

Thief

a screenplay by

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T h i e f

FADE IN:

1 EXT. DESERTED HOUSE/RUSSIAN COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

Large flakes of snow perform their wild dance around a small house in the Russian countryside. The place is enveloped in darkness now broken by the bright lights of a limo, which cut like a knife into the romantic rural scenery.

The black door of the car flies open revealing massive fur boots, which stamp across the virgin snow.

2 INT./EXT. DESERTED HOUSE - NIGHT

The beautiful face of a WOMAN in her midthirties, Rose - and the mother of Hugh - wrapped in traditional Russian farmer's clothes, watches with dread as THREE MEN get out of the limo. She draws the curtains and turns around to her HUSBAND, a feeble looking man in his late fifties, who is wheelchair bound. A little BOY is standing next to her, staring up at his mum in fear. Both start at BOISTEROUS KNOCKING at the door. The woman throws an anxious glance at her husband who replies by nodding reluctantly. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. The woman drags the boy upstairs.

[NOTE: All dialogue in Russian is in *italic* and should be subtitled]

WOMAN

Go, you must hide!

The boy clings to his mother's arms, shaking his head. His eyes beg for him not to be left alone.

WOMAN

(authoritative)

Go!

There are more KNOCKS at the door. The boy runs up the stairs.

3 INT. DESERTED HOUSE/ATTIC - NIGHT

The boy hurries up the last steps. He looks at a wooden box which stands next to the stairway, opens it and hides inside.

4 INT. DESERTED HOUSE - NIGHT

The woman gives one last furtive glance up to the attic, before she goes to the door. She opens it, finding in front of her VLADIMIR RIAZHISKY, a corpulent man who looks like the reincarnation of a tartar warrior. Riazhsy's black, vicious eyes stare at the couple, scornfully. He stands in the doorway stiff like a statue of victory. Riazhsy nods in the direction of an ASIAN, a boyish looking man with the face of a squirrel, who comes in and looks around as if this was his home. His colleague - looking like the Russian answer to Schwarzenegger - follows. The woman steps back in fear, staring at the intruders.

WOMAN

I don't have them.

Riazhsy comes closer and smiles smugly. The woman stands in front of her husband trying to protect him. Riazhsy plants himself in front of her and laughs loudly. The woman trembles all over as she stares right back into his eyes.

WOMAN

I swear by God, I don't have them.

Riazhsy nods into the direction of his men, who have been searching for something in every corner of the house, leaving a mess behind them. The Asian takes a knife out of his pocket and walks over to the man in the wheelchair. Riazhsy pushes the woman away. She falls, but tries to get on her feet again. The Russian Schwarzenegger holds her back. She has to watch as the razor sharp knife is pressed against her husband's throat.

WOMAN

(hysterical)

No!

Riazhsy turns to her, taking his time to pull off his gloves, and digs out a cigar from his pocket. He lights it, and takes a long, satisfying puff.

RIAZHISKY

What a pity that I cannot believe you.

He signals to his assistant to begin. The blade of the knife scratches the man's neck. The woman starts to cry.

WOMAN

No! Please stop it!

RIAZHISKY scrutinizes her face closely and gives the Asian a sign to stop.

RIAZHISKY

Where are they?

The Asian sees that the woman stares at a spot underneath the table. The Asian goes to the big wooden table in the middle of the room, kneels down and pulls away an old carpet. He pushes the table aside and removes loose wooden planks, by ripping them all out. He finds five rolled paintings.

RIAZHISKY takes one of the paintings and unrolls it. His eyes widen in admiration as he looks at the PORTRAIT OF YOUNG ROSE looking like a typical farmer's wife from tsarist Russia. The muscular, brutal looking man grins satanically and throws an inquiring glance at Riazhsky, who looks expectantly at his men as he gives his approval.

The Russian throws the woman on the table, pinning her down with his massive body. The Asian holds down the woman's hands, whilst the Russian starts to move up the woman's skirt. The woman screams in protest. Her frightened husband approaches the table in his wheelchair, but Riazhsky violently kicks against it, causing the man to topple out of his chair.

