

THE WIDOW'S MIGHT

by Richard Van Den Akker



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A Dinner Theatre Based on an Actual Art Heist

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SYNOPSIS: Elbert Johnson finds a rare and valuable object, but before he can collect on it, it is accidentally donated to a local thrift store. Dorothy Sagamore finds something that will save her thrift store and soup kitchen, but sells it before she realizes its value. Tina Clemons receives a special gift from God, but doesn't realize what it is. Part mystery and part comedy, this is a fast-paced dinner theatre where everyone wants something, but they aren't sure what. Watch as this cast of unique characters struggles to find what is really important in life, and what the term "priceless" really means.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 females, 4-6 males)

DOROTHY "DOT" SAGAMORE (f)..... Started the Widow's Mite thrift store and soup kitchen with the money her husband left her when he passed on. Dot is tough but has a tender side—never turning down someone in need, but never putting up with troublemakers, schemers, or "lazy good-for-nothings." (191 lines)

ELBERT JOHNSON (m)..... Elbert found a great treasure, only to have it taken away. He'll do anything to get it back. (98 lines)

GERALDINE WASHINGTON (f)..... Poor Geraldine started life with the deck stacked against her. No skills, no talents, no incentive. She is getting by however she can, usually by stealing. She believes she's worthless until she meets Dot. (52 lines)

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- TINA CLEMMONS (f) Dot's employee. Tina is not the sharpest pencil in the box, but she is honest and has a good heart. (90 lines)
- JESSE JAMES (m) Small-time crook, but not very talented at his life of crime. (30 lines)
- FRANK JAMES (m)..... Small-time crook, but not very talented at his life of crime. (25 lines)
- SHEILA DUNWORTH (f) Antique store owner and friend of Dot. (20 lines)
- SIMON B. WHITTLESWORTH (m)..... Art historian who is an expert on Renaissance paintings. (11 lines)
- AARON (m)..... Out-of-work security guard. Out of work because he isn't a very good security guard. (22 lines)
- DARRIN (m) Out-of-work security guard. Out of work because he isn't a very good security guard. (20 lines)

NOTE: Most male parts could be played by females. Additionally, parts may be doubled for Jesse and Frank James and Aaron and Darrin.

BACKGROUND: *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* is a painting from 1633 by the Dutch Golden Age painter Rembrandt van Rijn that was displayed in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum of Boston, Massachusetts, prior to being stolen in 1990. The painting depicts the miracle of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee, as depicted in Matthew 8:23, Mark 4:35-41, and Luke 8:22-25. It is Rembrandt's only seascape.

On the morning of March 18, 1990, two thieves disguised as police officers broke into the museum. They tied up the security guards and stole *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* and twelve other works, including rare paintings by Degas and Vermeer, valued at approximately five hundred million dollars. It is considered the biggest art theft in U.S. history and remains unsolved. The museum still displays the paintings' empty frames in their original locations.

Exactly 23 years later to the day, on March 18, 2013, the FBI announced they knew who was responsible for the crime. Criminal analysis suggested that the heist was committed by an organized crime group. As of 2019, their conclusions have not been publicized, as the investigation is ongoing.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SETTING: The entire play is set in the Widow's Mite, a small, cluttered thrift store run by Dorothy. There is a counter with a phone and a cash register Upstage Center between two doors: one leading to the street (with an open/closed sign on it) and one to Dorothy's storeroom and apartment living quarters.

There are counters filled with bric-a-brac and junk against the walls, including behind the counter. On the wall there is a painting of *Dogs Playing Poker* and a picture of the Arc of the Covenant displayed, along with a day-at-a-time calendar.

If performing as dinner theatre, you will need round tables and chairs, tablecloths, and centerpieces for your guests. Music played between each act (when the serving is taking place) is also a nice touch.

COSTUMES: Elbert Jones and Simon B. Whittlesworth should wear the nicest clothing of all the characters, denoting wealth and prestige—perhaps suits and ties or nice shirts. Geraldine Washington dresses the shabbiest to start, befitting her down-on-her-luck status. Later she combs her hair and changes into nicer clothing. Dot Sagamore, Tina Clemmons, and Sheila Dunsworth dress somewhere in the middle (casually). Jesse and Frank James could wear jeans with black T-shirts. Aaron and Darrin could wear some facsimile of a security guard uniform, or not (since they are out of work).

