She never wore it because she died.

MARGOT

What?

PET

A piano fell on her. In Soho.

MARGOT

How does a piano fall on someone?

PET

The block and tackle snapped.

MARGOT

You expect me to wear that!?

PIERRE

I thought --

MARGOT

I'm not getting married anyway. Take it away, Pierre. Take it away!

PIERRE

I have some very nice Chanel-inspired tulle -- pale lilac, hand-stitched pearls...

MARGOT

I am very happy with my black gown. It's appropriate. Good day, Pierre.

PHONE RINGS

Pierre exits. Margot picks up.

BASTAKOFF (V.O.)  
So, you're quitting, eh? Not  
turning in the story? Listen, you  
two-bit joke of a reporter -- Van  
Gaskell - Pulitzer Prize winner,  
my ass!

INT. BASTAKOFF'S OFFICE - MORNING

He rages with a coffee cup and a bottle of aspirin  
spilled across his desk.

BASTAKOFF  
I set you up perfect for this  
assignment! I held the front page  
for you! So what's this about not  
turning in the Margot Dane story?  
When did you get a conscience?  
Guess what? The Times beat us to  
it! They have no idea what the  
details are, but they have the  
headline!

He holds up a newspaper with the headline at the phone:

JINXPEEL - ARRESTED IN ART HEIST

BASTAKOFF (CONT'D)  
You see that!? You're throwing it  
all away for some dame! Since when  
did you start doing the right  
thing!?

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The phone is on the table. Pet and Yvonne listen to the  
loud voice spill out.

BASTAKOFF (V.O.)  
I'll fix it so you can't even sell  
papers on the street, let alone  
write for them! You hear me!?

EXT. DANE ESTATE - DRIVE - MORNING

Gaskell tries the ignition. The engine coughs.

Margot RUNS up, throws open the passenger door, jumps in.



GASKELL

Margot --

She grabs his face and kisses him.

A long, passionate kiss.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

I thought you shoot reporters?

MARGOT

Normally.

They kiss again.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Van Gaskell?

GASKELL

Yeah... how did you know?

MARGOT

Your boss called back. You're fired.

GASKELL

Of course, I am.

Another kiss.

MARGOT

Where are we going?

GASKELL

Stan's Pub -- then after a few belts I'll pop into the office and see -- we?

She buckles up.

GASKELL (CONT'D)

As in you?

MARGOT

I could use some fresh air in a pub.

Gaskell smiles -- and starts the car.

EXT. A ROAD IN SUSSEX - DAY

The little PHOTOGRAPHY BY LOTOALA car bumps down the lane. Music plays on the radio.

A curl of blue smoke from the tailpipe.

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY BY LOTOALA CAR - DAY

Gaskell drives. Margot rides shotgun, smiling.

MARGOT

I'll convince him not to fire you.

GASKELL

Aw, let him. I don't care. He's fired me five times. I'll get another scoop down the road and he'll take me back.

The music on the radio is interrupted.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

News Bulletin! Authorities at the Musée d'Orsay have confirmed the theft of Van Gogh's iconic "Self-Portrait with a Straw Hat" -- in a carbon-copy heist of the Mona Lisa theft solved earlier this morning.

Margot and Gaskell exchange looks.

MARGOT

The men are bricking up the cellar! Hurry!

EXT. A ROAD IN SUSSEX - DAY

The wheels SCREECH. The car billows thick fumes as it does a U-Turn at top speed.

As they zoom back toward the house, a police car swings onto the road, sirens blaring.

It disappears into the haze of Photography By Lotoala.

FADE OUT.