

The Masterworks

A criminal's heir and a violin maker's daughter seek revenge by plotting to steal three priceless musical instruments in the middle of a concert.

EXT. VIOLIN SHOP - URBAN GHETTO - DUSK

The shop is called ZIEGLER'S STRINGS and is sandwiched between a pawn shop and an abandoned building.

A black limo parks across the street.

GUS and ANTHONY, well-dressed thugs, help MISTER LENNOX out of the limo. He is already frail at forty-seven, but his eyes are steely and his slight smile never wavers.

INT. VIOLIN SHOP

ZIEGLER, mid-thirties and bespectacled, hunches over a workbench. He is waxing the back of a violin.

Bells RING. The trio from the limo push their way into the shop.

ZIEGLER

Closed!

LENNOX

Not yet, I think.

His accent is a faded British. Ziegler eyes the intruders.

ZIEGLER

Is that Mr. Lennox? I told your man to schedule an appointment.

LENNOX

My calendar is quite full. I prefer spontaneous appearances these days.

Lennox spots a YOUNG GIRL at the back of the store. He grins wickedly. Ziegler removes his glasses and purses his lips.

ZIEGLER

Upstairs, girl. Now.

The girl bolts through a door and up a flight of stairs.

LENNOX

Mr. Ziegler, the magazines say that you will be the next Stradivarius.

Ziegler waves a hand at his deserted, run-down store.

ZIEGLER

Obviously my customers have not read those articles.

LENNOX

I also read that you are building a masterwork.

ZIEGLER

I was building it. I finished it this evening.

He flips over the violin in his hands. Ashen maplewood, not quite black. Silver strings shining like moonlit water.

LENNOX

Name your price. Whatever you ask, I will pay.

ZIEGLER

Would you like to hear what I have read, Mr. Lennox?

Lennox nods. Ziegler sets the violin down.

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)

I read that you are a collector. You have no interest in the music that this violin will make. You will keep it like a butterfly under glass. To be envied, never enjoyed.

LENNOX

I strongly suggest you reconsider.

ZIEGLER

I will not. Good evening, Mr. Lennox.

Lennox nods sadly and leads Gus and Anthony out of the shop.

Ziegler grabs a bow and plays a long, haunted scale. He closes his eyes, listening for imperfections, hearing none.

INT. ZIEGLER'S BEDROOM - MIDNIGHT

Ziegler tosses in bed. Sniffs. Sits up.

GIRL (O.S.)

Papa!

He leaps from his bed and throws open the door.

FIRE ROARS through the hallway. The girl stands in her nightgown, weeping.

ZIEGLER
The fire escape! Go!

She does as she is told. Ziegler plunges through the flames, down the stairs.

INT. VIOLIN SHOP

He bursts into the burning shop. The ashen violin is gone.

Anthony grabs him from behind and SLAMS him to the workbench.

Ziegler looks up and sees Gus. The thug holds up a razor-sharp wood gouge.

GUS
Mister Lennox will not view the violin as a mere collectible, Mr. Ziegler. He views it as an *investment*. And it will be worth much more if there is only one.

Anthony forces Ziegler's hands open against the workbench. Ziegler roars a denial.

Gus brings the knife down on Ziegler's hands, again and again and again.

Black.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - FIFTEEN YEARS LATER - LATE MORNING.

The ashen violin is mounted on a wall. It is paired with a fiery red cello, and they overlook a jet black grand piano.

DANIKA, early twenties, black skirt and white button-down, studies the instruments earnestly, unsmiling.

Through a small window, she sees JUSTIN march into view.

EXT. MANOR

Justin stomps past a gazebo, through neatly manicured monotonous green grass. He is twenty-three and angry. His slacks are covered in mud from the knees down.

INT. MAIN HALL

Justin slams open the front doors.

JUSTIN

Pop? Where are you, Pop? I gotta talk to you.

Danika stares at Justin as he passes. He grins and winks.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)

I look even better when I'm not covered in crap. Pop!

He charges up the glorious front staircase.

INT. LENNOX'S OFFICE

Justin bursts into the room. Anthony and Gus sit in leather wing chairs. They are fifteen years older but no less physically fit.

ANTHONY

Hey, Justin, we're in the middle of something-

JUSTIN

Yeah? I was in the middle of getting drunk last night, I turn around, and my Corvette is getting towed away!