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PROPS

- book
- address book
- bill of sale
- bouquet of flowers
- broom
- cell phone
- two checkbooks
- deed
- five dollar bill
- foreclosure notice
- frying pan
- keys
- four poorly done watercolor paintings of the disciples and Jesus on a boat at sea inside a box wrapped in brown paper
- lava lamp
- two Tasers
- sack lunch
- pepper spray
- small box containing a whistle and a rubber band gun
- bag of marbles
- wrist rocket slingshot
- two pens
- two business cards
- large replica of *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* by Rembrandt (rolled up to start)
- bottle of Tabasco sauce
- wallet with money inside

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

The Widow's Might may be performed as a dinner theatre featuring a three or four-course meal. The dramatic action is interspersed with the dining. The following is a guideline to assist in your planning.

- Guests arrive and are seated. (Optional: appetizers on table to start.)
- Welcome
- Beverages, salad, and bread are served.
- Act I is performed
- Entrée is served.
- Act II is performed
- Dessert and coffee are served.
- Act III is performed
- Guests depart.

SUPPORT PERSONNEL: The following persons, though not part of the drama, are vital to the overall success of the evening.

KITCHEN HELPERS: Organizers and cooks to plan the menu and prepare the meal.

WAIT STAFF: Serve the meal in courses and attend to the guests' needs. They may dress alike if desired—e.g., white shirts, black pants, and black bow ties. Some groups may wish to enlist the cast as servers.

HOST/HOSTESS: Greets the guests and gives the welcome. May also assist the kitchen staff.

PASTOR: Prays before the meal and concludes the evening.

ACT ONE

AT START: *The action begins after guests are enjoying their salad and bread. The scene opens on the interior of the Widow's Mite thrift store. DOT enters from the back door, tears yesterday off of the calendar, then unlocks the front door, turning the sign to "Open." She goes behind the counter and sits back, reading a book. TINA enters through the front door.*

TINA: Good morning, Dot!

DOT: Good morning, Tina. Tina—where's your lunch?

TINA: Oh, Dot, you wouldn't believe it!

DOT: Try me.

TINA: Guess who I met on the way to work today?

DOT: Can't imagine.

TINA: Elvis!

DOT: Elvis? You met Elvis on the way to work this morning?

TINA: Yep!

DOT: Tina, Elvis died years ago. Are you sure it wasn't an Elvis impersonator?

TINA: Nope, he wasn't an Elvis impersonator. I'm not stupid, you know.

DOT: So, how did you know he wasn't an Elvis impersonator?

TINA: Because he didn't look or sound like Elvis, silly. Who'd hire an impersonator who didn't look or sound like the person he was impersonating?

DOT: So you met Elvis, only he didn't look or sound like Elvis. So how did you know he was Elvis?

TINA: He showed me his driver's license.

DOT: And it said Elvis Presley on his license?

TINA: No, of course not. (*Looking around secretively, then in a stage whisper.*) He is in the Witness Protection Program. They changed his name.

DOT: And his face, apparently. And his voice.

TINA: They do think of everything, don't they?

DOT: So they faked his death and hid him in the Witness Protection Program?

TINA: Yep.

DOT: So what does this have to do with your lunch?

TINA: Well, you know Elvis likes to eat, right? He said they were starvin' him so he couldn't be recognized. The poor guy was thin as a rail, so I gave him my lunch.

DOT: Tina, you are just too gullible. You always believe what anyone tells you.

TINA: But why would anyone lie to me?

DOT: To get your money or your car or, like today, your lunch.

TINA: Dot, do you really think he was lying to me?

DOT: Of course, dear.

TINA: I don't know. It just don't seem like something Elvis would do—lyin' to someone just to take their lunch!

DOT: OK, I give up. Enough about Elvis. Just go on in the back and sort through those donations from yesterday. I'll make sure you get some lunch today.

TINA: Anything good in there? Anything I'd like?

