



THE ROSENTHALER SUITE

aka

MY BEST FRIEND

by

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INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH. DAY

Manhattan. A funeral in-progress. The casket makes its way up the center aisle. Fifty mourners watch. One types on his Blackberry rapidly with intense concentration.

He is forty-five. He has wavy silver hair. He wears a black double-breasted suit. He is NICHOLAS.

The procession comes to a stop alongside him.

Nicholas' fingers pause on the keypad. He turns to look out of the corners of his eyes. An elderly pall-bearer has gone red in the face. He grimaces. The other pall-bearers murmur, concerned. They struggle to keep the casket in the air. One of them -- younger and powerfully built -- turns to Nicholas and whispers sharply:

PALL-BEARER

Help.

Nicholas raises an eyebrow. He speaks with a slight Bronx accent, but his overall manner calls to mind something vaguely like an Italian or maybe Hungarian aristocrat from an earlier century. Somehow the combination sounds natural:

NICHOLAS

Of course, my dear.

Nicholas looks back down at his Blackberry and types quickly for another ten seconds while the pall-bearers wait, straining, and the old man sways slightly. Nicholas presses send. He smiles for an instant at the pall-bearers and replaces the old man at the corner of the casket. The old man sits down. Nicholas nods.

The casket continues toward the front of the church. Nicholas' Blackberry begins to vibrate loudly, glowing through his pocket as they make their way past each succeeding row. As soon as they have placed the casket in front of the altar, Nicholas pats it briefly with both hands and says soberly:

NICHOLAS

Godspeed to you, Krementz.

Nicholas peels away from the group, looking back over his shoulder at the pall-bearers without breaking his stride. They breathe heavily as they watch him go.

Nicholas takes out his Blackberry and reads a message as he winds around the corner of the church. He slips into a confessional. He pulls the door shut behind him, switches to

his mobile phone, and dials urgently. He waits for a connection.

NICHOLAS
Natalie. Did we get it?
(pause)
Come on. Spit it out.

Nicholas listens for a moment. He says shortly:

NICHOLAS
I don't care if it's not his best work.

Nicholas listens for another moment. He says aggressively:

NICHOLAS
I don't care if it's his worst work. If
it says "Moses Rosenthaler" at the bottom
of the picture, then keep bidding.

A little window slides open with a snap. A white-haired priest stares through a screen at Nicholas.

NICHOLAS
Hold the line.
(whispering respectfully)
Hello! How are you? I'm just finishing
a --

PRIEST
This isn't a phone booth.

NICHOLAS
Understood. I'm not Catholic.

The priest stares coldly at Nicholas. Nicholas hesitates.

NICHOLAS
I'm hanging up.

The confessional screen snaps shut. Nicholas says into the telephone, no longer whispering:

NICHOLAS
Keep bidding.

EXT. SIDEWALK. DAY

Nicholas briskly consoles the widow on the steps outside. She is nearly ninety. She is sad but not devastated. She is MRS. KREMENTZ.

NICHOLAS
I'm sorry for your loss.

MRS. KREMENTZ

Thank you.

NICHOLAS

What are your plans for the Rosenthalers?

MRS. KREMENTZ

I'm going to sell them.

NICHOLAS

You have my number?

MRS. KREMENTZ

Yes.

NICHOLAS

Call me tomorrow, my dear.

Nicholas takes out his Blackberry as he walks away. He says back to Mrs. Krementz, distracted:

NICHOLAS

He was a wonderful fellow.

MRS. KREMENTZ

Thank you.

Nicholas steps out into the street among a half-dozen car service cars with drivers waiting. He looks up and down the block. He shakes his head and throws his hands into the air in disbelief. He says out loud to himself:

NICHOLAS

Where is he?

Nicholas takes out his mobile phone and dials. Pause. He raises his voice:

NICHOLAS

Natalie! Where's Felipe?

(pause)

Come on. Say it.

Nicholas listens. He looks horrified.

NICHOLAS

Around the block? Nobody else went around the block. I've been standing on 114th street for twenty minutes!

Nicholas sees a taxi. He whistles for it and waves.

NICHOLAS

Well, tell Felipe I'm in a taxi. He lost his passenger. I'll be there in ten minutes, and I'll say it again: get your stuttering under control.

INT. STATION WAGON. DAY

A livery cab with a price-list and Mr. Driver Service Vehicles hand-painted on the door. The man behind the wheel is thirty-five. He has a blond moustache and wears a tweed cap. He is ZBIGNIEW. Classical plays on the radio. A sticker on the dashboard says "Support Public Television". There are post-cards of Renaissance paintings taped up around the interior, and a little, plastic bust of William Shakespeare hanging from the rear-view mirror.

Nicholas gets into the car.

NICHOLAS

72nd and York, please.

ZBIGNIEW

(nods)

Sotheby's?

NICHOLAS

(hesitates)

Right.

There is a CD displayed on a little rack above the passenger seat. It catches Nicholas' eye. He studies it, squinting. It says "Beethoven" across the top. Zbigniew looks at Nicholas in the rearview mirror and says cheerily:

ZBIEGNIEW

Beethoven.

Nicholas now has his mobile phone to his ear, checking his messages. He frowns and says without looking up:

NICHOLAS

What?

ZBIEGNIEW

I meant the music. I'll turn it off.

Zbigniew politely turns off the music. Nicholas finishes pressing some buttons on his mobile phone. He looks up, annoyed and frustrated. He sighs. He looks to Zbigniew.

NICHOLAS

Beethoven? OK, play it.

ZBIEGNIIEW
 (pleased)
 This is the Violin and Piano Sonata
 Number 9 in A-major.

Zbigniew turns the music back on. He smiles and bobs his head to the music. He conducts slightly with one hand as he drives.

NICHOLAS
 OK, that's enough. Turn it off.

Zbigniew turns the music back off.

EXT. SIDEWALK. DAY

The station wagon pulls to a stop next to a fire hydrant in front of a futuristic, glass building with "Sotheby's" etched in large type above the entrance. Nicholas opens the door before the car has stopped and says:

NICHOLAS
 Wait for me.

ZBIGNIEW
 (uncertain)
 Oh, you mean -- it's a time-job?

NICHOLAS
 (brusquely)
 Yes, it's a time-job. What's your number?

Zbigniew takes a card out of little stack in the ashtray. He hands it to Nicholas.

ZBIGNIEW
 I might have to circle around the block.

NICHOLAS
 (agitated)
 What'd I just say --

Nicholas looks down at the card. He reads:

NICHOLAS
 -- Mr. Driver. Did you not hear me?

ZBIGNIEW
 (encouraging)
 I did hear you. This is a fire zone, but
 I'm going to stay close.

NICHOLAS
 (hesitates)
 Stay close.

ZBIGNIEW
 Roger that. See you in twenty.

INT. AUCTION HOUSE. DAY

A large, abstract, blue and purple painting that looks like a mixture of barbed wire tangled with a hurricane is being lifted off the block. The auctioneer announces the next item while people in the crowded room whisper and take notes.

Nicholas sidesteps quickly down a row of seated bidders. He pauses suddenly in front of a bald man in a Nehru jacket. The bald man stares up at Nicholas coldly. He is RONNIE. Nicholas thrusts out his hand and stage-whispers:

NICHOLAS
 Hi, Ronnie.

RONNIE
 (bitterly)
 Don't try to shake my hand. You know what you just did.

Nicholas immediately continues down the row. He slides into a seat next to a thirty year-old woman in a black dress. She has bleached-blond hair with black roots and a little tattoo of a star on each of her shoulders. She is NATALIE. She reveals that she has a slight stammer as she says:

NATALIE
 We got it.

NICHOLAS
 I know.

NATALIE
 For double the high estimate.

NICHOLAS
 That's fine. What's next?

NATALIE
 The ugly, little, black one.

NICHOLAS
 Get that, too.

Nicholas lurches back up and makes a bee-line across the room toward a stocky, sixty-five year-old woman seated in the back row with the head of a tortoise shell cane clasped in front

of her in one hand and a bidding paddle in the other. She wears her hair slack over one eye with a single hairpin. She is LUCINDA. She is seated among a group of young, gay men in suits. One of them holds her coat and another her handbag. They see Nicholas approaching and murmur to each other.

Nicholas arrives in front of Lucinda and says grandly:

NICHOLAS

Hello, my dear Lucinda.

Lucinda bristles as Nicholas kisses her on both cheeks. She is a chain-smoker and has a terrifying voice:

LUCINDA

You're scratching me.

NICHOLAS

May I have a word?

Lucinda looks to her companions. They look back at her sympathetically. She hands one of them her paddle and trades it for her coat and handbag. She stands up. She follows Nicholas out of the auction room. As soon as the doors close, she illegally lights a cigarette and asks coolly as they walk through the lobby among gigantic steel sculptures:

LUCINDA

Why are you buying Rosenthalers?

NICHOLAS

(searching for the words)

Because he was always timeless, even back when we thought he was the future --

(finding them)

-- but today he's right now.

LUCINDA

Who says?

NICHOLAS

I do.

LUCINDA

He hates your guts, doesn't he?

NICHOLAS

No, he doesn't.

LUCINDA

Doesn't he? Am I imagining that? Wasn't there an incident?

NICHOLAS

(hesitates)

Not as far as I can recall. I'm not in touch with him anymore, but I love him as a man and an artist -- and a former friend, if you will.

Lucinda considers a few possible responses to this -- then brushes them all aside. She stops inside the front door and says bluntly:

LUCINDA

OK, let's hear it. What do you want?

NICHOLAS

I'm short of cash. I need a partner.

LUCINDA

(skeptical)

For what?

NICHOLAS

(dramatically)

Krementz died Tuesday. They're burying him right now. We're going to buy the Rosenthaler Suite -- and everything else Moses Rosenthaler ever painted, sculpted, scribbled or had anything to do with.

LUCINDA

(frowning)

Why would I want to do that?

NICHOLAS

(with total confidence)

Because in the next few months, or, probably, more like weeks, he's going to become very, very important again, and somebody's going to get rich. I want it to be me -- and you, by extension.

Lucinda stares at Nicholas for a moment. She points in his face and says quietly, intrigued:

LUCINDA

He's dying.

NICHOLAS

(pause)

Hm?

LUCINDA

He's dying.

NICHOLAS
 (immediately)
 Of course, not. Touch wood.

Nicholas taps the glass door next to them. He holds up a neatly typed list of titles, sellers, and prices.

NICHOLAS
 Here's what we want.

Lucinda snaps the list out of Nicholas' hand. She studies it. She checks her watch.

LUCINDA
 Take me to my lunch.

EXT. SIDEWALK. DAY

Nicholas and Lucinda exit the building. Nicholas looks up and down the block and starts to throw his hands up into the air in disbelief again. A mail truck pulls away revealing Zbigniew standing next to his station wagon across the street with two police men. He appears to be telling them a story. He is highly animated as he finishes it. The police men laugh hysterically. Zbigniew sees Nicholas immediately and shouts:

ZBIEGNIW
 Stand by! Here I come!

Zbigniew jumps into the car, honks twice as he throws it into reverse, races backwards up the block, then shifts into drive and glides to the curb alongside Nicholas and Lucinda. Nicholas looks mildly impressed.

INT. STATION WAGON. DAY

Nicholas and Lucinda get into the car. More classical music plays softly. Lucinda says immediately:

LUCINDA
 55th between Fifth and Sixth.

ZBIGNIW
 (nods)
 Lorenzo's?

LUCINDA
 (hesitates)
 Right. Very good.

Zbigniew accelerates to make the light. Nicholas watches him curiously. He points at a new CD in the little rack:

NICHOLAS
What's this one?

ZBIGNIEW
(pleased)
Haydn. Concerto for Two Horns in E-flat.

Zbigniew turns up the volume. He smiles and drums his fingers on the steering wheel. Lucinda taps her fingers on the head of her cane with a distant look on her face. Nicholas whistles vaguely.

NICHOLAS
OK, that's enough again. Turn it off.

Zbigniew turns the music off. Nicholas looks to Lucinda and says gravely:

NICHOLAS
It's true. He's dying.

LUCINDA
When?

NICHOLAS
Soon.

LUCINDA
How do you know?

NICHOLAS
I found out, and nobody else seems to be in on it. One week after the funeral, we're going to open the biggest Rosenthaler retrospective anybody ever heard of --
(pointing to his list)
-- because we're going to own all the Rosenthalers. This is a major opportunity, but we've got to move fast.

LUCINDA
(long pause)
Well, let's make sure he's really sick first.

EXT. SIDEWALK. DAY

Nicholas helps Lucinda out of the station wagon and escorts her to the entrance of a power-lunch-type restaurant. It says "Lorenzo's" over the front window. He holds open the door and says:

NICHOLAS

We'll talk soon, my dear. I don't go in there. I can't remember why.

Lucinda frowns, curious. Nicholas points to the maitre d' behind his stand just inside the foyer. He is staring at Nicholas with a look of intense hatred. Lucinda shrugs. She enters the restaurant and the door closes behind her.

Nicholas stands on the sidewalk for a moment. He puts his hands in his pockets. He checks the sole of his shoe to see if he stepped on some chewing gum. He stares into space. He gets back into the station wagon. Zbigniew watches him in the rear-view mirror. Silence.

Nicholas suddenly looks up at the little rack. There is a new CD in it. He says to himself:

NICHOLAS

Mozart.

Nicholas looks to Zbigniew in the rear-view mirror. Their eyes meet. Zbigniew immediately turns on the music. They listen while the engine idles. Nicholas looks out at the restaurant. Inside the front window, customers eat and drink. Someone laughs silently. Outside, a busboy smokes a cigarette in an open doorway. Nicholas says quietly:

NICHOLAS

63rd and Park.

ZBIGNIEW

(nods)

Home?

NICHOLAS

(hesitates)

Right. Very good again. How'd you know that, Mr. Driver?

ZBIGNIEW

(shrugs)

I just had a feeling.

Zbigniew smiles. Nicholas nods. They drive away down the block.

INSERT:

An engraved invitation which reads "Nicholas Cadazio cordially invites you to an intimate celebration of his 46th birthday, Location: Sushi Yukio".