LENNOX

Consider it repossessed.

All three turn. Lennox is creeping out of the bathroom with the aid of a walker. His grin and eyes have not changed.

JUSTIN

You're just gonna throw it in your collection? Couldn't stand seeing somebody having some fun with it?

LENNOX

Your life, my boy, has been a colossal amusement park ride, drinking, women, cars. No more. As of today, you work for me.

Justin recoils as if slapped.

JUSTIN

Work for you? What, with these hit men? You can't just do that!

LENNOX

Justin, the name of Lennox inspires great admiration, great envy, great fear. I know I won't be around for much longer, but you will see to it that my name will continue.

Justin opens his mouth, but he has run out of things to say.

INT. MUSIC ROOM.

Danika removes the violin and its bow from their cradle on the wall. Justin slinks in behind her.

JUSTIN

Careful - that thing's got like a hundred alarms on it. Are you from Vittorio's? Never seen you before.

DANIKA

I'm new.

She plays a high E, so soft and sweet that Justin shivers involuntarily. She descends the scale, pulling trembling sighs from the instrument.

JUSTIN

I play, too, you know. At college I was in the orchestra.

DANIKA

Here. Play.

She throws the violin at him. He barely catches it.

JUSTIN

Are you crazy? This thing's worth like two million dollars!

DANIKA

It's worthless. An antique before its time. They're all just museum curiosities now.

She eyes the piano and cello sulkily. Justin eyes her rear end.

JUSTIN

Maybe I could use some lessons. We could give it some play time. Do you teach?

She looks at his muddy slacks.

DANIKA
Will you come better dressed?

He smiles craftily and nods.

INT. UPPER LEVEL

Justin watches Danika leave through an immense circular window. Lennox shuffles up behind him.

JUSTIN
I got a few violin lessons coming to me. Maybe I'll get cultured.

LENNOX
Be careful, Justin. I was just informed that her name is Danika Ziegler. Her father made that violin.

Justin whirls around in disbelief.

LENNOX (CONT'D)
Eyes open, my boy.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - A WEEK LATER - AFTERNOON

Justin draws his bow along a tarnished violin, a quick and lilting Mozart riff. Danika listens, unmoved.

JUSTIN
No good?

DANIKA
Your wrist keeps collapsing. And Nintendo music is more expressive.

Justin holds the violin up in surrender.

JUSTIN
I get the notes right, though.

DANIKA
You're like your father. You treat your instrument like a machine.

Justin's expression darkens. He launches into a new song, a turbulent Bartok.

The hint of a smile at Danika's lips. She picks up her own instrument and adds a higher voice.

They face each other, bows stroking frantically, angrily, passionately.

A final strong minor chord.

DANIKA (CONT'D)
You do have some life in you.

JUSTIN
I am *not* like my father.

EXT. MANOR

Danika leaves through the front gates and crosses the street. Justin slinks out of a side gate and follows her.

EXT. GHETTO

Danika lights a cigarette and pushes her way through the heavy doors of an old automotive garage.

Justin shuffles out of an alley and strolls into the garage.

INT. GARAGE

The garage is a graveyard of musical spare parts. REINSTOLDT, scraggly, looks up from a disemboweled piano. KIM, a delicate Korean man, sits silently in the corner.

REINSTOLDT
Yah? Can ve help you?

JUSTIN
I just thought I'd see what your operation looked like.

Danika turns and freezes when she sees Justin. He walks over to a tool bench and picks up a device that looks like an industrial saw. Reinstoldt stands quickly.

JUSTIN (CONT'D)
I didn't know you used these to tune pianos. I thought they were for snapping apart security devices. You know, like my dad has on his collection.

This last bit is directed at Danika. She reveals no emotion.

DANIKA
What do you want?

JUSTIN

I want in.

Reinstoldt looks hesitantly to Danika. Kim never moves.

REINSTOLDT

Who is zis guy, Danika?

JUSTIN

You're trying to steal those three instruments. The security on that room is impenetrable. You'll never be able to do it without my help.

DANIKA

Why would you want to do this?

JUSTIN

Because I want him to have something taken from him for once.

The musicians study him. Danika's eyes are fiery.

DANIKA

All right. What's the plan?