DOT: Honey, I couldn't begin to guess what you'd like. But if you find something you want, you set it aside and you can buy it with your employee discount, OK?

TINA: OK. Thanks.

TINA exits. DOT sits down and starts reading her book. After a few seconds GERALDINE enters dressed in rags. DOT looks up from her book.

DOT: Good morning. Anything I can help you with?

GERALDINE: Well, ma'am, I was told you could help me out.

DOT: *(Pointing at the front door.)* Sure. Right through there... same way you came in. *(Returns gaze to book.)*

GERALDINE: Excuse me.

DOT: Why? Did you burp or somethin'?

GERALDINE: *(Very confused.)* I—what?

DOT: You asked me to excuse you. What for? Did you burp or somethin'?

GERALDINE: I'm—

DOT: Not very bright? Yeah, I got that part. *(Looking up from her book.)* So, what do you want?

GERALDINE: Ma'am, I've had a hard time of it. I lost my job, and I have two children and a sick grandma to feed. If I don't get something to eat soon, I'm liable to drop dead right here!

DOT: (*Peering over the counter at the floor.*) Right here? You couldn't, maybe, move a few feet over and not block the cash register?

GERALDINE: You're joking while a woman is dying.

DOT sighs, puts down her book, comes around the counter, and pokes her in the ribs a couple times.

GERALDINE: Hey! Stop that.

DOT: You ain't gonna die. Not from hunger, anyways. What job did you lose?

GERALDINE: I-I waited tables.

DOT: Ever work a cash register?

GERALDINE: (*Sensing an opportunity to make some money.*) Yes, I can work a register.

DOT: Can't pay much. Minimum wage. Take it or leave it.

GERALDINE: Well... sure. I can start now if you like.

DOT: Nope. You can't work with customers looking like that. Pick yourself some clothes off that shelf, then go back through there. (*Pointing to the door to her living area.*) There's some soap and maybe some deodorant. Might even be a comb, if you don't mind disturbing that wildlife preserve you got there on yer head.

GERALDINE: Thanks. (*GERALDINE exits through the back door.*)

DOT: (*Going back to her seat and picking up her book.*) Con men, idiots, and crooks. Why do they always find me?

The front door opens and ELBERT JOHNSON enters.

ELBERT: Pardon me.

DOT: Why, what did you do?

ELBERT: I am looking for the proprietor.

DOT: Ain't got one.

ELBERT: No?

DOT: Just got an owner, and that's me. What do you need?

ELBERT: My name is Elbert Johnson. (*Hands her his business card.*) My housekeeper made a donation to your store. Some books and pictures.

DOT: Thanks. Much obliged.

ELBERT: You're welcome. Anyway, she inadvertently donated a painting that I am very attached to. I'll gladly buy it back.

DOT: (*Putting down her book.*) A painting? What painting?

ELBERT: A large painting of a boat in a storm.

DOT: I don't recall seeing it.

ELBERT: It was rolled up, so you may not have noticed it. If I could look through the boxes she donated, perhaps I could locate it.

DOT: My assistant is sorting through the donations now. (*Yelling.*) Tina?

TINA: (*Entering.*) Yes ma'am?

DOT: Any paintings in that box of donations?

TINA: Paintings?

DOT: You know, flat rectangular things with paint on 'em. (*Points at Dogs Playing Poker painting on the wall.*) Like that.

TINA: No. Nothing like *that*.

DOT: Tina, look me in the eye. I don't mean a *Dogs Playing Poker* painting. I mean *any* paintings. Are there any paintings at all in that pile of donations?

TINA: In the pile? No. No paintings in the pile of donations.

ELBERT: It has to be there.

DOT: (*To ELBERT.*) I'll handle this. (*To TINA.*) Tina, dear. Were there any paintings in the pile of donations *before* you took them out of the pile?

TINA looks down at her shoes.

ELBERT: She stole it!

DOT: She did not steal it. Tina is as honest as the day is long. Tina, dear, go get the painting you took from the pile.

TINA: But Dot, you said I could—

DOT: I know what I said, dear. I just want to look at it.