INT. JAPANESE RESTAURANT. NIGHT

A tiny, immaculate sushi bar. The room is lacquered entirely in red, and there is a lone chef wearing a kamikaze-style headband. Nicholas sits with Natalie at a low table next to the front door. They drink cocktails. Natalie wears white trousers and a short, white fur coat. They are the only customers.

Nicholas looks anxious. He checks his watch.

NICHOLAS

Maybe this is one of those parties where literally no one shows up, and it's a public humiliation.

NATALIE

(shrugs)

Well, I'm here. Somebody showed up.

NICHOLAS

(seriously)

You're my employee.

Natalie looks insulted but resigned. Silence.

NATALIE

Who's going to pay for this?

NICHOLAS

(shrugs)

Yukio runs me a tab. I'll deal with it when I'm not broke again.

The front door opens, and a slightly overweight man wearing a ski cap and a T-shirt comes in. He has two small, bright red sores on his cheek. He is CHARLIE. Nicholas brightens.

NICHOLAS

Here we go! Charlie!

(suddenly frowning)

What's that? On your face.

CHARLIE

(embarrassed)

I know. Hi, Natalie.

NATALIE

(leaning toward Charlie)

How was the --

NICHOLAS
 (blocking her)
 Don't kiss him! Jesus. Can't you see the
 lesions on his face? That's viral.

CHARLIE
 (wounded)
 I'm not contagious.

The front door opens again, and a Swedish-looking woman in a
 caftan comes in with a four year-old boy with long hair. She
 is GRETA. The boy plays a loud video game as he walks.
 Nicholas looks dismayed.

NICHOLAS
 Greta, my dear. You brought a child with
 you.

GRETA
 This is Benji. He'll just play his game.

NICHOLAS
 Natalie, get Benji some headphones.

The front door opens again, and Lucinda comes in. She looks
 around the room skeptically.

NICHOLAS
 Lucinda, my dear!

LUCINDA
 Do they make cooked food here?

NICHOLAS
 Of course. Yukio's a genius.

LUCINDA
 Who am I sitting next to?

NICHOLAS
 Whoever you'd like.

LUCINDA
 (pointing to Natalie)
 I'll sit next to her.

The front door opens again, and a tall, beautiful, black girl
 wearing a black dress comes in. She is MARIANNE. She stands
 next to Natalie. Nicholas says to them with admiration:

NICHOLAS
 I love this. The black in the black and
 the blonde in the white. It's wonderful.

Nicholas kisses Natalie and Marianne. They both look slightly offended.

CUT TO:

Fifteen minutes later. The boy is sitting in the corner playing his video game with headphones on. A torn-open headphones package lies on the floor next to him. Ten other guests have arrived. Nicholas stands next to Natalie watching the others chatting. He points to Marianne.

NICHOLAS
Your friend is lovely.

NATALIE
(pleased)
I know.

NICHOLAS
Very beautiful. Willowy.

NATALIE
(less pleased)
I know.

NICHOLAS
Give her my number, will you?

NATALIE
(pause)
What for?

NICHOLAS
As a favor to me.

NATALIE
(annoyed)
She's my girlfriend.

NICHOLAS
(hesitates)
In what sense? She's a dyke?

Nicholas looks confused and disappointed. Natalie stares at him. She laughs.

NICHOLAS
You're telling me she's a dyke? The black one?

NATALIE
(suddenly frustrated)
Yes.

NICHOLAS
 (curious)
 And, in fact, so are you?

NATALIE
 Yes.

NICHOLAS
 Wow. Very sexy. Very sexy. How awkward.

The sushi chef listens to this exchange discreetly as he prepares a lobster. Nicholas looks at him and shrugs.

NICHOLAS
 They're a beautiful couple, right?
 Lipstick lesbians, I guess they call it.
 (to Natalie)
 Cheers. She's a little out of your league, isn't she? A lesbian with a speech impediment. Maybe not.

Natalie frowns. Greta comes over to Nicholas and says staring at her mobile phone:

GRETA
 Nicholas?

NICHOLAS
 Yes, Greta, my dear?

GRETA
 Did you just send this to me?

NICHOLAS
 (hesitates)
 What?

GRETA
 This text.

NICHOLAS
 What text?

GRETA
 (reading)
 Are you bored? Greta bugs the shit out of me. Have her pay you back for the headphones. Why was she invited?

NICHOLAS
 (pause)
 I sent that to Natalie.

GRETA
You sent it to me.

NICHOLAS
That was a fuck-up. I don't feel that way.

GRETA
(icily)
Well, I'm leaving.

NICHOLAS
I'm sorry, Greta. Don't go. Just --

Nicholas looks to Natalie. She stares back at him blankly. He turns back to Greta and says sincerely:

NICHOLAS
It didn't happen.

CUT TO:

One hour later. Everyone is seated around the small counter at the center of the restaurant. The chef lights a candle on a little hunk of a carefully prepared dark paste with slices of strange, prickly, foreign fruits arranged around it. He places it in front of Nicholas. Nicholas says hopefully:

NICHOLAS
Nobody's going to sing?

Everybody begins to sing Happy Birthday, quietly and awkwardly. Just before the end, Nicholas interrupts:

NICHOLAS
I'm blowing it out.

Nicholas blows out the candle and stands up with a cup of sake in his hand.

NICHOLAS
Thank you, my friends and colleagues, for your --
(laughing uncomfortably)
-- mild best wishes, and thank you for being here tonight.

Greta says in a very loud stage-whisper to Natalie sitting next to her:

GRETA
Who's the friend?

NICHOLAS

I'm forty-six today, and -- who's the friend? What's that about? Jesus, Greta. Slow down on the hot sake. Anyway, I'm forty-six --

NATALIE

(getting up)

Excuse me.

NICHOLAS

Where you going, Natalie?

Natalie stands up and goes into the bathroom. Pause. Marianne gets up and goes after her. Greta now says openly:

GRETA

Who's the friend? I'm serious. Anybody? Charlie?

CHARLIE

(uneasy)

I'm not going to say anything. Sure, we're kind of friends. Why not?

NICHOLAS

(furious)

Spineless! Dammit, Charlie! Stand up for me!

CHARLIE

(pause)

Nah, I changed my mind.

NICHOLAS

I can't believe it. It's my birthday, I invite you for the most heavenly sashimi in the city, and you're talking to me like a --

GRETA

I hate this restaurant. It's a rip-off.

NICHOLAS

(hesitates)

Don't insult Yukio! OK, I'm sorry about the text message -- but I had a point!

GRETA

I'm going to make a scene.

NICHOLAS

You've done that.

Greta pours her sake over Nicholas' dessert. Nicholas looks deflated.

NICHOLAS

Oh, damn you. What the hell is this? The hot sake on the pineapple cake. Good Jesus.

EXT. SIDEWALK. NIGHT

Nicholas stands next to Lucinda while she smokes a cigarette. Inside, the others put on their coats. Greta comes out with the little boy still wearing the headphones. She walks away up the street without looking back. Silence.

LUCINDA

Who are these people? They're not your friends.

NICHOLAS

Apparently not.

LUCINDA

(shrugs)
Do you have any?

NICHOLAS

(hesitates)
Are you being serious?

LUCINDA

Never mind. I've looked it over. I'll partner with you on the Rosenthaler show.

NICHOLAS

(elated)
You will? Glorious.

Lucinda turns and starts to walk away. Nicholas tugs her lightly back by the sleeve.

NICHOLAS

One second. Were you being serious just now? Not about the Rosenthalers.

LUCINDA

(long pause)
I was, yes.

NICHOLAS

Well, I'd like to answer, if I may. Yes, I have friends.

LUCINDA
(evenly)
Really.

NICHOLAS
Of course.

LUCINDA
OK. I wasn't actually trying to hurt your feelings. I'm only trying to understand what I just witnessed.

NICHOLAS
You don't believe me.

LUCINDA
Name one.

NICHOLAS
(pause)
They're not in the art world.

LUCINDA
OK. Never mind.

NICHOLAS
I have several. Not many, but several.

LUCINDA
Where are they? Anyway, I know I'm right. They don't exist, so let's drop it.

Lucinda starts to turn away again. Nicholas says in a different voice:

NICHOLAS
Are you always right, Lucinda?

Lucinda stops. She looks back to Nicholas. She shrugs.

LUCINDA
Almost always.

NICHOLAS
Well, not this time.

LUCINDA
You want to bet?

NICHOLAS
Gladly. Desperately. Yes, please.

LUCINDA
How you going to prove it?

NICHOLAS
 (shrugs)
 I'll produce him.

LUCINDA
 And provide supporting evidence.

NICHOLAS
 Naturally.

LUCINDA
 I'll bet you the Rosenthaler Suite.

The rest of the party comes out of the restaurant. They each look to Nicholas and Lucinda, but no one says a word as they walk away. Natalie comes out last. She hands Nicholas a small, gift-wrapped package in glittery wrapping-paper. A card on the top reads "Happy Birthday, Nicholas". She turns and walks away. Nicholas watches her go.

Nicholas looks back to Lucinda. Silence.

NICHOLAS
 OK.

LUCINDA
 If you haven't introduced me to your best friend by the end of the month, I get the Rosenthaler Suite, *in toto*, for every penny its worth -- whatever amount that actually turns out to be.

NICHOLAS
 And if I win?

LUCINDA
 It's yours.

NICHOLAS
 Done.

LUCINDA
 Let's put it in writing.

Lucinda points at the ground. Nicholas picks up a slightly damp Chinese delivery menu off the sidewalk. He smooths it out a bit. Lucinda takes a fountain pen out of her hand-bag and starts scribbling in the margins. Nicholas watches over her shoulder. She points at the menu:

LUCINDA
 Initial here and here.

Nicholas writes his initials on the menu. Lucinda re-reads it. She tucks it into her hand-bag.

LUCINDA
I'll get it notarized.

Lucinda walks away. Nicholas looks up and down the block. He goes back inside to negotiate the bill.

INT. CLASSROOM. NIGHT

A night-school art studio with an acoustical tile ceiling and a linoleum floor. A bowl of peaches sits on a plastic table among twenty painters of all ages at their easels. A white-haired woman with a tan, lined face and a pony-tail walks among them studying their canvases and whispering comments.

The woman stops next to Zbigniew and stares at his picture. He looks up to her hopefully. She frowns. She pats him on the shoulder and moves away without meeting his eyes.

Zbigniew turns back to his canvas, only slightly saddened. He dabs his brush in a bit of yellow and sets back to work.

CUT TO:

Nicholas walking home alone with his still gift-wrapped birthday present in his hands. He rounds the corner, then stops. He looks back behind him. The Mr. Driver station wagon is parked at the end of the block. He stares at it.

A door opens across the street. Nicholas looks up at the building. A large sign reads "Arts and Crafts Annex". The twenty painters and their teacher come out carrying large portfolio cases and books. Zbigniew is with them. He has a brightly colorful painting tucked under his arm. He puts on his tweed cap. He also wears white bucks and seersucker trousers. He appears to be telling the class a story. He is highly animated as he finishes it. Everyone laughs hysterically. They say good-bye to each other. Some go left, and some go right. Zbigniew walks across the street to his station wagon. He takes his car keys out of his pocket as he approaches.

Nicholas says from the sidewalk:

NICHOLAS
Mr. Driver.

Zbigniew stops and looks up. He smiles.

ZBIGNIEW
Hello.

Zbigniew points to Nicholas' package:

ZBIGNIEW

Is that for me? You shouldn't have. Just kidding. What's the occasion?

(reading the card)

It's your birthday.

NICHOLAS

It was.

ZBIGNIEW

You didn't open your present.

Nicholas looks down at the package. He looks back up to Zbigniew.

NICHOLAS

It's from my secretary.

Zbiegniew nods. He takes the package out of Nicholas' hands and gently shakes it, listening. It bumps slightly. He hands it back to Nicholas. Pause.

ZBIGNIEW

How old are you today?

NICHOLAS

Forty-six. How old are you?

ZBIGNIEW

Thirty-five.

NICHOLAS

You're an artist?

ZBIGNIEW

No, I operate a small car service. Actually, it's just one vehicle. This is my hobby, I guess.

Zbigniew holds up his painting. It would be difficult to identify the subject matter, if there is one. He shrugs.

ZBIGNIEW

I'm taking a class to try to get better.

Nicholas leans toward the canvas and stares at it. He frowns.

NICHOLAS

Hm.

ZBIGNIEW

It's not finished yet.

Nicholas nods as he continues to study the picture:

NICHOLAS
Work-in-progress.

ZBIGNIEW
Well, I thought it could use a little bit
more color. Why are you crying?

Nicholas has tears streaming down his face. He makes no attempt to dry them. He laughs and puts out his hand.

NICHOLAS
Good-night, Mr. Driver.

Zbigniew shakes hands with Nicholas. He looks concerned. Nicholas starts walking away down the sidewalk. Zbigniew says after him:

ZBIGNIEW
Are you all right?

Nicholas says back over his shoulder without stopping:

NICHOLAS
Not really.

Zbigniew watches Nicholas continue down the block. Finally, he gets into his station wagon.

MONTAGE:

Nicholas sits alone next to a glowing, stainless steel refrigerator in an ultra-minimalist kitchen with white, marble counter-tops and a glass floor. He is eating a frozen TV-dinner of beef stroganoff with macaroni and cheese.

Zbigniew sits alone next to an old refrigerator with magnets all over it (from the Met and the MOMA and BAM) in a small kitchenette with a fire-escape outside the window. He is eating the same frozen TV-dinner of beef stroganoff with macaroni and cheese.

INT. KREMENTZ APARTMENT. DAY

A penthouse over Central Park. The walls are filled with pop art. Nicholas sits perched on the edge of a small armchair, waiting. A house-keeper in a black uniform dusts a white piano in the next room. Mrs. Krementz enters.

MRS. KREMENTZ
Good morning, Mr. Cadazio.

NICHOLAS
Good morning, Mrs. Krementz.

MRS. KREMENTZ
It's through here.

Nicholas follows Mrs. Krementz down a corridor lined with cubism. She asks as they walk:

MRS. KREMENTZ
Have you seen them before?

NICHOLAS
I saw them when he painted them.

MRS. KREMENTZ
Did you? You knew him then?