5 INT. DESERTED HOUSE/ATTIC - NIGHT

The frightened face of the boy looks out of the half opened wooden box. His wide eyes stare downstairs. The LOUD SCREAMS of his MOTHER and the LAUGHTER of TWO MALE VOICES mingle with THE BRUTISH GROANING of another MAN that echoes in the attic.

FADE TO:

6 EXT./INT. MONTAGE VARIOUS PLACES - DAY/NIGHT

Skilful hands put the PORTRAIT OF YOUNG ROSE in a gold-painted carved wooden frame.

A set of five paintings is loaded into a van, parked opposite the famous Isaac Cathedral in St. Petersburg.

Railway workers load the paintings into a train compartment.

A diesel locomotive train travels across various Russian landscapes.

The train arrives at Gare de l'Est in Paris.

A MAN in a restaurateur's outfit looks at the five unwrapped paintings and meticulously hangs the PORTRAIT OF YOUNG ROSE on a wall. He steps back and looks at the painting in awe.

CUT TO:

7 INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

same painting projected onto the wall of a dimmed lecture hall at Vienna's Faculty of Arts. HUGH LEVITAN, a handsome man in his thirties, who somehow hides his good looks behind small specs, is standing next to the projector holding a pointer in his hands. His eyes light up when he looks up at the painting.

HUGH

...he always created images of Russian peasants, full of spiritual power, poetry and beauty, which should by no means be seen as mere 'imitations of nature', as the artist used to say. Unfortunately we'll probably never have a chance to see the original. Any more questions?

Hugh steps back and looks to his STUDENTS; an amalgam of two dozen young people from all over the world, who follow his presentation with great interest. Some of the students continue to stare at the projected slide, whilst TWO FEMALE STUDENTS, who stand out in their colorful and extremely sexy clothes with low necklines, ignore the slides and stare at Hugh instead. When Hugh notices that they are not paying attention one of them makes eyes at him. Hugh deliberately ignores her, scanning the auditorium for a raised hand. Finally, A MALE STUDENT puts his hand up. Hugh gives him a nod.

STUDENT

Isn't it exhibited in one of the Russian galleries? I saw your father's work once in the Pushkin Museum in St. Petersburg.

Hugh smiles smugly.

HUGH

You're right. Some of his paintings are accessible to the public. Other paintings, however,...

(pensive)

... disappeared.

The student looks pretty disappointed, raising his eyebrows. The LOUD RINGING OF THE BELL ends today's lecture. The students grab their books and head towards the exit. Hugh sighs and looks sadly at the students. After a beat, he switches off the slide projector. The two girls wait for the right moment to approach him. Hugh puts a few notes into his leather bag and leaves with the rest. The two girls get caught in the throng of students moving towards the exit.

8 INT. UNIVERSITY/CORRIDOR - DAY

Hugh walks along the corridor and reaches the door to his office. The two girls increase their pace and catch him before he disappears behind the door. Hugh turns around and looks at them.

HUGH

Yes?

GIRL 1

We...um

(looks at her fellow student)

...I mean I ...just wanted to tell you that um... your lecture... yeah, it was really um... very impressing...

The other girl nods assiduously. Hugh looks at them slightly confused.

GIRL 1

(continuing)

...and we... I wonder um,... perhaps... I mean it's the end of the term and we thought um...,

(taking a deep breath)

...why not celebrate it over dinner?

Hugh looks at them, thunderstruck. The two girls flash a dazzling smile at him.

HUGH

Dinner? ...That's... nice! Yeah, but I'm afraid,... I'm rather busy these days and perhaps... well, I'll have to check my schedule with my secretary. Thanks anyway!

Hugh grins embarrassed, nods good-bye and enters his room. The two girls look at each other - disappointment stamped on their faces.

GIRL 1

(despondent)

Believe me, he's a fruit!

GIRL 2

(sighs)

Yeah, but so sweet.

The first girl shrugs her shoulders, gives her friend a comforting hug, and pulls her off.

9 INT. HUGH'S OFFICE - DAY

Hugh unpacks his bag and looks back to the door, shaking his head in disbelief. His SECRETARY, an elderly lady with glasses, who looks exactly like the definition of a bookworm, enters his office. She wears a brown, terribly old fashioned costume which goes well with her hair done up in a bun. Hugh looks at her.