TINA: Yes ma'am. (*Exits.*)

ELBERT: I demand that you return my painting to me!

DOT: Hold on there, Kimosabe. No need to get all riled up. I'll take care of this.

TINA returns with a large rolled-up painting. She hands it to DOT, who unrolls it as GERALDINE returns and slips unnoticed behind the counter. It is a replica of the painting The Storm on the Sea of Galilee.

DOT: This it?

ELBERT: That's my painting! Give it back.

DOT: Your housekeeper donated it. It's not yours anymore.

ELBERT: *(Takes out his wallet and starts counting out bills.)* I'll pay one hundred dollars.

DOT: I can't sell it to you. It's already been sold.

ELBERT: To who?

DOT: To Tina. We have a deal here. If she sees something she likes in the store, she puts it aside and I sell it to her. She took the painting out of the pile of donations because she wants to buy it.

ELBERT: This is ridiculous! How much is she paying for it?

DOT: Five dollars. Paintings are ten dollars in this store, and her employee discount is fifty percent.

ELBERT: I am offering one hundred dollars. That's a lot more than five dollars. You run a soup kitchen, right? Think of how much soup you can buy for an extra ninety-five dollars!

DOT: That's not the point. It belongs to Tina now, so you have to ask her!

ELBERT: Tina, dear, wouldn't you like to make some money? Here's a new twenty dollar bill for that painting you just bought for five dollars.

DOT: You're offering her twenty?

ELBERT: It is a four hundred percent profit! That's pretty good for a couple minutes' work. Whaddaya say, Tina?

TINA: No thank you.

ELBERT: What?

DOT: She said, "No thank you."

ELBERT: OK. *(Takes more bills out of wallet.)* A hundred dollars. *(Holds money out.)* Here. Take it and give me my painting.

TINA: No! It's mine.

ELBERT: What do you want it for? Can't you use a hundred dollars?

TINA: God gave me this picture. It's mine.

ELBERT: God didn't give you this picture. A confused, can't-follow-instructions, soon-to-be-fired housekeeper that doesn't understand the words, "Stay out of my closet" gave it to you. It wasn't hers to give away, and I want it back.

DOT: Tina, what do you mean by God gave it to you?

TINA: This morning as I went through the box of donations I saw a fishing pole, and it made me sad, because of what happened when I was little. I said a prayer and asked God to help me, and then I saw the painting. He answered my prayer, and now it's mine and you can't take it away. Dot, you can't let him take it away!

DOT: I won't let him take it, Tina dear. Here. (*Rolls up the painting and hands it to TINA.*) Go put it somewhere safe, OK?

TINA: OK. (*Takes painting and exits out the back door.*)

ELBERT: That is my painting. I demand that you return it immediately!

DOT: It's hers. Can I interest you in a nice *Dogs Playing Poker* or a velvet Elvis?

ELBERT: I know my rights. I am going to contact the authorities, and they'll make you return it.

DOT: Go ahead and try.

ELBERT: (*Starts to leave, then comes back.*) By the way, what was all that about the fishing pole?

DOT: Tina's father drowned while fishing when she was only five. I guess the painting makes her feel better when she looks at it.

ELBERT: I don't understand.

DOT: Most folks don't understand how Tina's mind works, but I'm guessing that the picture of Jesus letting the disciples know that he is with them through the storm at sea reassures her that Jesus was with her dad when he died, and that everything's gonna be all right.

ELBERT: I guess that makes sense.

DOT: Now, can I ask you a question? Why do *you* want that painting so bad?

ELBERT: Uh, it's an old family heirloom. It has sentimental value.

DOT: About a hundred dollars worth, huh?

ELBERT: Can't you get her to reconsider? I will pay two hundred: one hundred for her, one hundred for you.

DOT: It ain't about the money.

ELBERT: You're barely scraping by. I bet you have trouble paying the rent here. Don't you need money?

DOT: Oh, a little more money can help. But money isn't everything. Well, you can go get your lawyers and judges and whatnot, but you are not taking that picture from Tina.

ELBERT: The court will make you give it back, and then there will be no two hundred, one hundred, or even twenty dollars for you!