INT. LENNOX'S OFFICE

Lennox sits straight up in his chair, furious.

LENNOX

A concert? With my collection?
Are you out of your mind?

JUSTIN

Too late, pop, it's booked.

LENNOX

And I suppose your music teacher
will be the performing violinist!

JUSTIN

You told me to take care of your investments. Those instruments are not gaining in market value because they were never played. A one-off concert featuring Ziegler's daughter will triple their value.

LENNOX

Very well, Justin. But I will be keeping a very careful watch on Miss Ziegler, and my property.

He snaps. Gus and Anthony appear at the door.

INT. BACKSTAGE DRESSING AREA - ONE MONTH LATER

Danika exits her dressing room in a stunning green dress; Reinstoldt and Kim join her in tuxedos.

They approach Gus and Anthony.

GUS
You know we're going everywhere
with you.

DANIKA
I'll try not to let the smell
interfere with my performance.

ANTHONY
Maybe we should frisk you. Just
being thorough.

JUSTIN
Down, boy.

Justin steps in between Anthony and Danika.

GUS
Don't talk to us like that, junior.

JUSTIN
That's how you talk to animals,
Gus. Some day I hope to have the
pleasure of putting you down.

GUS
We'll see if that ever happens.

The thugs usher the musicians to the stage.

INT. CONCERT HALL

Thunderous applause as the musicians take the stage.

The instruments are waiting. Reinstoldt seats himself at the piano, Kim takes up the cello, and Danika her father's violin.

Lennox sits in a wheelchair in a opera box. He speaks into a small radio.

LENNOX
Is everything copacetic?

INT. BACKSTAGE

Anthony takes up residence just behind the stage left curtain, Gus stage right. Gus puts a hand to his ear.

GUS
Everything's fine, Mister Lennox,
and we have a good signal from the
security devices.

LENNOX (O.S.)
You let me know if they even play a
wrong note.

GUS
Will do, Mister Lennox.

INT. OPERA BOX

Justin joins Lennox in the box.

LENNOX
As if Gus would know Beethoven from
breaking dishes.

JUSTIN
Oh, he'll know. Wait till you hear
her play.

The musicians begin with Beethoven's *Ghost*, at first sharp, then so tender that the maestro himself would shed a tear.

Lennox and Justin are enraptured.

INT. CONCERT HALL - LATER

A few final chords, and a standing ovation. The curtains drop, and Gus and Anthony escort the players off.

Lennox sighs.

LENNOX
We're halfway there. It looks like
this was a good idea after all.

JUSTIN
I'm going to check backstage.

LENNOX
Be quick. They've got ten minutes.

Justin is already fleeing down the stairs.

INT. DRESSING ROOM

Danika enters her room, followed closely by Anthony. Justin enters, carrying a box of roses.

JUSTIN
So far, so good?

ANTHONY
Believe me, if they had tried
anything yet, we'd be finishing
this concert in a morgue.

Justin moves in close to hand Danika the box of roses.

JUSTIN
You're amazing.

DANIKA
I'm trembling on stage. That damn
violin. I wish it had burned.

Justin kisses her softly. She whispers in his ear.

DANIKA (CONT'D)
We don't have to do this. Are you
sure you still want to?

JUSTIN
He needs to pay for what he's done.

A double knock at the door, and Kim and Reinstoldt enter, followed by Gus.

GUS
Let's finish this up, folks.

DANIKA
Yes. Let's.

She opens the box of roses and removes a silenced pistol.
FTT! FTT! Gus and Anthony each take a bullet in the chest.
The radio dangles from Anthony's ear. It crackles to life.

LENNOX (O.S.)
Gus? Anthony? Are you going to
the stage? Somebody talk to me!

The musicians head for the stage. Justin grabs the earpiece.

JUSTIN
I've got it under control, pop.

INT. STAGE

The curtain is still down. The musicians pick up their instruments. Justin runs onstage, getting frantic.

LENNOX (O.S.)
If they're not playing in ten
seconds-

Danika nods, and they begin to play a simple scale.

LENNOX (O.S.) (CONT'D)
All right, I hear the music.
They've got two minutes.

Justin snaps off the radio and grabs hold of the floor.

An eight by ten foot section pulls away. He drops it down, creating a ramp.

He runs to the wing, locks a pulley, and runs two ends of a cable out from it, each threaded with a carabiner.