SECRETARY

I am sorry but I was unable to make the appointment at the Russian consulate. In fact, they kicked me out of the line twice and then I had this terribly impolite woman on the phone, she wouldn't even listen to me. I have never...

HUGH

Thank you anyway, I really appreciate it.

SECRETARY

Is there anything else I can do for you?

Hugh absent-mindedly stares on his desk.

SECRETARY

Mr. Levitan?

HUGH

No, thank you.

The secretary leaves. The polite look on Hugh's face changes to extreme anger. He looks at a book with the title 'Russian Masterpieces', takes it, reads the title and furiously throws it to the other end of his desk.

HUGH

Fuck!

The cover page of the book is damaged, tearing the title and a painting into two pieces.

10 INT. RUSSIAN CONSULATE/RECEPTION - DAY

Hugh sits opposite an ostentatious looking WOMAN, with red pinned up hair. She is on the phone, clearly talking to one of her friends.

[NOTE: The WOMAN has a strong Russian accent]

WOMAN

...did he?...No, he didn't!...

Hugh is becoming more nervous. He throws a vindictive glance at the woman, whose features change quickly while she is talking - from disappointment to delight and back. From time to time she giggles like a complete imbecile.

WOMAN

(continuing)

...you're not serious... no, definitely not... he did?... no, he didn't... did he or did he not?...

Hugh, unable to hold back his rising inner tension, jumps up from his seat and plants himself in front of the reception desk, looking at her ominously.

WOMAN

Just a sec!

The woman covers the phone with her hand, and looks at Hugh innocently as if he were an intruder.

HUGH

Look, I don't care whether he finally did it or not. The real question is when can you do it, eventually,... after letting me wait for...

Hugh looks at his watch.

HUGH

(continuing, raising his voice)

...pathetic thirty damned minutes!

The woman looks at Hugh somewhat surprised and wrinkles her nose.

WOMAN

You Americans have no patience.

HUGH

Patience is a minor form of despair, disguised as a virtue and I'm pretty desperate right now, damned desperate to be more precise!

Hugh turns to leave and heads towards the door to the consulate's office. The woman puts the phone down, gets up and tries to catch him - but in vain. Her high heels prevent her from running.

WOMAN

No, you can't just go in like that!

Hugh stands at the door, with the handle in his hands and turns around to the woman.

HUGH

I can and I will!

Hugh opens the door and goes in.

11 INT. OFFICE OF THE CONSUL - DAY

Hugh storms into the office, where the CONSUL is musing over a pile of documents on his desk. He is a fat man in his late fifties, with a face of an English bulldog. Hugh heads straight to the consul's desk. The consul is taken by surprise, dropping the ash of his cigar on the documents. He looks at Hugh, thunderstruck. The woman enters the office.

WOMAN

I'm sorry, he just...

The consul motions to her to be quiet, gets up and offers Hugh a seat. The woman looks pretty angry, turns on her heels and exits the room. As she closes the door behind her, both men take a seat.

CONSUL

What can I do for you?

HUGH

Have you received my letter concerning my father's paintings?

CONSUL

(pensively)

The paintings?... Ah, yes, the Levitans, now I remember. Well, I guess there is not much we can do about it.

HUGH

Look, I have proof that the director of the Lenin Gallery is in possession of my father's works.

CONSUL

Riazhsy? I'm afraid, I find that hard to believe. Riazhsy is known to be a very respectable owner of one of the finest galleries of St. Petersburg.

HUGH

Well, maybe he is now, but years ago, he stole the paintings from my family.

CONSUL

What kind of evidence can you bring forward?

HUGH

I was there when he took them away!

CONSUL

This is quite a serious accusation, you know, and certainly a very delicate matter, indeed.

HUGH

Delicate or not, there must be a way to get some support from you.

CONSUL

If your father was Russian then the paintings belong anyway to the Russian national heritage. So what can I do? Of course, there is always the possibility of going to the police. In fact, getting in touch with a lawyer might be an option worth considering.

Hugh shakes his head and laughs.

HUGH

A lawyer against the mob? You've got to be kidding.