NICHOLAS
I was his dealer. He fired me, in fact.

MRS. KREMENTZ
People aren't very interested in Rosenthaler anymore. I suppose you know that.

They cross into a dim, empty, windowless gallery. Mrs. Krementz closes the door behind them.

MRS. KREMENTZ
Let me turn these on.

Mrs. Krementz presses a button. The lights fade up, revealing six, large paintings which continue the theme of hurricane and barbed-wire while incorporating shattering glass and a variety of explosions. Nicholas says in a hushed voice:

NICHOLAS
The Rosenthaler Suite. Which is which?

MRS. KREMENTZ
Well, the only ones I can ever remember are:

(pointing to one)
Kristallnacht, over here --
(pointing to another)
-- and the purple one's Nagasaki. The rest kind of all look the same to me.

NICHOLAS
(respectfully)
Perhaps that's the point.

Nicholas moves to the center of the room. Mrs. Krementz waits next to the door, watching as Nicholas slowly pivots from one painting to the next. He asks quietly:

NICHOLAS

How long were you married?

MRS. KREMENTZ

Fifty-two years.

NICHOLAS

As long as that? My goodness. Any children?

MRS. KREMENTZ

No.

NICHOLAS

Just art.

MRS. KREMENTZ

Yes -- and many good friends.

NICHOLAS

(intrigued)

Really? Is that so? I'm very interested in that. I mean, that subject matter. Who were they?

MRS. KREMENTZ

(hesitates)

Who were who?

NICHOLAS

Your friends. Where'd you -- get them? How were they accumulated?

MRS. KREMENTZ

(pause)

That's hard to answer.

NICHOLAS

(nods)

Yes, naturally. It would be. It's not so cut-and-dried as all that, is it? It's a dumb question, in a sense.

MRS. KREMENTZ

(confused)

Our friends were all -- for us, that was our family, you see.

NICHOLAS
 (somewhat moved)
 Very well put. Can I ask you -- you may
 not know the answer: did he like me?

MRS. KREMENTZ
 (puzzled)
 Who?

NICHOLAS
 Krementz. Your husband.

MRS. KREMENTZ
 (pause)
 He didn't know you well, did he?

NICHOLAS
 I suppose not. A few weeks.

MRS. KREMENTZ
 During which he was on life support.

NICHOLAS
 (sadly)
 That's true -- but still charming, under
 the circumstances.

Nicholas takes a little slip of paper out of his pocket and
 hands it to Mrs. Krementz.

NICHOLAS
 Is this amount appropriate?

Mrs. Krementz studies the slip of paper. She says quietly:

MRS. KREMENTZ
 That's fine.

INSERT:

A notary's stamp presses onto the signed and counter-signed
 Chinese delivery menu.

INT. CADAZIO GALLERY. DAY

A large, white room with polished cement floors. Letters
 across the top of a wall read "Nicholas Cadazio Gallery". The
 paintings of the Rosenthaler Suite lean against the walls in
 crates with the fronts lifted away. Nicholas and Lucinda sit
 at a small table in the center of the space next to a notary
 who shuffles through documents, making notations.

Natalie watches from a doorway at the bottom of a staircase,
 uneasy. Lucinda says bluntly:

LUCINDA
You've got ten days.

NICHOLAS
(carefree)
I'm not worried.

NATALIE
(from across the room)
I am.

NICHOLAS
(yelling)
Bite your tongue, girl! You don't even
know what the devil we're talking about.

NATALIE
Yes, I do. The bet. You're going to lose,
and I'm going to be out of a job.

Pause. Nicholas looks blankly from Natalie to Lucinda.

LUCINDA
I told her.

NICHOLAS
It was confidential.

LUCINDA
Not to me.

NICHOLAS
(yelling again)
Well, thanks for the vote of confidence,
but, as a matter of fact, I already know
who my guy is -- and I know where to find
him.

INSERT:

A small notice clipped from the bottom corner of a newspaper.
It reads "Ronnie Mayer to Handle Important Carnegie Hill
Estate Sale". The word "Ronnie" has been circled with stars
around it in red ink.

INT. CAR SERVICE SEDAN. DAY

A black Mercedes. The driver wears a suit. He looks very
serious. He is Felipe. Nicholas rides silently in the back
seat with the clipping in his hand. He looks anxious.
Silence.

Nicholas looks up suddenly. He says oddly -- catching even
himself off-guard:

NICHOLAS
How you doing, Felipe? Just making
conversation.

Felipe hesitates. He starts to say something, then stops.

FELIPE
Excuse me, sir?

NICHOLAS
What's new? You married? Any kids? Where
you from? Just making conversation.

Felipe looks uneasy. He glances at Nicholas repeatedly in the
rear-view mirror.

NICHOLAS
You've been driving me for seven years,
you know that?

FELIPE
Me?

NICHOLAS
Yes, you. Is somebody else in the car?

Felipe swallows nervously. Nicholas asks, puzzled:

NICHOLAS
You don't want to answer?

FELIPE
Excuse me, sir.

NICHOLAS
Why do you keep saying, "Excuse me, sir"?

Felipe stares ahead uncomfortably. Nicholas sounds
frustrated:

NICHOLAS
What's wrong? I'm trying to make a
conversation.

FELIPE
I don't know how to answer. You don't
normally say anything to me.

NICHOLAS
(wounded)
That's just not true. You're trying to
make me feel bad. Never mind. Forget it.

Nicholas sighs deeply -- then something occurs to him. He pats his breast pocket. He digs into his side pockets. He pulls the Mr. Driver business card out of his inside pocket and snaps:

NICHOLAS
Let me out. I'm going to walk.

FELIPE
(uncertain)
To 111th street?

NICHOLAS
(angrily)
Yes, to 111th street, dammit.

CUT TO:

Nicholas sitting in the back seat of Zbigniew's station wagon while classical music softly plays.

ZBIGNIEW
Tchaikovsky. Piano Trio in A-major. How's the volume?

NICHOLAS
Fine.

EXT. SIDEWALK. DAY

An enormous, limestone mansion. Zbigniew's station wagon slows to a stop across the street and parallel-parks.

INT. TOWN HOUSE. DAY

A wood-panelled room with sheets over the furniture and boxes everywhere. A man lying on his back with a magnifying glass in his hand studies the underside of a table. Two men in jumpsuits carry an enormous landscape through the room. A woman on a stepladder takes a photograph of a chandelier.

Nicholas waits among them with the present from Natalie in his hands. The birthday card has been removed. He crouches down and looks under the table. The man on his back turns to Nicholas. Nicholas stands back up. He says vaguely to the woman on the stepladder:

NICHOLAS
He might still be mad at me because I bought his Rosenthaler.

The woman hesitates. She comes down from the stepladder.

WOMAN

I'll just remind him you're waiting.

The woman walks out of the room. Nicholas crosses over to a painting of a vase. He is rubbing the canvas with his finger as Ronnie (the bald man now in a different Nehru jacket) enters the room. Nicholas tucks his hand away and smiles. He points at the table.

NICHOLAS

I don't actually understand these types of antiquities but something tells me this is probably very beautiful.

Ronnie stands across the room in silence, staring. Nicholas jerks his thumb at the painting of the vase.

NICHOLAS

You think that's a real Yastrimsky?

RONNIE

(coolly)

I'm selling it as a real Yastrimsky.

Nicholas thrusts out the present in front of him and says warmly as he crosses over to Ronnie:

NICHOLAS

For you, my dear.

Ronnie reluctantly takes the present, frowning.

RONNIE

What's this?

NICHOLAS

I don't actually know. It's a present. Open it. I'm apologizing for buying your Rosenthaler.

Nicholas hugs Ronnie. Ronnie stands like a statue, stunned.

RONNIE

What'd you just do?

NICHOLAS

I hugged you, and I apologized.

RONNIE

(steely)

Don't ever hug me again, and don't apologize --

The man under the table lowers his magnifying glass. He looks uneasy. Ronnie says icily:

RONNIE
-- just sell it back to me.

NICHOLAS
I can't do that, but I wanted to try to patch this up, if I can. Let me explain:

RONNIE
(baffled)
Patch what?

NICHOLAS
We were partners, weren't we? Not so very long ago, am I right? Nick and Ronnie.

RONNIE
(angrily)
Nick and Ronnie? You sued me!

NICHOLAS
Well, you sued me back. That was business. Let me explain:

RONNIE
He painted it for me, signed it to me, and wanted me to have it.

NICHOLAS
I understand, but, with all due respect, if you were so attached to that picture, then you shouldn't have sold it in the first place, whenever that was.

RONNIE
Twenty-three years ago. We're not going to patch this up, because we aren't friends, and we never were.

NICHOLAS
(curious)
No?

RONNIE
No, and this present --

Ronnie thrusts the present back out at Nicholas. Nicholas does not take it.

NICHOLAS
That's for you, my dear.

RONNIE
-- I refuse to accept.

NICHOLAS
(long pause)
Would you be friends with me if I sold
you back your Rosenthaler?

RONNIE
(carefully)
No, but I would respect that decision.

NICHOLAS
How about if I gave it to you for free?

RONNIE
(confused)
What? What's happening? Are you actually
going to do that?

NICHOLAS
I don't think so. It's a small piece, but
I paid double the high --

RONNIE
(agitated)
No. Still no.

Pause. Nicholas shrugs.

NICHOLAS
Well, in that case there's not much point
in even --

Ronnie throws the present out the window. Nicholas looks
horrified. The box bounces on the sidewalk across the street.
Zbigniew, standing next to his station wagon, picks it up.
One corner is somewhat smashed. He shakes the box again
slightly, listening. He looks up to Nicholas and Ronnie in
the window. Nicholas says quietly:

NICHOLAS
That was probably fragile. I'm barking up
the wrong tree. You're not the guy.

RONNIE
What the fuck are you talking about?

NICHOLAS
You're an even bigger asshole than people
think I am.

RONNIE

Get out.

CUT TO:

Nicholas sitting in the back seat of Zbigniew's station wagon again. Zbigniew looks concerned. He hands Nicholas the somewhat smashed present. Nicholas stares at it. He looks depressed.

The car stops at a traffic light. Another car honks. Zbigniew looks out to his left and brightens. He lowers his window. A car service driver in the next lane is leaning across the front seat of his car, laughing and speaking Spanish. Zbigniew yells back at him in Spanish, also laughing. The other driver says something a bit more melancholy in Spanish. Zbigniew nods, says something else, and they both laugh hysterically. Nicholas studies them, fascinated.

The light changes. Zbigniew waves to the other driver, and they both drive away. Nicholas says eagerly:

NICHOLAS

Friend of yours?

ZBIGNIEW

Hm? What? No, I guess not. I just sometimes talk to that guy at traffic lights.

NICHOLAS

(in disbelief)

No. Truly?

Zbigniew shrugs. He nods. Nicholas leans forward against the back of the front seat and drapes his arms over it.

NICHOLAS

In Spanish?

ZBIGNIEW

Well, I'm pretty good at languages, you know.

NICHOLAS

So fluid. So effortless. What were you talking about?

ZBIGNIEW

Traffic and a baseball game, if I understood him correctly. It might've been football.

NICHOLAS

Wow. I admire that. Bravo.

Silence. Nicholas remains poised over the front seat. He says simply:

NICHOLAS

I'm not well-liked.

ZBIGNIEW

(hesitates)

You're not?

NICHOLAS

No. I have no friends. Literally, not one single friend -- but I need one, and I need one fast.

ZBIGNIEW

(intrigued)

Why's that?

NICHOLAS

(long pause)

Because I'm lonely.

ZBIGNIEW

(sincerely)

Who isn't?

NICHOLAS

(surprised)

You! People like you! You're very good with them. You make them laugh! I've noticed this.

ZBIGNIEW

(reluctantly)

I don't know. I think you've got the wrong idea. I was just making small-talk. That's easy.

NICHOLAS

(curious)

Is it? Not to me. What's the trick?

ZBIGNIEW

(pause)

To making small-talk?

NICHOLAS

(nodding)

To making friends.

ZBIGNIEW

Well, I wouldn't know. That's what I'm saying. I don't have any friends, either.

NICHOLAS

Nonsense. Of course, you do. I've seen it.

Silence. Nicholas says urgently:

NICHOLAS

Teach me, Mr. Driver. I'll pay you.

ZBIGNIEW

(confused)

You're already paying me. This is a time-job.

NICHOLAS

For the lessons.

ZBIGNIEW

What lessons?

NICHOLAS

The friendship lessons.

ZBIGNIEW

(laughing uneasily)

I don't feel comfortable doing that. As I just told you, I don't have any friends, myself. I wouldn't know where to --

NICHOLAS

The talking-to-people lessons then.

ZBIGNIEW

(pause)

Are you being serious?

NICHOLAS

(sharply)

Yes, I'm being serious. This is a very pressing and important matter to me. I'm being deadly, brutally serious.

Silence. Zbigniew turns off the music. He shrugs. He flips on his turn signal.

INT. COFFEE SHOP. DAY

Nicholas and Zbigniew sit side-by-side at a store-front lunch-counter. Outside, a crew next to a utility truck works behind a barricade, demolishing the sidewalk.

ZBIGNIEW

Well, I suppose, if we're really going to do this, let's just start cold, I guess. We'll see what level you're currently at, OK?

NICHOLAS

(gladly)
Wonderful.

ZBIGNIEW

We've never met. We're strangers. Let's strike up a conversation.

NICHOLAS

I understand. Very good. Give me a signal when to begin.

ZBIGNIEW

Now.

A waitress approaches with a note-pad in her hand. She wears a name tag that says "Loreen". Zbigniew orders politely:

ZBIGNIEW

Just a coffee, please.

NICHOLAS

(interrupting)
Two -- and doughnuts all around.

Zbigniew looks slightly puzzled. Nicholas stands up and raises his voice to address the other customers.

NICHOLAS

These are on me everybody! Your money's no good here!

Three old, Puerto Rican men further down the counter and an Asian woman with a little boy in a booth all look up, startled. The waitress asks evenly:

WAITRESS

How many doughnuts all around?

NICHOLAS

For everybody.
(to the room:)
Who wants doughnuts?

The three men murmur to each other, looking away. The little boy stares. No one responds directly.