He snaps one carabiner around the leg of the piano.

He skitters down the ramp. Under the stage, he finds a cello, violin, and piano - exact replicas of the three masterworks.

On stage, the scale becomes more complicated, almost a fugue.

LENNOX (O.S.) (CONT'D)
What are they playing?

JUSTIN
It's just a warm-up, pop. Standard
stuff.

LENNOX (O.S.)
Ninety seconds.

Justin emerges from the pit with the cello and the violin.

Danika slides her bow over from the violin she is holding to the copy in Justin's hand.

Justin frets the chords as she plays. The scale is perfectly continuous. She swaps the violin with his fake.

He moves next to Kim and swaps cellos in the same manner, then flees into the pit with the instruments.

JUSTIN
Here goes nothing.

Justin hooks the second carabiner to the duplicate piano.

Reinstoldt stands and pushes his piano, still playing.

The piano moves almost soundlessly down the ramp into the pit. The weight of it pulls the second piano up the ramp.

As the pianos pass each other, Reinstoldt stops playing his piano *at the exact moment* Justin starts playing the fake.

LENNOX (O.S.)

Raise the curtain. Do it now!

Justin shoves the piano as hard as he can, still playing, trying to reposition it.

Reinstoldt forces Justin away from the keyboard and takes over.

REINSTOLDT

Ze curtain!

JUSTIN

No time.

Justin unlatches the cable and runs it back to the wing. He wraps it around a lock lever labelled CURTAIN.

LENNOX (O.S.)

Where's my concert, Justin?

JUSTIN

Curtain's stuck, pop. Ten seconds.

He runs and slides down the ramp on his back, yanking the cable in as hard as he can.

The CURTAIN lock snaps down as the cable pulls away. The counterweight begins to drop.

Justin reels in the cable and pops the ramp back into the floor, sealing the hole.

INT. OPERA BOX

Lennox watches the curtain come up. Nothing appears amiss.

The scales stop. Danika launches immediately into Schubert.

Hesitant, then enthusiastic, applause. Lennox frowns.

INT. PIT.

Justin moves to the back of the pit and flings open double doors. A loading dock and large truck.

INT. CONCERT HALL

Beads of sweat fly from Danika's hair with the last violent strokes of Schubert.

Three seconds of silence, then tumultuous standing ovation.

Lennox speaks into his radio.

LENNOX

Justin, keep them in the dressing rooms. These three aren't leaving.

The curtain closes. Silence from the radio.

He is about to try again when he overhears the conversation of two garrulous gents in the nosebleed seats.

GENT 1

The performance was phenomenal. But I feel the sound quality was lacking after the break. Perhaps they spent too much time tuning.

GENT 2

I'll say! Who ever heard of a staged warm-up during an entr'acte?

Lennox's eyes grow wide. He rolls himself clumsily out of the box.

INT. BACKSTAGE

An usher help Lennox push open the dressing room door. They find Gus and Anthony, dead.

USHER

Oh my God. I'll get the police.

He runs. Lennox puts his hands to his temples.

JUSTIN (O.S.)

You there, Pop? You know what it feels like now? To have something taken from you?

Justin's voice comes from the radio. Lennox thumbs a button.

LENNOX
Put the girl on, Justin.

EXT. FIELD

The truck is parked in a deserted baseball field. Reinstoldt sits behind the wheel of the truck. Kim inspects the instruments in the back.

Justin hands the earpiece to Danika.

LENNOX (O.S.)
Very good, girl. You've taken back your daddy's violin. I suppose you think we're even.

DANIKA
Not quite. You took my father's hands. His future. He killed himself a year later. He had no reason to live. So now I take your reason to live.

She draws the pistol and FIRES it into Justin.

LENNOX (O.S.)
JUSTIN!

Justin drops into the dust and dandelions.

DANIKA
The name of Ziegler will live on with the violin. The name of Lennox dies now. Now we are even.

She tosses the earpiece onto Justin's chest.

INT. BACKSTAGE

Lennox throws the radio against the wall, shattering it. He weeps.

EXT. FIELD

Danika shuts Kim in the back of the truck and jumps into the passenger seat. Reinstoldt drives the truck into the sunset.

Danika pulls the violin from the back and holds it tightly, as if to strangle it.

Black.