CONSUL

Even if you're right, you must understand that the situation in Russia is rather difficult at the moment. However, it has come to my ears that there will be a new sales exhibition of Russian paintings, and to my knowledge Riazhsky is in charge.

HUGH

Where and when?

CONSUL

I don't know, really. Why don't you check the papers?

The consul gets up, signaling that their conversation has ended.

CONSUL

I wish you good luck.

Hugh nods, not hiding his disappointment.

12 INT. HUGH'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Various paintings flip over the screen of Hugh's computer. Hugh surfs the net accessing information about forthcoming art-exhibitions. His hand clicks and re-clicks his mouse,

skipping one page after another. Hugh enters another website. He quickly navigates from one iconized painting to the next. Hugh almost oversees the PAINTING of THE YOUNG ROSE that, which according to the ad, will go on a traveling exhibition from Paris to London, where Russian paintings will be auctioned off. Hugh moves closer to the screen and double-clicks the icon. It takes a few seconds to enlarge the picture to its full size. He props his head up in his hands and pensively stares at the picture.

13 INT./EXT. MAIN STREET IN VIENNA'S CITY CENTRE - NIGHT

Hugh drives his gray rusty beetle past the famous Hofreitschule and other historical buildings which are all lit in bright lights. He holds the steering wheel with his left hand and a mobile phone in his right hand.

HUGH

No... he is selling them... first they go to Paris and then they're auctioning them off at Sotheby's... no I am not drunk... ... Pavlov, I have to tell her... upset her?... You know how much the paintings mean to her... I'll show you the print-outs ... See you later!

Hugh hangs up. He sees a small, scarcely lit, typical Viennese café approaching. He looks at his watch.

14 INT. CAFÉ - NIGHT

ROSE LEVITAN, extremely well-dressed for a woman of her age, sits in a cozy café and admires a new-born baby that sits in the lap of its proud YOUNG FATHER. Rose pulls funny faces.

ROSE

You're such a cutie!

Rose tenderly caresses the cheek of the baby with her finger. She looks up to the mother sitting at a neighboring table.

ROSE

How old is he?

FATHER

Is she!

ROSE

I'm sorry, you can't really tell
nowadays, can you?

MOTHER

Two months.

Rose watches the child, obviously clearly absorbed by the baby's charming smile. The father notices that Rose is in love with his child.

FATHER

You wanna hold her?

Rose beams and takes the baby in her arms. The baby seems to be content, smiling at Rose.

ROSE

(sighs)

It's such a long time ago since I
held my son in my arms and still it
seems to me like yesterday.

MOTHER

Don't you have any grandchildren?

The mother has touched Rose's sore point. She looks rather sad but still tries hard to smile.

ROSE

No, and actually, the odds are not
good.

Hugh enters the restaurant and makes out Rose with the baby. He approaches the table. Rose hands the parents the baby and offers Hugh a seat.

ROSE

My son!

MOTHER

Oh!

Hugh looks at the mother, looking confused. The baby starts to scream forcing the parents out of the restaurant. Hugh watches them leaving. His eyes are full of pity.

ROSE

You're late, as usual!

HUGH

Sorry, the traffic!

ROSE

(grins)

I've already thought you let your Ma go back to Russia without even say good-bye.

Rose notices that Hugh does not react at all.

HUGH

(depressed)

How was your last day?

Rose looks suspiciously at her son, scrutinizing his face for a while.

ROSE

I know this face. Come on, what's eating you?

Hugh takes the Internet print-out from his pocket and puts it onto the table. Rose leans forward daring to take a peek at the colored sheet advertising the Paris exhibition. Her face freezes when she recognizes her portrait. She stares at the sheet, tears in her eyes. Hugh watches sad-eyed his mother's reaction.

HUGH

(bitter)

At least, we can go and see them.

ROSE

(determined)

I don't want to see them ever again!

HUGH

It's dad's work! You know how much he was in love with the family portraits.

Rose takes the paper and tears it apart. She looks away, biting her lip.

HUGH

Mum, why are you doing this?

ROSE

It took me so many years not to think every single day, every damned minute of my miserable life of that night and now you pop up with this... paper. What do you expect?

Hugh looks like a child being told off.