NICHOLAS
Anybody? Nobody?

ZBIGNIEW
(to the waitress)
I'll have one, I guess.

The waitress walks away. Nicholas looks unsure.

NICHOLAS
People don't eat doughnuts anymore these days, do they?

ZBIGNIEW
Let's start over.

NICHOLAS
(disappointed)
I'm killed already, aren't it? I'm dead already before we even got going. Oh, screw it. I'm in big trouble.

ZBIGNIEW
Calm down. It's OK. It's just -- you can't pay people to be your friends, even with doughnuts. It transforms the relationship into a completely different definition. You're coming on too strong. Let's start with just you and me striking up a conversation.

NICHOLAS
OK. Give me a signal when to begin again.

ZBIGNIEW
Hang on.

The waitress has returned with the coffee and doughnuts. She sets them down.

ZBIGNIEW
How long have these characters been working on that sidewalk?

WAITRESS
Two weeks.

ZBIGNIEW
Every day?

WAITRESS
Every day.

ZBIGNIEW
With the jack-hammer?

WAITRESS
And the bull-dozer.

ZBIGNIEW
This is Burger World Number twenty-three!
One of the landmarks of the city!

WAITRESS
(laughing)
It's supposed to be.

ZBIGNIEW
I might just have to fill up that hole
myself, Loreen.

WAITRESS
I'll help you. You want sugar?

ZBIGNIEW
Yes, please.

The waitress sets down a jar of sugar and walks away.
Zbigniew whispers, aside:

ZBIGNIEW
See, it's better just to bullshit like
that. It sends a message: I'm not crazy.
Don't be scared of me. I'm just friendly.

NICHOLAS
(nodding)
Right. I get it. Watch this.

Nicholas flags down the waitress as she goes by again.

NICHOLAS
Can I add something to that, Loreen? As a
citizen and a customer. It seems to me
the city has a responsibility to --
(suddenly)
You know what? I'm going to just go talk
to those assholes myself.

Nicholas jumps to his feet and charges out the door. Zbigniew
and the waitress look to each other, slightly alarmed.

EXT. SIDEWALK. DAY

Nicholas yells at the jack-hammer operator, who looks up at
him crookedly while continuing to operate his machine.
Nicholas climbs partly down into the hole in the sidewalk,

still yelling, as some of the other workers look up from their own power-tools. A foreman appears and calmly pushes Nicholas up out of the hole and back behind the barricade.

Nicholas keeps yelling, pointing to the waitress standing in the doorway next to Zbigniew. The waitress looks horrified. Zbigniew grimaces. He goes over to Nicholas, interrupting, and jerks him away from the construction site.

CUT TO:

Zbigniew holding Nicholas by the upper arm, pulling him quickly down the sidewalk. Nicholas fumes:

NICHOLAS
He was out of line.

ZBIGNIEW
I think they were just doing their job.

NICHOLAS
(taking exception)
Well, you're the one who complained! And Loreen.

ZBIGNIEW
That was supposed to be for your benefit.

Nicholas contemplates this as they walk. He nods slowly. He grasps it:

NICHOLAS
You mean I was trying to be a hero, but I came off like a nut.

ZBIGNIEW
Very much so.

NICHOLAS
It's so delicate. The nuances.
(pause)
I think I should focus on people I already know.

ZBIGNIEW
That sounds reasonable.

INSERT:

A typed document. It reads "Possible Friends" across the top. There are ten names listed below.

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE. DAY

Zbigniew and Nicholas consult discreetly in a waiting room.

ZBIGNIEW
Try not to force it.

NICHOLAS
(pause)
In what sense?

ZBIGNIEW
Let him come to you.

NICHOLAS
I don't understand what that means.

Zbigniew hesitates. A secretary enters the waiting room.

SECRETARY
Mr. Cadazio?

Nicholas stands up briskly. Zbigniew gives him a thumbs-up.

CUT TO:

A tall man in a three-piece suit. He says from one side of a conference table to Nicholas on the other:

LAWYER
I'm not sure how to respond. Not in my opinion. You're certainly a valued client. By the way, I have some news on the sexual harassment case. She says she'll settle for thirty thousand.

NICHOLAS
(pause)
Hold out. She'll go lower.

CUT TO:

A bearded man holding a notebook in his lap. He says from his chair next to Nicholas lying on a leather couch:

PSYCHIATRIST
The answer is no, for obvious reasons, but I think it might be useful for us to explore why you're asking that question.

NICHOLAS

(pause)

Skip it. It's too complicated.

CUT TO:

A small man with reading glasses propped up on top his head. He says from behind a desk piled with papers:

ACCOUNTANT

I just do your taxes, Mr. Cadazio.

Nicholas nods sadly.

CUT TO:

Nicholas and Zbigniew standing on a street-corner studying the list of possible friends. Half of the names have been crossed out.

ZBIGNIEW

Do you know anybody who isn't on your payroll?

NICHOLAS

I haven't paid most of these people in months.

ZBIGNIEW

I understand, but that doesn't necessarily help.

MONTAGE:

Zbigniew accompanies Nicholas as he negotiates with other professionals in their work-places: his chiropractor, who listens, perplexed, while adjusting Nicholas' back; his travel agent, who listens, confused, while typing up an itinerary; his tennis coach, his dentist, and his barber -- who listens while shaving him but does not seem to understand.

INT. AUCTION HOUSE. DAY

A red, black, and yellow painting that looks like smoke, fire, and gravel swirled together is being placed on the block. Nicholas and Lucinda sit in the front row with paddles in their hands. Nicholas now has a very short hair-cut. He raises his paddle. An auctioneer calls out:

AUCTIONEER

Seven thousand.

Lucinda says quietly without looking at Nicholas:

LUCINDA
You've got six days.

NICHOLAS
I'm aware of that.

LUCINDA
Any progress?

NICHOLAS
Absolutely.

LUCINDA
You look tense.

NICHOLAS
I am tense -- by choice. That's my metabolism.

LUCINDA
How's Rosenthaler?

NICHOLAS
In a steady decline, as far as I can gather.

LUCINDA
Bid.

Nicholas raises his paddle again. The auctioneer calls out:

AUCTIONEER
Seventy-five hundred.

INT. NICHOLAS' OFFICE. DAY

Upstairs at the Cadazio Gallery. Nicholas and Natalie sit on opposing sides of a wide desk. Natalie types rapidly on her lap-top, periodically referring to a stack of invoices beside it. Nicholas is studying his address book. He closes it. He takes a sip from a little cup of espresso. He says suddenly:

NICHOLAS
Do you know any friends of mine?

Natalie answers without looking up or pausing her typing:

NATALIE
You don't have any.

NICHOLAS
(hesitates)
I know, but was there ever somebody you though ought to be my friend?

NATALIE

No.

NICHOLAS

(pause)

Don't want to at least think about it for a minute?

NATALIE

No.

Nicholas sighs. He flips through an art magazine and sets it aside. He checks his Blackberry. Pause.

NICHOLAS

How long have you been a gay woman?

Natalie stops typing and looks up. She frowns. She asks, irritated:

NATALIE

What does that have to do with anything?

NICHOLAS

(shrugs)

Nothing. I'm just making conversation. Practicing, I mean.

Natalie stares at Nicholas coolly. She goes back to her typing. Nicholas stirs his espresso. He thinks of something else:

NATALIE

How are things going between you and that fantastic, black girl?

NATALIE

(looking up angrily)

That's none of your business.

NICHOLAS

(gently)

Sorry.

NATALIE

Marianne.

NICHOLAS

(excited)

That's the one!

NATALIE

We broke up. She dumped me, anyway. We're just friends now.

NICHOLAS

Dammit. I feel for you. She was utterly stunning. Have you ever taken any speech therapy? It might help with your stutter.

NATALIE

(snapping)

Are you kidding? That's just -- you know what? I'm not going to discuss this with you. It really is none of your business. I have a slight stammer.

NICHOLAS

(agreeably)

Very slight. Hardly noticeable.

Natalie goes back to her typing. Nicholas watches her for a minute. He says glumly:

NICHOLAS

The last girl that had your job filed a sexual harassment on me.

Natalie nods. She says quietly, without looking up or pausing her typing:

NATALIE

We're going to lose, aren't we?

NICHOLAS

(pause)

We might.

EXT. SIDEWALK. DAY

Zbigniew is putting the finishing touches on a display of his paintings leaning in rows against the wall of a building next door to the Museum of Modern Art. Other vendors to the left and right sell African masks and sculptures of animals. Zbigniew sits down in a folding chair.

Pedestrians walk by briskly. Some look briefly at the pictures briefly without slowing down. Finally, a middle-aged woman wearing a T-shirt with a bottle of Pepsi on it stops and stares at one of the paintings. Zbigniew smiles.

ZBIGNIEW

Hello!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

(pause)

This reminds me of a carpet I used to have.

ZBIGNIEW
(hesitates)
Really? That's a coincidence.

The woman turns and walks away. Zbigniew folds his hands in his lap and waits. No one else stops.

INT. NICHOLAS' BEDROOM. NIGHT

Late that night. Nicholas lies in bed awake. A digital clock blinks three a.m. He drinks a sip of water. He stares at the ceiling. He suddenly bolts upright.

NICHOLAS
You son of a bitch. Of course!

Nicholas turns on the lights, which seem to be mounted under the bed and inside the walls. There is an electric look in his eyes. He dashes out the door, hurries down a glass-floored corridor, and goes into a room filled with art books. He scans the shelves. He spots a book titled: P.S. 246 Mustangs, 1972. He pulls it down.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET. DAY

The next morning. Nicholas sits in the front seat of the station wagon, next to Zbigniew, parked across the street from a clapboard house with a wide lawn. They are both crouched low in their seats, spying. Zbigniew asks quietly without taking his eyes off the house:

ZBIGNIEW
When was the last time you spoke?

NICHOLAS
I would say about thirty-five years ago?
Give or take. Sixth grade. We were close.

ZBIGNIEW
You think he'll be comfortable with this?
It might freak him out.

NICHOLAS
Well, he was a very kind, sweet person in those days, and he was officially considered my best friend, in so many words -- so I think my chances are pretty good, actually.

The front door opens. A man wearing black horn-rimmed glasses, a striped polo shirt, and a baseball cap comes out and crosses the lawn toward a mini-van in the driveway. He walks with his hands in his pockets, whistling. He is BRADLEY. Nicholas and Zbigniew duck lower in their seats.

NICHOLAS

Holy shit. That's him. He hasn't changed a bit. Take a look.

Nicholas holds up his yearbook and shows Zbigniew a page. Across the top it reads "Sixth Grade". Nicholas points to a photograph. Not only does the man look very similar to the boy, but he is wearing an almost identical shirt and glasses. Underneath the picture it says "Bradley Bale".

They watch as Bradley pauses under a tree, reaches up to a low branch, and lifts a white cat gently down to the ground. The cat curls around his ankle. He pets it and gets into the mini-van.

NICHOLAS

He's still kind. Did you see that?

Zbigniew nods.

CUT TO:

Nicholas and Zbigniew following the mini-van down the street, around the corner, and into the parking lot of a super-market. They watch Bradley go into the store. Nicholas takes a deep breath. He says finally:

NICHOLAS

I'm going in.

ZBIGNIEW

(resigned)

Good luck.

INT. SUPER-MARKET. DAY

Bradley rolls his cart up the cookies and crackers aisle. Nicholas accelerates and pulls up directly alongside him. Bradley looks to Nicholas. Nicholas smiles. Bradley looks ahead again. They continue to roll their carts up the aisle alongside each other in silence.

Bradley looks back to Nicholas. Nicholas smiles again. An odd look comes over Bradley's face -- a shadow and a flicker. He begins to slow down. They stare at each other, Nicholas smiling increasingly broadly, until they finally come to a stop among cereal boxes and nutrition bars. Long pause. Bradley says grimly:

BRADLEY

I always swore to myself I would hit you in the face if I ever saw you again, but I guess I just don't have the guts.

Nicholas' smile freezes on his face. He stammers:

NICHOLAS

Or maybe you're just that nice of a guy!
You always were.

Bradley's eyes narrow. He is shaking. Nicholas blurts out:

NICHOLAS

Bradley, it's Nick! Nick Cadazio!

BRADLEY

(gritting his teeth)
I know who you are.

NICHOLAS

(hesitates)
What'd I do?

BRADLEY

(to himself)
What'd he do? He's asking what'd he do.
(to Nicholas)
Nothing -- other than ruin my life for
four years.

NICHOLAS

(pause)
No. I did? Are you sure? Well, you're
doing fine now, anyway. I can see that!

EXT. PARKING LOT. DAY

Zbigniew watches from the station wagon as Nicholas and Bradley roll their shopping carts now filled with sacks of groceries across the parking lot to Bradley's mini-van. They exchange words curtly as Bradley pops open the hatch-back, loads-in the groceries, gets into the mini-van, and slams the door. Nicholas stands sadly with his cart as Bradley backs out of his space, puts the mini-van into gear, and starts off. Zbigniew watches sympathetically from the station wagon. From his point-of-view we watch as:

Suddenly, the mini-van's tires screech. The parking brake crunches on. The front door swings open, Bradley steps down from the driver's seat, strides over to Nicholas, and belts him in the face. Nicholas staggers, shoving his cart into a Cadillac and knocking over his sack of groceries, which splits open on the pavement. An alarm goes off and the Cadillac's headlights start blinking. Bradley immediately strides back to his mini-van and drives off.

Zbigniew's eyes widen. He jumps out of the station wagon.

CUT TO:

Nicholas leaning against the ringing, blinking Cadillac, in a daze. Zbigniew runs over to him and asks breathlessly:

ZBIGNIEW
What happened?

NICHOLAS
Nothing.

ZBIGNIEW
Are you all right?

NICHOLAS
Sure. He doesn't have much of a punch.

Zbigniew picks up the strewn groceries off the cement. They appear to have been chosen randomly: three cartons of strawberry ice cream, a large package of paper towels, two kinds of laundry detergent, assorted candies. Nicholas dusts himself off. An old man unwraps a box of cigarettes and watches them warily as he blinks his keys to turn of the alarm and gets into his Cadillac.