HUGH

I'm sorry... I...

Rose looks up at Hugh.

ROSE

Hugh, listen to me, you can't hold on to the past. The paintings don't mean the same as they did when your father was still alive.

HUGH

(defiant)

But they mean a lot to me and I want to get them back.

ROSE

(collected)

Hugh, they won't bring back your father!

HUGH

I know, but they'll give me back memories which I'll always treasure.

ROSE

I'll never understand why you entomb yourself in the past, spending your whole life in museums, digging into old catalogues. Don't you see that life is passing you by?

HUGH

What do you want me to do? Get married, have a bunch of kids and a dog? Is that what you want me to do?

ROSE

You are as stubborn as your father.

They both look down so as to avoid looking at each other.

HUGH

They will be auctioned off. Probably then they'll be gone forever.

Rose shakes her head, slightly irritated.

ROSE

What do you want to do?

HUGH

If only we could prove...

ROSE

Riazhsy will claim that he bought them. He was buying a lot of stuff at that time. Besides, he can forge papers you know.

HUGH

We could take legal action.

ROSE

To bring this whole thing to court? You want me to stand up as a witness telling the whole world what happened that night? Are you completely out of your mind?

HUGH

No... I don't want to hurt... Perhaps I could go to the auction and...

ROSE

The collection is worth a million.

Hugh nods in resignation.

ROSE

Forget the whole thing. Try to forget! At least, try.

HUGH

I can't.

Rose nods. She takes a look at her watch. While getting up, she sees a taxi arriving in front of the café.

HUGH

Why did you call a cab? I can...

ROSE

Don't worry, I called it a few minutes ago.

She grabs her bags and gives Hugh a hurried kiss on his cheek.

ROSE

Take care!

Hugh looks like a beaten dog watching his mother leave the café.

15 EXT. EMPTY HISTORIC STREET IN VIENNA - NIGHT

Hugh walks along an empty street lit up by old fashioned streetlights, his hands deep in his pockets. He sees an old coke can and half-heartedly kicks it against a wall.

16 EXT. STREET IN THE OLD PART OF VIENNA - NIGHT

Hugh passes a kiosk selling newspapers, cigarettes, beverages and food. He stops and steps closer, looking at the vendor, a scruffy looking bearded man, in his fifties.

HUGH
Zwei Flaschen Wodka!

The vendor nods and pulls out two bottles of vodka from the display. Hugh's eyes fall on the newspaper display. He sees a HEADLINE about an art theft in Switzerland.

VENDOR (O.S.)
Macht zweihundertachtunsechzig
Schilling.

Hugh steps closer, takes the newspaper and absentmindedly hands the vendor a bill. He packs the bottles of vodka in the pockets of his coat and opens the newspaper while leaving, completely absorbed by the article.

VENDOR
Warten Sie, sie kriegen noch Geld!

Hugh turns around, but continues to read.

HUGH
Schon gut!

Hugh leaves the kiosk, the opened newspaper in his hands and continues to read the article.

17 INT. PAVLOV'S ATELIER - NIGHT

The wrinkled and time-worn hand of an old man pours vodka into a small glass. Hugh is so tipsy that he rests his head in his hands on the table. He watches the glass being refilled as if it were the most thrilling thing on earth. His eyes look up at PAVLOV, an old man wearing a color smeared

painter's jacket. Pavlov looks typically Russian: heavy built body, rough features and black hair. His warm smile, however, reveals a sensitive soul behind the facade. Pavlov also re-fills his glass.

[NOTE: Pavlov has a Rumanian accent]

PAVLOV (O.S.)

There is no reason for being so miserable. You are an art expert. Get in touch with the people in charge and simply tell them the truth!

HUGH

Sure! I show up at the police and report a theft that took place twenty-five years ago.

PAVLOV

What's wrong with that?

HUGH

They would wonder why we didn't go to the police at that time.

PAVLOV

Well, you knew that Riazhsy stole them but he could have hidden them anywhere. There would have been no physical evidence. Besides, the situation in Russia has only changed recently.

Hugh laughs, or at least tries to, paying tribute to too much vodka by burping loudly.

HUGH

(depressed)

Mum doesn't want that.

Pavlov nods and sighs.

PAVLOV

Well, I know... and I understand her very well.

HUGH

I feel that she is somehow betraying my father.

PAVLOV

That's pretty unfair. You know how much your father and his work meant to me.

(pause)

He was like a brother to me! But think of what Rose went through all these years. She wants to forget.

HUGH

But I can't... I will never forget that night... Mum was on the floor... she didn't recognize me when I came down the stairs... I wanted to comfort her but she wouldn't let me touch her... pushed me away... and he was dead...

Pavlov's face is filled with pity.

PAVLOV

Hugh, there are more important things in life than retrieving a collection of family paintings. You have a mother who loves you very much. She is right, let sleeping dogs lie.

HUGH

You know how much the paintings meant to him. They were his family. He would have never sold them and now they are auctioned off,... to end up in some nouveau rich home in the States or in a Japanese bank office.

(furious)

It makes me so sick! I could kill this bastard.

Pavlov pours another glass of vodka.

PAVLOV

Riazhsy? Good luck, he is untouchable.

Hugh plays with his vodka glass and holds it in front of a burning candle, fascinated by the colorful play of light. He looks up at Pavlov.

HUGH

Well?

Pavlov raises his eyebrows.

HUGH
(continuing)
There are other ways to pay him back,
you know.

Hugh looks like a cheeky young rascal. Pavlov empties his glass, wrinkles his forehead, and watches Hugh put an unfolded newspaper on the table.

HUGH
I want the paintings!

Pavlov's eyes catch sight of the article about the art theft.

PAVLOV
You must be out of your mind.

HUGH
There must be a way to...

PAVLOV
Yes to end up in prison or get
killed. What about security systems?
Hell, you are not a professional
thief, all you can do is lecture and
study.

HUGH
One can always open up new doors in
life.

Pavlov turns to him, moving closer with his insistent eyes.

PAVLOV
Even if you succeed, once Riazhsy
finds out about it you're dead.

HUGH
Well he doesn't have to find out,
actually, does he?

Hugh looks at Pavlov with a absent minded and devious smile. Pavlov seems to know that Hugh is up to something.

PAVLOV
No way!

HUGH
(mysterious)

You did it once... and I know that..., theoretically speaking, you could do it again! It's your job after all.

Pavlov jumps up and walks up and down the room.

PAVLOV

No!

HUGH

Well, you've got four weeks!

PAVLOV

No!

HUGH

(spurring him on)

Think of the challenge!

Pavlov turns to Hugh.

PAVLOV

Look, I'm your friend and I loved your father but...

HUGH

What about justice?

PAVLOV

There is no such a thing.

HUGH

(determined)

Do it for my father!

Pavlov's face freezes. He looks Hugh straight into his passionately burning eyes which are gradually breaking Pavlov's resistance. He gives in with a nod.

18 INT. INTERPOL HEADQUARTERS LYON/OPEN-PLAN OFFICE - DAY

Almost perfect female legs walk past a partition wall of an open-plan office. A bunch of POLICE OFFICERS, wearing white shirts with more or less tasteful ties, short hair, stop their work and stare wide-eyed and gaping at their colleague, for whom the short walk to her boss' office is like running the gauntlet. Some of the men just eye her up. ELIZABETH, most of her friends call her LIZ, is a woman with square shoulders and firm limbs with a face almost too exquisite to evince intelligence, a being of enticing prettiness with a

soft treble voice. She wears a provocative red dress, making her look sexy as hell. One of the men she passes gives her a smack on her bottom. His colleagues howl in excitement. Liz stops, turns around to the man and grabs him at his tie drawing him closer. She loosens the knot of his tie and opens his shirt. The MAN is getting nervous, trying to stop her. Liz's quick and skilful hands continue to undress him. The man irritated like a schoolboy steps back, but Liz traps him in a firm grip. She starts to fumble at his flies. The howling is getting wilder, some men applaud and whistle spurring her on. Finally the man manages to escape and while walking backwards stumbles over his office chair and falls over. Liz looks down at him.

LIZ
Big mouth, no balls!

Liz turns and heads off, accompanied by the thunderous applause of her colleagues, towards an office door at the other end of the department.