Nicholas sighs. He looks away and stares off across the parking lot. Zbigniew stands beside him, worried. Silence.

NICHOLAS
Where did I go wrong?

ZBIGNIEW
That wasn't your fault.

NICHOLAS
I guess he always hated me.

ZBIGNIEW
I guess so.

NICHOLAS
(miserably)
What'd I do to him? I can't even remember. A few practical jokes? For fun.
(suddenly)
I stole his girlfriend. I regret that.
(thinking back)
I guess I was a bully, in those days -- and a bit of a tattletale. I drew a naked picture of his mother on the chalkboard. I put a fire-cracker in his birthday cake. I stole his inhaler. He's asthmatic. It's all flooding back to me. I was a monster.

ZBIGNIEW

You were twelve. Forget about that jerk.

NICHOLAS

(long pause)

You would've won him over.

Zbigniew laughs sharply, frowning. He rips open a bag of gourmet jellybeans. They spill all over the ground. A few remain in the tattered package. Nicholas looks to Zbigniew. He hesitates. Zbigniew says bitterly:

ZBIGNIEW

It's not easy for anybody. We're all alone.

NICHOLAS

(pause)

You're lonely?

ZBIGNIEW

Of course.

NICHOLAS

Even you?

ZBIGNIEW

(agitated)

Of course. I told you at the beginning. Here. Eat these. Try these.

Zbigniew hands Nicholas some jellybeans and tries various ones himself as they stand at the distant edge of the vast parking lot.

ZBIGNIEW

No more lessons today. We're just going to do this. Watermelon. Coconut. Licorice. Try the banana.

Nicholas tries a yellow one. They stand together eating the jellybeans in silence.

MONTAGE:

Nicholas paces, deep in thought, dressed in a silk bathrobe, back and forth through his large, futuristic, stainless steel and glass-floored living room.

Zbigniew paces, deep in thought, dressed in boxer shorts and a T-shirt with a picture of Leonard Bernstein on it, back and forth among the careful stacks of books and CD's in his small, cramped, but neatly organized living room.

INT. CADAZIO GALLERY. DAY

The next morning. Nicholas sits, unshaven, in the middle of the large space in a rolling desk chair, still deep in thought, sliding back and forth among the paintings of the Rosenthaler Suite. The canvases are still partly crated, leaning against the walls. A few small, new ones have appeared. Natalie comes in through the front door and sees him. She says from across the room:

NATALIE

This is a bad sign, isn't it?

Nicholas snaps out of it and looks to Natalie. He shrugs. He sighs. He keeps rolling. He pauses. He looks at one of the paintings. He slowly rolls toward it, staring. Natalie watches him curiously.

CUT TO:

Nicholas jumping into the station wagon next to Zbigniew. He seems energized and determined like never before. He says immediately:

NICHOLAS

I've got the guy.

ZBIGNIEW

(excited)

Really? Who is he?

NICHOLAS

It was right in front of me. It all ties together. I wonder if he's still on Broome street? Take us to Broome street, please.

ZBIGNIEW

Got it.

Zbigniew throws the station wagon into gear and merges with the downtown traffic. Nicholas says suddenly:

NICHOLAS

What should I call you, by the way?

ZBIGNIEW

(hesitates)

What do you mean?

NICHOLAS

I mean your actual name.

ZBIGNIEW
 (slightly irritated)
 You're asking me that now? You don't want
 to just call me Mr. Driver anymore?

NICHOLAS
 (stiffening)
 Well, no. I thought it might be more
 personal this way.

ZBIGNIEW
 Zbigniew Maszkiowitz.

NICHOLAS
 (instantly)
 You're joking. That's impossible.

ZBIGNIEW
 (resigned)
 Just call me Mr. Driver.

NICHOLAS
 (encouraging)
 No, teach me the name. Repeat it.

EXT. SIDEWALK. DAY

Nicholas and Zbigniew wait at the door of a converted
 factory. Nicholas looks up toward the roof. He shrugs.

NICHOLAS
 I'll buzz again.

Nicholas presses a button next to the door. A gravelly voice
 answers over the intercom:

VOICE
 Who's that?

NICHOLAS
 (hesitates)
 It's me, my dear.

Silence. Nicholas looks to Zbigniew. The voice comes back:

VOICE
 Nick?

NICHOLAS
 Yes, my dear.

The buzzer buzzes. Nicholas looks surprised and pleased. He
 shoves the door open.

INT. LOFT BUILDING. DAY

Nicholas and Zbigniew ride up in a freight elevator with graffiti on the walls and a steel cage ceiling.

NICHOLAS

I think he's in a good mood. He can be volatile, at times. In fact, violent.

ZBIGNIEW

(slightly concerned)

Really?

NICHOLAS

Oh, yes. At least, he used to be. Of course, that was much more common in those days. It was much more socially acceptable for a macho-type of artist or writer to hit people with chairs or walk around with a black eye and that sort of thing. In fact, that was -- just now, on the intercom -- that was the first time we've spoken since he tried to strangle me at the Winter Gala so many years ago. That one certainly made the papers.

The car stops and the door is thrown upwards revealing a very large, seventy-five year-old man standing in front of them. He wears a lavender kimono, silk bedroom slippers, and has a silver beard. He looks like a very stylish line-backer. His hands are covered with black ink, and he holds a tall glass of red wine. He is MOSES.

Nicholas immediately open his arms out wide, smiling crazily. He starts to come out of the elevator, but Moses holds up his hand for him to stop. Pause. Nicholas motions to Zbigniew.

NICHOLAS

Moses, I want to introduce you to my friend Zbigniew Maskowitz. He's an aspiring artist, and --

MOSES

Who told you?

NICHOLAS

(pause)

Told me what, my dear?

MOSES

You've been buying my shit for peanuts all over town. You think I don't follow your train of thought? I'll say it again. Who told you?

NICHOLAS

I remember this paranoia. God knows what goes on in that gorgeous brain of yours. I miss you.

MOSES

Let me rephrase it.

Moses drinks half his glass of wine and pours the rest onto the floor. Nicholas warns Zbigniew under his breath:

NICHOLAS

He's going to throw it at me.

Moses throws the empty glass as hard as is he can at Nicholas. Nicholas ducks. The glass shatters against the back wall of the elevator with a pop. Nicholas erupts:

NICHOLAS

I saw you sitting in a goddamn wheelchair with a tube in your arm outside the chemo ward at Mt. Sycamore! I'm not a fucking secret agent. What crime have I committed? I was worried about you.

MOSES

(pause)

You might've said hello.

NICHOLAS

I was respecting your privacy.

MOSES

What were you doing there?

NICHOLAS

(shrugs)

I had to see a collector. He was on his way out, too. In fact, they buried him last week.

MOSES

Krementz.

NICHOLAS

(sadly)

Yes. Charming fellow.

Pause. Moses says to Zbigniew flatly:

MOSES

Polish?

ZBIGNIEW

Yes, sir.

MOSES

Jew?

ZBIGNIEW

(hesitates)

No, sir.

Moses nods. He turns away and wanders into the next room. Nicholas and Zbigniew hesitate. They come out of the elevator and follow Moses through a doorway, into a studio the size of warehouse with high windows and wide plank floors spackled with years of cadmium and sienna and ochre and ultramarine. There are paints and easels and bottles of turpentine and several gigantic canvases in progress around the room. Nicholas marvels:

NICHOLAS

Is this the new work? Oh, my goodness. It's muscular. It's ferocious. How are you pricing these?

Moses grunts. He sets back to work on a sort of black supernova with lime-green rays of lightning shooting out of it. Nicholas and Zbigniew watch him work for a minute. Zbigniew asks politely:

ZBIGNIEW

How long does it take to paint one of these, Mr. Rosenthaler?

Moses looks at Zbigniew. Pause. He steps back away from his canvas and looks at it. He rubs his forehead, leaving a smudge of black ink over his eye.

MOSES

Well, I've been working on this one for seventeen years, if you can believe that -- but just this lower left corner. The rest's been done since 1997.

ZBIGNIEW

Wow.

MOSES

I'm trying to get it like these shapes over here, but it's hard to get them like that. They can't have any edges.

Moses motions around the painting with a putty knife. Zbigniew studies the edges or lack of them for a moment.

ZBIGNIEW
What's it called?

MOSES
Avalanche.

Zbigniew nods respectfully. Moses turns away again and wanders into the next room. Nicholas motions for Zbigniew to wait, then follow Moses through the doorway, into a kitchen overlooking an air-shaft. There are bottles of pills and various medical instruments organized across the counter-top. Moses sits at a little formica-topped table and starts taking his blood pressure. Nicholas sits across from him.

NICHOLAS
Why was I fired, Moses? It was
unspeakable. I was devastated.

MOSES
I fired you because you stopped
representing me.

NICHOLAS
(hesitates)
Well, nobody was buying any Rosenthalers.

Moses grins. He nods slowly and says with a slight laugh as the pump hisses:

MOSES
That's true. Fuck it, I guess.

NICHOLAS
I meant what I said. I miss you.

MOSES
(pause)
Who cares?

Moses unstraps the velcro from his arm and takes a syringe out of a zippered bag. Nicholas says gently as he watches Moses prepare an injection:

NICHOLAS
We're not friends, I understand -- but
we're former friends, right? Who had a
falling out, right?

MOSES
No. We had a falling out because you
screwed me as my representative -- but we
weren't friends. That was never the
situation.

NICHOLAS
No?

MOSES
Never.

NICHOLAS
(pained)
Why not?

Moses shoots himself up with something. He shrugs.

MOSES
Because you don't know how to do that.
You're not that type of cat.

NICHOLAS
I'm not, am I?

MOSES
No.

NICHOLAS
That's hard for me to accept. I'm kind of
trying to deal with a moment in my life
when I realize -- I'm all alone.

Moses stands up and takes a pill. He pours three glasses of wine in plastic cups and hands one Nicholas. Nicholas follows him back into the studio. Moses hands one of the other cups to Zbigniew and says finally:

MOSES
Listen, who cares what I think, because
everybody knows I'm crazy -- but I'll
tell you what other people say about you,
if you're interested. This might put it
in perspective.

NICHOLAS
OK. What do they say?

MOSES
They say you're a sleazy hustler, a cold-
blooded snake, and borderline crook.

NICHOLAS
(pause)
According to your information.

MOSES
That's right.

NICHOLAS

And what's your opinion about that?

MOSES

I agree with them -- and I would suggest you take it from there. Maybe you might learn something. Who knows?

Nicholas sighs. He shakes his head and mutters to himself:

NICHOLAS

You were the last one on my list, you know that? Oh, well.

MOSES

List of what?

NICHOLAS

It doesn't matter.

Moses clinks his plastic cup against Nicholas' and Zbigniew's. He drinks his wine in one sip and hands the empty cup to Zbigniew. He turns back to his canvas and starts scraping on the edge of a brush-stroke with a razor blade. Zbigniew moves away to look at another painting. Nicholas stands next to Moses and says finally:

NICHOLAS

It's true. I saw an opportunity. I feel you're going to be hugely famous again after you die -- but, at the moment, your work is priced to sell. I thought you were very ill, and I apologize.

MOSES

(still scraping)

I am ill. I have three kinds of cancer.

NICHOLAS

Which ones?

MOSES

Throat, lungs, and esophagus.

NICHOLAS

(pause)

Oh, hell, Moses.

EXT. SIDEWALK. DAY

Nicholas and Zbigniew stand together in front of a shop with a hand-lettered sign across the front that reads "Italian Ices". Nicholas looks miserable. Zbigniew sighs and shakes his head.

ZBIGNIEW

That was a tough one.

Nicholas nods. He looks up at the sky and puts his finger under his eye to hold back a tear. He says quietly:

NICHOLAS

That man is a lion, Zbigniew.

Zbigniew nods. He says respectfully:

ZBIGNIEW

I used to have a poster of one of his early sculptures that was made of beetles.

NICHOLAS

(pleased)

So you know the work.

ZBIGNIEW

Some of it.

NICHOLAS

Good boy.

Nicholas takes his finger away from his eye but keeps looking up at the sky. Zbigniew discreetly takes a bite from a cup of rainbow sherbert with a little plastic spoon.

ZBIGNIEW

You feel pretty down, huh?

NICHOLAS

Yes, I do. It's a funny thing. It never hit me like this before.

ZBIGNIEW

(sadly)

I guess these lessons haven't added up to much, have they?

NICHOLAS

No, they haven't.

ZBIGNIEW

Well, I wasn't actually going to charge you, anyway.

Pause. Nicholas looks to Zbigniew. Zbigniew shrugs.

ZBIGNIEW

Other than the fare.

NICHOLAS
 (quietly)
 It was a time-job.

Zbigniew nods. Nicholas stares at him.

ZBIGNIEW
 You want to try this?

Nicholas nods vaguely. Zbigniew hands him the cup with the spoon sticking out of it. Nicholas takes a bite without looking at it and without using the spoon. His expression transforms radically in an instant.

NICHOLAS
 Holy fuck! That's delicious.

ZBIGNIEW
 (gladly)
 I'll get you one. What flavor?

NICHOLAS
 (pause)
 The rainbow. Like yours.

Zbigniew goes into the shop. Nicholas watches him through the window.

INT. CADAZIO GALLERY. DAY

Nicholas bursts through the front doors and strides among the growing inventory of partly-crated Rosenthalers leaning against the walls. He shouts:

NICHOLAS
 Natalie! Cancel all my appointments for tomorrow!

Natalie says as she comes down the stairs:

NATALIE
 You don't have any.

NICHOLAS
 You're joking. Why not?

NATALIE
 You tell me. I don't know what you're up to.

NICHOLAS
 Well, you're about to! Something's happening!

NATALIE
You found a sucker?

NICHOLAS
I don't want to jinx it, but yes. He's
not a sucker, by the way. I'm offended by
that.

Nicholas dashes up the stairs. He yells down from the office:

NICHOLAS
I'm going to win!

INT. NICHOLAS' OFFICE. DAY

Nicholas turns on an electric shredder mounted on a trash
can. He picks up the list of possible friends off his desk
and feeds it into the machine. It splits into confetti.

CUT TO:

The next morning. Nicholas jumps into the station wagon next
to Zbigniew again. He seems even more exuberant than before.