19 INT. KEN'S OFFICE - DAY

KEN SINGLETON, a man with the face of a weasel, member of the mid-fifties club, and about to go bald stands in front of his milky glass door, watching his men howl. He chuckles and shakes his head, watching Liz on the way to his office. He opens the door and waves her in. Liz storms in and looks at Ken with a self-confident smile.

LIZ
Look, if I'm here to trace down
another pimp - my answer is NO!

Ken sits down scrutinizing Liz from head to tow. He smiles at her, deeply satisfied.

LIZ
(continuing)
I've had enough of vice or using my
body as a weapon for INTERPOL! Look
at me...

Liz fumbles at her dress.

LIZ
(continuing)
...I already look like some cheap
hooker, my God, why am I doing this?

Ken obviously can't get over how Liz behaves. He continues to giggle. Suddenly, he stops and looks at her, seriously.

KEN

Because you're ambitious as hell!

Liz pouts and sits down.

LIZ

I want to get out of this.

KEN

Well, that's why you're here.
Consider it a chance for your big
break.

LIZ

Tell me, what is it?

Ken puts a newspaper with the same photographs as the paper Hugh had before on the table. The FRENCH HEADLINE indicates a theft of Russian paintings in Switzerland.

KEN

Paintings!

Liz takes the newspaper and diagonally reads the article.

LIZ

The Russian Mafia?

KEN

Correct! We have reason to believe
that a guy called Riazhsy, who's
known to be the director of one of
the biggest Russian Art Galleries, is
dabbling in many different things if
you know what I mean.

Liz gives him a curious glance.

LIZ

Trading with forgeries?

KEN

No, probably not, but we think that
he is behind the theft in
Switzerland.

LIZ

Why not arrest him?

KEN

It's not that easy. The paintings never show up on another market. All he wants is to get the insurance money. He exhibits them, his men steal them, he cashes in and probably sells the originals to his private clientele.

LIZ

Got you!

Ken puts a brochure in front of her, advertising the Paris exhibition.

KEN

We assume that he will strike again in either Paris or London.

Ken hands her a pile of art books.

KEN

I want you to study the art catalogues. Make yourself familiar with the security, and speak to all people in charge! Find experts to check the authenticity of the paintings. We have to be prepared for all eventualities. Make sure nothing happens.

Liz nods.

LIZ

Well, that doesn't sound so terribly hard. We could double the security, transform the exhibition hall into a fortress.

KEN

The thing is, actually, we can't. It's a very delicate matter, you know. The Russian ambassador will be at the opening of the exhibition in Paris, a few well connected men who might collaborate with Riazhsky. You never know who is working with them. Besides, we have strict instructions to operate in the background. If the press picks up on it we're finished.

Liz nods.

KEN

This is a big case. Don't let me
down.

LIZ

Any strings attached?

Ken shakes his head and grins, looking down at her legs.

KEN

I think it's time for disarmament.

LIZ

(melanie griffithish)
No petting old men any more?

KEN

Promised, only the tough and decent
jobs.

LIZ

(lowering her voice)
That's a deal!

Liz clutches the books and turns to leave. Ken smiles
satisfied with a certain pride in his eyes as he watches Liz
leaving the office.

20 INT. MONTAGE PAVLOV'S ATELIER - DAY

A photo of THE YOUNG ROSE is pinned to a wall next to a
painter's easel. Pavlov meticulously checks the photo, takes
a black charcoal pencil and steps back from the easel,
looking at the empty canvas. He takes a deep breath and
outlines Rose's contours with a few brief strokes.

A brush is pulled out of a tin with oil color paint. Pavlov's
eyes look at a half finished painting of Rose. He adds a
large amount of the paint to fill out the white blanks on the
canvas.

Pavlov's hand gives a fine brush to Rose's dress and adds a
few details.

Pavlov starts a new sketch, copying the photography of an old
man dressed in farmer's clothes.

Pavlov puts the finishing touches to the painting of the old
man. He looks at the last photo of a young boy and sighs.

Pavlov steps back from his last work, a portrait of the young Hugh, revealing three paintings: the portraits of the Levitan family. He seems satisfied, and smiles.