NICHOLAS
I got us a pair of ringside seats to the
Mets game!

Nicholas shows Zbigniew two tickets. Zbigniew hesitates,
puzzled. He studies the tickets.

ZBIEGNIEW
Wow! Great! Right behind the dugout.

NICHOLAS
(pause)
What's that?

ZBIEGNIEW
That's where the players sit.

NICHOLAS
Perfect! I'm sorry I don't know the
terminology yet. Obviously, people love
to discuss sports and sporting events and
such. They know the names of all the
players and so on. I'm going to develop
that ability.

ZBIGNIEW
Are we going to see anybody first? From
the list.

NICHOLAS

Screw the list! Let's have some fun,
dammit. Remind me how to say your name
again.

EXT. BASEBALL STADIUM. DAY

Nicholas and Zbigniew share a bag of peanuts as they watch a player knock a line-drive deep into left field. Fans leap to their feet, cheering. Nicholas and Zbigniew watch pleasantly. They both wear Mets caps. Nicholas seems moved.

NICHOLAS

So this is what's it's about? The vast
green fields of grass, and the men
running about, and the sounds! I never
grasped its beauty.

ZBIEGNIEW

(interested)

Me, neither. It's kind of a great game.
The boredom of it's kind of relaxing.

NICHOLAS

(pause)

You, neither, what?

ZBIGNIEW

Me, neither, I never got it, either.

NICHOLAS

(uncertain)

You, neither, you never got it, either,
what?

ZBIEGNIEW

(confused)

The things you just said. I've never been
to a baseball game, myself.

NICHOLAS

(at a loss)

I thought you were our guide.

ZBIEGNIEW

Well, I certainly know the basics -- but
I don't follow sports.

NICHOLAS

Then what the fuck are we doing here?
Let's get the hell out and have a drink.

CUT TO:

An oyster bar on the East River. Nicholas and Zbigniew eat crackers and drink beers. Nicholas explains:

ZBIGNIEW

When I was a teenager, I wanted to be an actor. On the stage, I mean. I would rehearse by myself all day -- I was obsessed with the theatre -- but I guess I don't sound naturalistic when I'm acting. Anyway, that's what people told me. Plus, my voice doesn't carry. Maybe I should've tried mime. In college, I spent two years writing what amounted to an epic poem that sort of touched on, more or less, everything, through the ages, but I couldn't get anyone to read it. It was just unreadable, apparently. Who knows why. (Parts of it were in Greek, but I translated them in the margins.) Of course, I love music, and I took trumpet lessons and banjo, but the truth is I don't really have enough ears to carry a tune or even keep a beat.

NICHOLAS

Surely, that's not the case. What does it take? You just:

Nicholas starts snapping his fingers and improvising a little tune. Zbigniew shrugs.

ZBIGNIEW

I know. I can't do that.

NICHOLAS

Oh, dear.

ZBIGNIEW

(in summation:)

You see, I'm interested in the arts. That's all I care about for as long as I can remember -- but I have no talent.

NICHOLAS

(pause)

Maybe you're a painter.

ZBIGNIEW

That's my hobby. I'm a driver.

Silence. Nicholas says defiantly:

NICHOLAS

A bloody, damn good one.

ZBIGNIEW

Thanks.

NICHOLAS

Here come the cherrystones!

A waiter sets a tray of raw clams on ice in front of Nicholas and Zbigniew. They look excited.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK. DAY

Nicholas and Zbigniew walk alongside a pond with model sailboats zipping around in it by remote-control. A breeze blows gently.

NICHOLAS

Well, my family background is a bit unusual in the sense that the man who I thought was my father turned out to be my uncle, in fact.

ZBIGNIEW

(hesitates)

You mean, your father's brother --

NICHOLAS

Yes. Apparently. My mother liked both of them, to some degree, as far as I can tell. Anyway, we all went our separate ways, quite amicably.

ZBIGNIEW

When?

NICHOLAS

(pause)

I suppose I was about twelve.

ZBIGNIEW

(taken aback)

Twelve?

NICHOLAS

Maybe thirteen. Anyway, I was very happy to be on my own.

INT. MEDIEVAL ART MUSEUM. DAY

Nicholas and Zbigniew stand among suits of armor and swords and lances. A class of third-graders files past them as they talk:

NICHOLAS

Were you ever married?

ZBIGNIEW
Very briefly.

NICHOLAS
Me, too! Very briefly, also!

ZBIGNIEW
No kidding. It happens, I guess.

NICHOLAS
It certainly does! That's hysterical!

Zbigniew does not seem to find this quite so humorous but keeps smiling nevertheless:

ZBIGNIEW
Yeah!

NICHOLAS
We should talk about our divorces, right?
As a topic of conversation. That's
lively.

ZBIGNIEW
(reluctantly)
OK.

NICHOLAS
Mine was an absolute horror show. Easily
the most awful experience of my life.

ZBIGNIEW
So was mine.

NICHOLAS
I will never again live with another
human being, under any circumstances.

ZBIGNIEW
(getting depressed)
That's too bad.

Nicholas nods. Zbigniew sighs. They stand in front of a large catapult in silence.

NICHOLAS
Let's change the subject, actually.

INT. PERFORMANCE HALL. DAY

An orchestra plays magnificently on stage. Nicholas and Zbigniew sit in the audience, only somewhat under-dressed. Zbigniew listens, rapt, with his eyes closed, conducting discreetly with his fingers. Nicholas sits slouched with his

arms crossed. His Blackberry glows and vibrates in his pocket. He is tempted, but chooses not to answer it. He leans forward with his elbows on his knees and tries to pay attention. He bobs his head a bit with the music.

CUT TO:

The end of the performance. Nicholas and Zbigniew stand side-by-side applauding. They both look impressed. Nicholas shouts:

NICHOLAS
 Bravo! Bravo!
 (to Zbigniew)
 In fact, that was, actually, relatively entertaining.

ZBIGNIEW
 (shrugs)
 Well, it's supposed to be.

INT. CADAZIO GALLERY. DAY

Nicholas and Zbigniew stand among the partly crated Rosenthalers. Zbigniew says, impressed:

ZBIGNIEW
 The Rosenthaler Suite.

NICHOLAS
 The Rosenthaler everything. The Suite, the Cooling Stars, all the Death Camps (one though nine). I started buying as soon as I knew he was sick. Lucinda and I are partners on this, but it'll be my show.
 (pause)
 Actually, I feel like a bit of a heel.

Zbigniew nods thoughtfully.

EXT. SIDEWALK. EVENING

Nicholas stands next to the station wagon. He wears his Mets cap and holds a miniature knight in his hands and a program from the symphony. Zbigniew says from the driver's seat:

ZBIGNIEW
 Thanks, again, for the ball game -- but especially for Mahler's Symphony Number Four in G-Major. What a treat.

NICHOLAS

(broadly)

It was my pleasure, Zbigniew. Thank you
for joining me.

ZBIGNIEW

So long.

Zbigniew rolls up his window. Nicholas waits on the sidewalk, smiling. He waves good-bye. Pause. Zbigniew rolls down his window again.

ZBIGNIEW

I'm having dinner with my parents. You
want to meet them?

NICHOLAS

(hesitates)

Truly?

ZBIGNIEW

Sure.

NICHOLAS

(overwhelmed)

I'd be deeply honored and touched.

ZBIGNIEW

Well, it'll probably just be some kind of
casserole. They don't speak much English,
by the way. Do you like vodka?

NICHOLAS

(walking on air)

I adore it.

ZBIGNIEW

Get back in.

NICHOLAS

(pause)

One minute. Let me just grab something.

Nicholas dashes into the building.

CUT TO:

Three minutes later. Nicholas jumps into the station wagon. His hair has been wetted down and neatly combed. He is wearing a neck-tie. He holds the damaged but generally repaired birthday present in his hands. He nods. Zbigniew starts driving. Nicholas says, aside:

NICHOLAS

I've never met anybody's parents before.
Formally, I mean.

ZBIGNIEW

(hesitates)

Well, as I say, it'll probably just be
some kind of casserole.

NICHOLAS

Fabulous.

ZBIGNIEW

(pause)

What about your ex-wife? Didn't you ever
meet her folks?

NICHOLAS

(dismissively)

In passing. Not like this.

INT. MASZKIOWITZ APARTMENT. NIGHT

A cheerful, cluttered apartment with a different pattern of faded, multi-colored wall-paper in every room. A small, elderly man opens the front door, laughing, and a small, elderly woman immediately hands Nichols and Zbigniew little glasses of chilled vodka as they come inside. They are MR. and MRS. MASZKIOWITZ. Zbigniew hugs and kisses his parents and introduces them to Nicholas in Polish. Mrs. Maszkiowitz kisses Nicholas on both cheeks. Mr. Maszkiowitz claps Nicholas on the back. They all drink their vodkas, and Mrs. Maszkiowitz pours them each another.

Nicholas hands Mrs. Maszkiowitz the present. She looks very touched and says something to Zbigniew in Polish.

ZBIGNIEW

Open it, mama!

Mr. Maszkiowitz helps his wife open the package. Inside, there is a pair of silver cuff-links -- one with an N on it and one with a C. Nicholas' expression is completely blank. Zbigniew watches everyone's reactions. Mr. and Mrs. Maszkiowitz admire the cuff-links and carefully take them out of their case.

Mrs. Maszkiowitz puts the N in her lapel, and Mr. Maszkiowitz wears the C in the flap of his shirt-pocket. They smile at each other, genuinely grateful, and thank Nicholas profusely in Polish. Nicholas looks pleased and surprised. He asks Zbigniew excitedly:

NICHOLAS
Do those match their real initials?

ZBIGNIEW
(hesitates)
Of course not.

CUT TO:

The dining room. Mrs. Maszkiowitz serves a casserole with bread-crumbs over the top of it. There is a bowl of pickles on the table and a plate of radishes. They all continue laughing and chatting and drinking vodka as they eat. Mr. Maszkiowitz tries to teach Nicholas different words in Polish.

CUT TO:

The living room. Mr. and Mrs. Maszkiowitz show Nicholas dozens of Zbigniew's paintings which fill the walls all around the room and lean in stacks in the corners. All the pictures are very bright and appear to use more or less every variety of pigment available. Nicholas studies them carefully.

CUT TO:

The dining room again. Mrs. Maszkiowitz serves a dessert that looks like whipped cream over meringue layered with sugar cookies. They continue drinking vodkas.

NICHOLAS
I really think you're onto something.

ZBIGNIEW
Thanks, but you don't have to say that.

NICHOLAS
I mean it.

ZBIGNIEW
Well, I don't believe you.

NICHOLAS
Where's the toilet?

ZBIGNIEW
End of the hall on the left.

NICHOLAS
Excuse me, please.

Nicholas smiles to Mr. and Mrs. Maszkiowitz and stands up. He walks unevenly down the corridor.

INT. MASZKIOWITZ BATHROOM. NIGHT

Striped towels hang over a plastic shower curtain with swimming fish all over it. Three toothbrushes and a razor sit beside the sink. Nicholas runs the tap as he whispers loudly into his mobile phone:

NICHOLAS
You've met him.

INTER-CUT WITH:

Lucinda sitting alone on a sofa in a two-story high living room overlooking a garden. Abstract bronzes and large steel and wooden sculptures line the walls. She smokes a cigarette while watching a detective show on television. She says blankly:

LUCINDA
Who is he?

NICHOLAS
The guy in the station wagon.

Silence. Lucinda says finally, in disbelief:

LUCINDA
The driver? With the music?

NICHOLAS
Zbigniew. He's become a dear friend. He paints, by the way. Not exactly well, but interestingly.

LUCINDA
That's not going to work.

NICHOLAS
I believe it will.

LUCINDA
You're not actually friends.

NICHOLAS
Yes, we are.

LUCINDA
He's your driver. He's a ringer. It's not acceptable.

NICHOLAS
I understand your skepticism because he's a new friend, but I assure you --

LUCINDA

Prove it.

NICHOLAS

Of course. What would be satisfactory to you?

Lucinda stands up and walks across the room to a desk. She opens a drawer and withdraws a Xerox copy of the Chinese delivery menu from a folder. She reads:

LUCINDA

"He would need to make a significant personal sacrifice of no benefit to himself in any respect whatsoever -- or risk his life for you." Something along those lines.

NICHOLAS

Well, I don't think it's such a great idea if somebody gets physically injured, I have to say.

LUCINDA

I'll let you out of it for a ten thousand dollar penalty.

NICHOLAS

Absolutely not.

LUCINDA

OK, then. You've got twenty-four hours to fulfill the terms of the agreement.

NICHOLAS

I intend to, my dear.

INT. STATION WAGON. NIGHT

Zbigniew drives Nicholas back into the city. Classical music plays softly. Nicholas stares ahead in silence. Zbigniew points at the radio:

ZBIGNIEW

Remember this one?

NICHOLAS

(distracted)

Hm? No.

ZBIGNIEW

You've heard it before.

NICHOLAS
Hm? I don't think so.

ZBIGNIEW
(pause)
Are you listening?

NICHOLAS
(snapping out of it)
What'd you say? Sorry. Excuse me.

ZBIGNIEW
I meant the music.

NICHOLAS
(listening)
Oh, yes. Beethoven again -- am I right?

ZBIGNIEW
Violin and Piano Sonata Number 9.

NICHOLAS
In A-major.

ZBIGNIEW
That's right!

NICHOLAS
(shrugs)
I'm learning. Your parents are divine, by
the way. I've never tasted such a
casserole.

ZBIGNIEW
Oh, good.

NICHOLAS
Also: something about your use of color --
moves me.

Zbigniew rolls his eyes. Nicholas insists:

NICHOLAS
I'm not kidding.

ZBIGNIEW
(shrugs)
If you say so. See you tomorrow?

Zbigniew pulls over to the curb in front of Nicholas'
building. Nicholas says gravely:

NICHOLAS
Come up for a minute. I need to discuss something with you.

ZBIGNIEW
(hesitates)
What?

NICHOLAS
I'll tell you upstairs.

Pause. Zbigniew turns off the motor, unbuckles his seat-belt, and he and Nicholas get out of the station wagon.

INT. NICHOLAS' LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

Zbigniew sits on a white, leather couch, frozen, with his mouth open. He has a glass of brandy in his hand. Nicholas stands across the room, facing him, holding his own glass of brandy. Silence.

NICHOLAS
I need you to help me do a burglary.

ZBIGNIEW
(long pause)
I beg your pardon?

NICHOLAS
I believe you heard me.

ZBIGNIEW
(baffled)
Yes, I heard you, but I thought you were going to ask if you could borrow some money. I'm not rich, but my grandmother left me a --

NICHOLAS
(touched)
You're a prince. I'm very moved by that gesture, Zbigniew. Unfortunately, you don't have this kind of capitol.

ZBIGNIEW
(pause)
What do you want to steal?

NICHOLAS
A picture.

Nicholas drinks down his brandy and sets the empty glass on a plexiglass side-board. He continues:

NICHOLAS

A quite valuable and important Rosenthaler of ambiguous provenance. In point of fact, I sold it twice, myself, and it was loaned to somebody who traded it for something the other person didn't even own. At this time, I happen to know, it's secretly in the possession of Lucinda Barnes, but it doesn't, technically, belong to anybody -- and I've got a buyer in Saudi.

Zbigniew stares at Nicholas blankly. He says quietly:

ZBIGNIEW

This is crazy.

NICHOLAS

Perhaps, but this is how it works in the art world. If we don't do this, I'm out of business. It's not hers, anyway, and she won't be able to do anything about it, and I've got an old score to settle with Lucinda which I won't bore you with the details of, but this should square it.

ZBIGNIEW

(pause)

What's the piece?

NICHOLAS

The first canvas of the Treblinka Uprising. It's made of beetles.

ZBIGNIEW

(surprised)

I had a poster of that in college.

NICHOLAS

(pretending to remember)

Oh, yes. So you said.

Zbigniew stands up, walks across the room, and stands facing the wall, taking Nicholas' previous place -- while Nicholas sits down on the white, leather couch, taking Zbigniew's previous place. Pause. Zbigniew turns around suddenly, raising his voice:

ZBIGNIEW

I'm not helping you rob somebody! You're going to end up in jail, and so will I! This is one of the dumbest ideas I've
(more)

ZBIGNIEW (cont'd)
 ever heard from you! I can't believe
 we're even having this conversation!

NICHOLAS
 Point taken -- but what if I told you
 she's storing the picture in the back
 room of my gallery.

Silence. Zbigniew drinks down his own brandy and sets the
 empty glass on the plexiglass sideboard, next to Nicholas'.

NICHOLAS
 It's crated and unmarked, along with
 several other pieces she wanted me to
 store. She thinks I don't know what it is
 -- but I do.

ZBIGNIEW
 (uncertain)
 It's in your gallery.

NICHOLAS
 That's correct.

ZBIGNIEW
 And you want to steal it.

NICHOLAS
 I can't see any other alternative. I hate
 to involve you, but it's an emergency,
 and I need your help.

ZBIGNIEW
 (grimly)
 I see.

NICHOLAS
 What do you think?

Zbigniew comes back over to the couch and sits down next to
 Nicholas. He takes a deep breath and says carefully:

ZBIGNIEW
 Let's start at the top again. Tell me
 once more why you think this is going to
 work out, and how it's justified -- and
 what you're asking me to do.

CUT TO:

The next morning. Lucinda stands in the open doorway of her
 apartment, in front of her two-story living room, dressed in
 men's pajamas, smoking a cigarette. Nicholas, across from

her, in the corridor, with a paper cup of coffee in his hand, says excitedly:

NICHOLAS

I can't believe he bought it. I could barely follow the logic myself. He's just -- loyal, you know? He's a terrific fellow. You'll meet him, eventually. Does this qualify?

LUCINDA

(pause)

Well, I suppose if he's genuinely prepared to go through with it, it would be hard to argue that it doesn't -- but I want a record of the entire procedure, from start to finish, plus witnesses.

NICHOLAS

Naturally. I'll arrange it.

LUCINDA

You've only got twelve hours left.

NICHOLAS

We're going to do it tonight.

Lucinda nods. She closes the door.

INT. NICHOLAS' OFFICE. DAY

Two men in jump-suits work together running a set of cables from downstairs and connecting them to a bank of security camera monitors on a cart. Natalie alphabetizes a set of catalogues on a shelf across the room. Nicholas talks quickly on the telephone:

NICHOLAS

I rented us a step-van and bought some goggles and bandanas. I've just got to pick-up the blow-torch from the hardware store.

INTER-CUT WITH:

Zbigniew driving his station wagon across the Brooklyn Bridge.

ZBIGNIEW

A blow-torch? What for? You've got the keys to every lock in the building.

NICHOLAS

(motioning to the monitors)

There's security cameras, Ziggy! We've got to make this look professional. I just had a major, high-tech security alarm installed over here. With lasers. It's the --

Nicholas glances at the label on an old, twisted-up tennis racquet which is part of an installation hanging on the wall.

NICHOLAS

-- T-2000 model. We've got to beat that!

ZBIGNIEW

But you know the code.

NICHOLAS

That's beside the point, Ziggy! We've got to start acting like this is really happening!

ZBIGNIEW

(pause)

When did you decide to start calling me Ziggy?

NICHOLAS

(hesitates)

You don't like it?

ZBIGNIEW

(pleasantly)

It's fine. They called me that in school.

NICHOLAS

It's just easier for me to pronounce. I'll see you in an hour.

Nicholas hangs up the telephone. Natalie says without stopping her alphabetizing:

NATALIE

He'll never forgive you.

Nicholas looks to Natalie. Pause. He says finally:

NICHOLAS

He'll never know. Besides, he's not that kind of guy. He's much more understanding than that. You'll meet him, eventually.

INT. MASZKIOWITZ APARTMENT. DAY

Zbigniew hugs and kisses his parents while they talk to him in Polish. Mrs. Maszkiowitz tugs on Zbigniew's sleeve:

ZBIGNIEW

No, I can't stay. I just wanted to say hello, and I love you.

Zbigniew fights his way out of the apartment, laughing and saying his good-byes in Polish. The door closes behind him. Mr. and Mrs. Maszkiowitz look at each other, uneasy.

INT. NICHOLAS' LIVING ROOM. EVENING

Nicholas stands alone staring out the window of his apartment. He wears his Mets cap and is listening to Beethoven on his stereo. He watches the sun setting across the park. The room grows dark. He turns off the music with a remote control and walks out of the room.

EXT. CADAZIO GALLERY. NIGHT

The night. The lights in the building are out. The street is quiet. The sound of a siren fades away in the distance.

EXT. ALLEY. NIGHT

A black cargo van waits parked behind a dumpster next to a loading dock with a sliding door labelled Cadazio Loading Only.

INT. NICHOLAS' OFFICE. NIGHT

Lucinda and Natalie sit in the dark staring at the bank of monitors. They wear headphones. Lucinda smokes a cigarette. Natalie whispers:

NATALIE

Are you comfortable? Can I offer you anything?

LUCINDA

Sparkling water, please -- and an ashtray, if you care about this carpet.

INT. CADAZIO GALLERY. NIGHT

A little, red light blinks on a panel on the wall next to the entrance. An air conditioner hums faintly somewhere, hidden. A taxi drives by outside.

A tiny, metallic squeak echoes through the room.

CUT TO:

Lucinda and Natalie listening in their headphones with glasses of mineral water in their hands. They lean closer to the monitors.

CUT TO:

The deserted gallery. The squeak repeats three more times -- and then a small screw falls from the ceiling and bounces on the floor.

INSERT:

The metal cover of a ventilation shaft. It folds open and a rope ladder descends from inside.

CUT TO:

Lucinda and Natalie squinting at the monitors as:

Nicholas and Zbigniew, dressed mostly in black, although Zbigniew still wears his seersucker trousers and white bucks, climb down the ladder and crouch on the floor. They have complicated harnesses strapped around them and wear goggles and bandanas wrapped around their faces. Nicholas unzips a duffel bag and takes out a set of metal sticks which he begins to assemble.

Lucinda whispers, curious:

LUCINDA
Is that a fucking crossbow?

INSERT:

A gloved hand sliding a steel bolt with a nylon line attached to the tail of it into a slot on a crossbow.

CUT TO:

Nicholas lying on his stomach. He cocks the crossbow and aims it across the room while Zbigniew, crouched low, ties the other end of the line to a pipe on the wall. Zbigniew whispers:

ZBIGNIEW
Ready.

Nicholas fires. The bolt slams through a crate on the far side of the gallery, splintering it. Nicholas shouts:

NICHOLAS

Fuck!

ZBIGNIEW

(panicked)

Shh! Quiet! What's wrong?

NICHOLAS

It went through Nagasaki! Good God!
Jesus. I guess we can repair it. I'll
call the restorers first thing.

Zbigniew tugs on the rope. It feels secure. He pulls the other end tight. He and Nicholas click themselves onto the line with climber's hooks attached to their harnesses. They roll over onto their backs and start to slide themselves across the floor via a complex system of pulleys and ratchets.

CUT TO:

Lucinda and Natalie, who now look puzzled.

LUCINDA

This is getting a little too butch, don't
you think? Was this part necessary?

Natalie shrugs.

CUT TO:

Nicholas and Zbigniew dragging themselves methodically across the floor. They make their way to the center of the room. Nicholas reaches into his pocket and whispers:

NICHOLAS

Here.

Nicholas hands something little to Zbigniew in the dark. Zbigniew whispers:

ZBIGNIEW

What's that?

NICHOLAS

A Tootsie Roll.

ZBIGNIEW

(hesitates)

Oh, I see. To stick the wires down?

NICHOLAS

No, to eat. We're half-way across the
floor. It's time for a snack.

Nicholas laughs quietly. Zbigniew laughs quietly, too.

CUT TO:

Lucinda and Natalie laughing quietly, as well. Natalie whispers:

NATALIE

They're actually kind of cute together.

LUCINDA

(pause)

Maybe I did lose. I guess I'll still
break even if the smaller pieces sell.

CUT TO:

Nicholas and Zbigniew continuing across the floor. Zbigniew whispers as they slide along:

ZBIGNIEW

By the way, my mother asked if you prefer
blue or green.

NICHOLAS

In what?

ZBIGNIEW

In general.

NICHOLAS

Why'd she ask that?

ZBIGNIEW

(pause)

Who knows? She's a strange woman. It's
probably related to a superstition.

NICHOLAS

(sharply)

Well, how should I answer? It could go
either way.

ZBIGNIEW

Well, which do you actually prefer?

NICHOLAS

(agitated)

What difference does it make? Just tell
me which is better so I don't get it
wrong!

ZBIGNIEW

She's knitting you a cardigan.

Nicholas stops crawling. Silence. He asks gently:

NICHOLAS
A Polish cardigan?

ZBIGNIEW
I don't know how Polish it is. The yarn
comes from a shop Brooklyn.

NICHOLAS
She liked me.

ZBIGNIEW
Oh, she loved you. She said --

NICHOLAS
She even liked the cuff-links.

ZBIGNIEW
(curious)
Yeah. I'm still not sure what they think
those symbolize.

NICHOLAS
(defensive)
It's very good silver. Wonderful
craftsmanship. Maybe we should trade them
for the right letters?

ZBIGNIEW
They've asked you back for Sunday, if
you're free.

NICHOLAS
(pause)
I am free.

ZBIGNIEW
She's going to make you a goose.

NICHOLAS
(stunned)
My favorite bird of all time.

ZBIGNIEW
I can smell the formaldehyde.

NICHOLAS
(puzzled)
What?

ZBIGNIEW
From the beetles.

NICHOLAS
(uneasy)
Thank you for helping me, Ziggy.

ZBIGNIEW
That's OK. I'm not, actually, sure it's
such a good idea for you to do something
so illegal, to tell you truth -- but I
want you to know you can rely on me.

Nicholas stops crawling again. He looks stricken.

NICHOLAS
You know something?

ZBIGNIEW
What?

NICHOLAS
I'm not going to go through with this.

ZBIGNIEW
(hesitates)
Go through with what?

NICHOLAS
This robbery.

ZBIGNIEW
What do you mean? We're almost there.

NICHOLAS
I understand that, but we've become dear
friends, and I refuse to lie to you.

ZBIGNIEW
(pause)
Are you lying to me?

NICHOLAS
Not anymore.

ZBIGNIEW
About what?

Nicholas un-clicks himself from the harness and stands up.
Zbigniew looks shocked. He stammers:

ZBIGNIEW
Look out! The lasers! The motion
detector! The T-2000! What are you --

Zbigniew trails off as Nicholas strides across the room, taking off his bandana, and switches on the lights. Zbigniew remains very still, lying on the floor. Silence.

NICHOLAS

They're watching us on television.

ZBIGNIEW

(pause)

Who?

INSERT:

One of the monitors. Nicholas stands under the security camera pointing into and waving. Lucinda says to the screen:

LUCINDA

You're an idiot.

NATALIE

(ominously)

Something's happening over here, too.

On another screen, two police officers are crouched outside the front door, peering in at Nicholas and Zbigniew.

CUT TO:

One of the police officers whispering into his walkie-talkie while the other draws his service revolver:

POLICE OFFICER

Unit nine reporting. Four-eleven in progress. West 21st street, 200 block, north side. Request immediate back-up.

CUT TO:

Zbigniew still lying on his back on the floor. He pulls down his bandana and says to Nicholas across the room:

ZBIGNIEW

It was a bet?

NICHOLAS

(reluctantly)

It started that way -- but we've become dear friends, and --

ZBIGNIEW

Dear friends.

NICHOLAS

(hesitates)

Yes. I'm saying -- forget about the bet.
There's more important things in life to
work on.

ZBIGNIEW

You said you were lonely.

NICHOLAS

(genuinely)

I was! So were you.

ZBIGNIEW

And I gave you lessons -- on the house.

NICHOLAS

(hesitates)

Well, it was time-job.

ZBIGNIEW

This is humiliating.

NICHOLAS

(defensive)

For me! Not for you! You're the good guy!
You're the hero.

ZBIGNIEW

I don't feel like the hero. I feel like
an idiot. Who's watching us, again?