21 INT. HUGH'S HOUSE/ATTIC - NIGHT

Hugh sits in a comfortable black leather chair in the middle of his attic that he has transformed into a sort of private exhibition room for his art collection. Apart from a collection of fine paintings, there are two pyramid-shaped loudspeakers in each corner of the sparsely furnished room. The room is filled with CLASSICAL MUSIC. Hugh refills a wine glass and takes a sip. He looks at the three reproductions from Pavlov, obviously satisfied. Hugh turns to the photograph of his father holding a boy in his arms. He takes the photo and looks at it, full of love and admiration. He puts the photograph back and leaves the room.

FADE TO:

22 INT. ART GALLERY IN PARIS - NIGHT

An AMALGAM of WELL GROOMED ART CRITICS, SCRUFFILY DRESSED PRESS PEOPLE and PHOTOGRAPHERS mix with a MULTICOLOURED HUMAN POT-POURRI from across the globe. Ambassadors and the filthy rich shake hands and exercise the art of SMALL TALK. Ken walks against a one-way stream of caricature-like spitting images of the drunk and ugly. Ken doesn't spend more than a few seconds at each painting, strolling through the exhibition room like in a shopping mall. He passes by Hugh, who stands in front of a masterpiece. Hugh notices the alien looking man and looks scornfully at the him.

23 INT. ART GALLERY/SECURITY ROOM - NIGHT

Liz sits on a highly uncomfortable metal built designer chair, and is listening to the explanations of a SECURITY OFFICER, who stares nervously at Liz's neckline. Liz looks extremely bored, as if she had been listening for ages. She is unable to sit straight on the chair any more.

[NOTE: The security officer has a strong French accent]

SECURITY OFFICER

... so, there is no way to get in and
certainly no way to get out.

Liz nods, but looks around.

SECURITY OFFICER (O.S.)

(continuing)

Our alarm systems belong to the best in France. In fact, we are collaborating with the same company that services le Louvre.

Liz scans the crowd. She almost overlooks a particularly handsome face. Liz notices that the man is introduced to her boss. She gets up and turns to the security officer.

LIZ

I'm impressed, no really, I'm impressed. Thank you, thank you so much.

Liz heads towards Ken and Hugh moving forward like a wedge into the crowd.

24 INT. ART GALLERY/ANOTHER ROOM - NIGHT

The French Gallery MANAGER, a parrot look alike with orange hair and a green-red skirt, a human hybrid of Versace and Gaultier, introduces Ken to Hugh, who is completely absorbed by a painting. At first he does not take any notice of the manager with Ken in tow. The manager tips Hugh on his shoulders. Hugh turns around and scrutinizes the two men, who look like day and night.

[NOTE: The manager has a strong French accent]

MANAGER

(can't pronounce the "H")

May I introduce to you, Monsieur Hugh Levitan, Monsieur...

Ken offers Hugh a hand.

KEN

Hi, I'm Ken Singleton.

The manager makes out someone obviously very important in the crowd and turns to leave.

MANAGER

Sorry, I must go.

Hugh and Ken watch together the man's swinging hips, as he fights his way through the crowd. Ken digs out a business card and hands it to Hugh.

HUGH

Don't you think that fashion is a form of ugliness so intolerable that we have to alter it every six months?

Ken looks down at his gray boring suit and nods.

KEN

Monsieur Gabison told me that you are an art expert.

Hugh shrugs his shoulders and grins embarrassed.

HUGH

You are not here for lessons in art, are you?

KEN

Wouldn't do any harm, to be perfectly honest.

Hugh looks around like a child in wonderland.

HUGH

Look at all these paintings, fascinating treasures resurrecting the fallen kingdom of the czar.

Hugh points at a specific painting.

HUGH

(continuing; excited)

This one for instance, Mikhail Levitan carries us back to the world of the fairy tale, folklore and the poetry of Pushkin and Lermontov. The exalted, symbolic images of his pictures are charged with deep philosophic power and full of an inner tension.

Hugh is so absorbed by the painting that he doesn't notice Ken's growing frustration. Ken looks impatient, since he obviously does not understand a word. Neither of them has taken the slightest notice of Liz, who is listening attentively to Hugh's lecture-like monologue.