NICHOLAS

Lucinda. You'll meet her, eventually.
She's a bit of a battle-ax, but she's
very clever.

CUT TO:

The office. Natalie looks to Lucinda. Lucinda shrugs.

LUCINDA

He's right.

CUT TO:

Zbigniew un-clicking himself from the line. He stands up. He
pulls off his goggles and bandana and drops them on the
floor. He unstraps the harness from around his body. He says
calmly:

ZBIGNIEW

I'm going home.

NICHOLAS
(hesitates)
Why? I just came clean.

ZBIGNIEW
You used me.

NICHOLAS
(frustrated)
It's more complicated than that. I meant
to use you -- but we've become dear
friends!

ZBIGNIEW
(angrily)
Stop saying that!

NICHOLAS
(pained)
But it's true!

Zbigniew looks up at the ceiling directly into the security camera and says:

ZBIGNIEW
No, it's not.

Zbigniew spits his half-chewed Tootsie Roll on the floor.

ZBIGNIEW
I'm going home.

A voice answers from across the room:

POLICE OFFICER
Not tonight, you're not.

Nicholas and Zbigniew freeze. There are five police officers positioned in doorways around the room with their pistols drawn and aimed at Nicholas and Zbigniew.

POLICE OFFICER
Tonight you're going to jail.

NICHOLAS
(hesitates)
This is private property.

POLICE OFFICER
Get back down on the floor!

Nicholas and Zbigniew lie on the floor, face-down. Nicholas yells, grief-stricken, across the room to Zbigniew as they are being hand-cuffed:

NICHOLAS

I'm sorry, Ziggy. I'll make it up to you.
I promise!

INT. CITY JAIL. DAY

Nicholas and Zbigniew sit on a bench in a holding cell next to two drunk, shirtless men with tattoos all over their bodies and bruises all over their faces. Zbigniew stares into space. Nicholas looks guilty.

INT. COURT ROOM. DAY

The next morning. A Hispanic judge flips through a file and whispers something to a bailiff. They look out at:

Nicholas and Zbigniew hand-cuffed together in the front row. Lucinda, Natalie, and Mr. and Mrs. Maszkiowitz sit behind them. Mrs. Maszkiowitz has tears all over her face. Zbigniew whispers to her gently in Polish. Mr. Maszkiowitz glares at Nicholas.

The judge says into a microphone:

JUDGE

Mr. Hammerstein, may I have a word? You too, Mr. Firenze.

LAWYER

Of course, your honor.

Nicholas' lawyer approaches the bench. A prosecutor in a striped suit joins him. The judge shrugs and says quietly:

JUDGE

What the hell is this all about?

LAWYER

I don't believe a crime has been committed.

PROSECUTOR

Me, neither, your honor.

JUDGE

I concur. I suggest we --

LAWYER

My client would like to make a statement, however.

JUDGE

(puzzled)

What kind of statement?

LAWYER

I'm not sure, exactly. For the record.

Long pause. The judge shrugs. He signals to the bailiff, who goes over to Nicholas and Zbigniew and removes their handcuffs. Nicholas looks to his lawyer hopefully. The lawyer nods. The judge motions to Nicholas and says into his microphone:

JUDGE

You have the floor for sixty seconds, Mr. Cadazio.

NICHOLAS

(hesitates)

Sixty seconds? That's it? Starting when?

JUDGE

(irritated)

Starting when I just said it.

NICHOLAS

Oh, my goodness. Excuse me, Zbigniew.

Nicholas stands up and squeezes past Zbigniew, stepping on his feet. Zbigniew looks up at him coldly. Nicholas walks quickly to the front of the court room. He starts immediately:

NICHOLAS

Your honor, counselors, ladies and gentlemen of the court --

Pause. Nicholas points to Zbigniew and says with deep feeling:

NICHOLAS

-- this man is innocent.

JUDGE

(interrupting)

We've established that, Mr. Cadazio.

Nicholas looks quickly back to the judge, surprised. He says briskly:

NICHOLAS

Have we? Good. I think I mean it in a different way, though. Let me continue.

Zbigniew turns back to the audience again and says significantly:

NICHOLAS

This man is innocent, and he's pure. He's also talented, in my opinion, even though he doesn't know it. As a colorist, first and foremost. Mr. and Mrs. Maszkiowitz, I want to apologize to you and your son for this fiasco and other idiotic, maybe unforgiveable mistakes which you'll hear about soon enough, I'm afraid. I thank you again for your hospitality, which I suppose I'll never get another chance to experience. I'm generally considered to be, and I quote, "a sleazy hustler, a cold-blooded snake, and borderline crook." For good reason, because it's true.

(to Zbigniew)

Well, you're the most diametrically reversed opposite guy of that I've ever met, Zbigniew -- and if there's one thing I've learned over these past ten days, it's this: I can do better.

(yelling to his lawyer)

Time!

LAWYER

(staring at his wristwatch)

Eight seconds.

NICHOLAS

(instantly)

Please, give me a second chance.

Silence. The lawyer looks up from his wristwatch. Nicholas watches Zbigniew. Zbigniew stares blankly into space. He says quietly:

ZBIGNIEW

No.

The judge shrugs. He says into his microphone:

JUDGE

Case dismissed. You're both free to go.
What's next on the docket?

EXT. SIDEWALK. DAY

A buzzer buzzes and a steel door swings open. Nicholas and Zbigniew come out onto the sidewalk carrying their personal effects in plastic baggies. Zbigniew immediately walks away and gets into a waiting Japanese compact car driven by his parents. Nicholas watches him. Zbigniew does not look back. Mrs. Maszkiowitz in the back seat turns around and waves

sadly to Nicholas. Nicholas eagerly waves back to her as the car pulls away and disappears around the corner. Silence. A horn honks.

Nicholas looks behind him. A black Mercedes blinks its lights.

INT. CAR SERVICE SEDAN. DAY

Felipe sits in the driver's seat. Nicholas opens the door and says softly as he slides into the back:

NICHOLAS
Hello, Felipe.

FELIPE
Hello, sir.

NICHOLAS
I just got out of jail. I guess you're aware of that.

Felipe hesitates. He is not sure how to respond. Nicholas looks away and says, resigned:

NICHOLAS
Don't worry. You don't have to say anything. Just take me home.

Felipe puts the car into gear, and they drive away down the street.

INSERT:

An obituary in the New York Times. The caption reads "Moses Rosenthaler, Forgotten Abstract Expressionist Lion". There is a photograph of Moses standing in front of the Rosenthaler Suite with a shotgun in his hands.

EXT. JEWISH CEMETARY. DAY

A gentle rain falls. Nicholas watches the burial from behind a gravestone a hundred yards away. Lucinda is there, and Ronnie, and Mrs. Kremetz. It is a pretty good turn-out, given the weather. It is unclear whether Nicholas is crying, or just wet.

As the crowd disperses, Nicholas sees Zbigniew revealed among them. He approaches the hole in the ground and looks down into it. He turns and walks away across the cemetery.

As Zbigniew gets into his station wagon, he sees Nicholas running toward him between rows of gravestones. He slams the door and locks it. He starts the engine. Nicholas pulls an

envelope out of his jacket and waves it in the air as he reaches the side of the station wagon. He shouts:

NICHOLAS
It's an invitation!

Zbigniew stares at Nicholas through the rain-splattered glass. Nicholas waits. Zbigniew rolls open the window a millimeter. Nicholas slides the envelope in through the crack. Zbigniew throws the station wagon into gear and guns it, tires screeching as he pulls away.

Felipe waits under an umbrella next to the Mercedes.

Two mourners -- a tall man in his seventies with white hair and a black suit and a short, stocky man in his eighties who wears a wind-breaker -- walk toward a limousine. The short one squints at Nicholas getting into the Mercedes and says:

OLD SCULPTOR
Is that Nick Cadazio?

OLD WRITER
Yep.

OLD SCULPTOR
What's that prick doing here?

OLD WRITER
(shrugs)
I don't know. I spoke to him for a minute. He used to be a real bad guy, but now he's seems to have turned into some kind of weird, nice jerk.

INT. BARNES GALLERY. DAY

A large, white room with polished cement floors. Letters across the top of a wall read "Lucinda Barnes Gallery". A large truck is parked outside and a team of art movers stand in the doorway with crates on dollies. Nicholas supervises them. A receptionist behind the front desk looks frazzled.

RECEPTIONIST
We're not expecting a delivery, Mr. Cadazio. Please, tell them to wait.

NICHOLAS
It's OK. I'm authorizing it.
(to the movers)
Just go straight through.

Lucinda comes out quickly from the back room with two worried assistants. She says immediately, irritated:

LUCINDA

What are these doing here?

NICHOLAS

You won.

LUCINDA

I won the Suite. This is everything. Besides, the show's going to be at your place.

NICHOLAS

I'd rather you do it.

LUCINDA

(sternly)

What? Why? So you lost the bet. We've still got thirty-seven other Rosenthalers. They're fifty percent yours -- and you were right. People are interested. You're going to do very well on this show.

NICHOLAS

I know, but it leaves a bad taste in my mouth. I don't want to be a part of it, anymore. Besides, I've got something else in mind for my space.

LUCINDA

(pause)

Another show?

NICHOLAS

Another show. You do Rosenthaler over here. It's more prestigious, anyway.

LUCINDA

(confounded)

This'll put you out of business, Nicholas.

Nicholas shrugs. He smiles. He says warmly:

NICHOLAS

Maybe not -- or maybe that's what I want. Anyway, I've made up my mind.

Nicholas turns away and walks out the door.

INSERT:

An invitation printed on a painting made from Beetles. Across the top it reads "Rosenthaler, The Major Retrospective, Lucinda Barnes Gallery".

EXT. SIDEWALK. NIGHT

Lucinda's gallery. A huge crowd has gathered. Girls with clipboards guard the door. Black SUV's jam the street. Inside, the Rosenthaler Suite and numerous other pieces have been installed. Lucinda stands at the center of the vast crowd talking with two reporters and a television cameraman with a light on top of his rig.

The camera dollies away, down the block, past two apartment buildings and an old hotel. It stops in front of:

Nicholas' gallery. A much smaller crowd has gathered here. In fact, there appear to be only about a half-dozen visitors.

INSERT:

An invitation printed on an image of a painting of, possibly, confetti, of many colors. It reads "Zbigniew Maszkiowitz, New Work, Nicholas Cadazio Gallery".

INT. CADAZIO GALLERY. NIGHT

All of the pictures from Zbigniew's parents house hang on the walls. Nicholas and Natalie drink glasses of champagne and wander among the few guests in the large, empty room. A bartender waits along at his table. Nicholas says to Natalie, depressed:

NICHOLAS

I guess he's not coming.

NATALIE

Did you really think he would?

NICHOLAS

To tell you the truth? Yes.

NATALIE

Why? Because you gave him a show?

NICHOLAS

(shrugs)

A solo exhibition at what was once considered to be a major gallery.

NATALIE

No one even showed up.

NICHOLAS

We had a few visitors. I think the Chinese guy might even buy the pink one. Anyway, that's not why I thought he would come.

NATALIE

Then why?

NICHOLAS

(shrugs)

Because he misses me.

Nicholas smiles. He puts his hands in his pockets. He looks down at the floor and says quietly:

NICHOLAS

Maybe that's crazy, but it's how I feel.

NATALIE

I'm sure he does, but I told you --

NICHOLAS

I know. He'll never forgive me.

NATALIE

(pause)

Of course, I could be wrong.

NICHOLAS

(suddenly)

The Maszkiowitzes are leaving.

Nicholas and Natalie rush across the room to Mr. and Mrs. Maszkiowitz. They all try to say their good-byes and thank each other in broken Polish and broken English. Mr. Maszkiowitz stops in the doorway and looks back into the room filled with his son's paintings. He smiles proudly. He looks to Nicholas and shrugs. He walks out the door.

The last of the other visitors make their way outside, too. Nicholas and Natalie straighten up around the room a bit as the bartender packs up his things. Natalie puts on her coat.

NATALIE

I'll come by tomorrow and start packing my things.

NICHOLAS

No hurry. We've still got the lease until the end of the month, and who knows? Maybe I'll figure something out.

Nicholas walks Natalie to the door. He holds it open for her. She kisses him on the cheek.

NATALIE
Good-night, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS
Good-night, Natalie.

Natalie walks away, out the door, down the sidewalk. Nicholas watches her. He sighs. He starts to close the door -- then sees Zbigniew's station wagon parked across the street. No one is in it. Nicholas hesitates. He turns around quickly.

Zbigniew is standing on the far side of the gallery with his back to Nicholas looking at one of his paintings. He has a glass of champagne in his hand. Nicholas' eyes soften. He closes the door. He walks slowly across the room and stands next to Zbigniew. Zbigniew does not look at him.

Nicholas and Zbigniew stare at the picture together. Nicholas asks gently:

NICHOLAS
What do you see, Zbigniew?

ZBIGNIEW
(melancholy)
Me? I don't know. You're the expert.

Zbigniew turns to Nicholas and looks at him squarely in the face. He has tears in his eyes, and so does Nicholas.

ZBIGNIEW
What do you see?

Pause. Nicholas motions to different parts of the painting with sweeping gestures as he answers gently:

NICHOLAS
I see kindness in the orange zig-zags. I see wisdom in the yellow curlicues. I see pain and loss in the diagonal blue smudges -- but I see hope in this reddish-greenish-colored, um --

Nicholas searches for the word. Zbiegniew chimes in:

ZBIGNIEW
Apple.

Nicholas brightens. He says enthusiastically:

NICHOLAS

Yes! It's a still life?

ZBIGNIEW

(surprised)

Of course. That's what I paint. See, those are supposed to be peaches over there on the side over there.

NICHOLAS

(pause)

They are, indeed. How wonderful.

For a moment, Nicholas is completely overcome with emotion. He turns and looks at the vast wall across from them, filled with pictures which only now come into focus for him. He nods and turns to Zbiegniew with tears streaming down his face and says quietly:

NICHOLAS

I thought it was all more abstract.

Zbiegniew smiles sadly. He shrugs. Nicholas puts his arm around Zbiegniew's shoulder and says as they move away to discuss the next canvas:

NICHOLAS

Tell me about the rest.