DOT: Fine!

ELBERT: Fine!

ELBERT storms out.

DOT: You can come out now.

GERALDINE: What? (*Pokes her head up from behind the counter.*)
Are you talking to me?

DOT: Yes, I'm talking to you. Get out here.

GERALDINE comes around the counter.

DOT: It ain't nice to listen in on other people's conversations!

GERALDINE: I wasn't listening. I was just, uh, straightening up back there.

DOT: Lyin' ain't nice, either. Come here. Let me take a look at you.

DOT looks GERALDINE over.

DOT: Well, you are cleaner.

GERALDINE: Thanks. (*She starts to move away.*)

DOT: Not so fast. You also gained some weight.

GERALDINE: What are you talking about?

DOT reaches out and takes several items, one at a time, from GERALDINE'S pockets and places them on the counter, the items are bric-a-brac she lifted from behind the counter.

DOT: I don't allow any stealin' around here, either!

GERALDINE: How did that get there? I think—

DOT: You don't think, that's the problem. I offered you a job, and I am very good to my employees. And how do you repay me? Stealin'!

GERALDINE: I'm sorry. I-I guess old habits are hard to break.

DOT: Those old habits are the ones that need breaking the most!

GERALDINE: I apologize.

DOT glares at GERALDINE, who eventually hangs her head in resignation and heads toward the door to the street.

DOT: Where are you goin'?

GERALDINE: I thought you didn't allow stealing.

DOT: I don't allow quittin' early, either!

GERALDINE: I assumed I was fired.

DOT: The Lord forgave me all my transgressions. It'd be pretty selfish of me not to forgive others. Get back to work. (*GERALDINE heads for the cash register.*) Nope. Go help Tina price the donations and put them on the shelves. I ain't lettin' you near the register just yet. I may forgive, but I ain't about to throw temptation in yer face.

GERALDINE: OK. (*Starts to exit.*) I just wanna say that no one ever trusted me—not even a little. Thanks.

DOT: Don't thank me. Just do your work and we'll be fine. I don't care what you did. From this point forward, you stay on the straight and narrow. Understand? Now, git!

GERALDINE exits. DOT goes behind the counter, props her feet up, and opens her book.

DOT: Con men, idiots, and crooks. Why do they always find me?

As Act One ends, the meal continues. The salad plates are cleared, the main course is served, and beverages are refilled.

ACT TWO

AT START: *The action begins when all the guests have been served the main course. Scene opens on the interior of the Widows Mite thrift store. GERALDINE enters from back with a broom and starts sweeping the store. After a second ELBERT enters carrying flowers and a large rectangular package wrapped in brown paper.*

ELBERT: Excuse me, ma'am, is the owner here?

GERALDINE: Miz Dorothy? Yeah, she's in back.

ELBERT: May I speak with her?

GERALDINE: Sure.

GERALDINE goes back to sweeping, Eventually ELBERT clears his throat. GERALDINE looks up.

GERALDINE: Now what?

ELBERT: Can you go get her, please?

GERALDINE: Sheesh—do I have to do everything around here?
(She drops the broom with a sigh and resignedly heads toward the back door.)

GERALDINE: *(Yelling.)* Hey Dot, someone's out here lookin' for ya!

ELBERT: Well, I coulda done *that!*

GERALDINE: Then why didn't you? *(She picks up the broom and goes back to sweeping.)*

DOT enters followed by TINA. TINA is holding a lava lamp.

TINA: Are you sure it's safe?

DOT: I told you, dear, it ain't real lava. You can go ahead and plug it in. It won't hurt you.

TINA: I'm allergic to third-degree burns.

DOT: So is everyone else, dear. You'll be fine. Go ahead.

During the following dialogue, TINA is cautiously plugging the lamp in and turning it on, surprised that it doesn't start a fire. She holds her hands out to feel the heat and stares at the lamp in wonder.

DOT: Oh, it's you again. Where's your lawyer?

ELBERT: Ma'am, I would like to humbly apologize about our meeting yesterday. I believe we got off on the wrong foot. Allow me to make amends.

DOT: *(A little bewildered.)* You can say amens all you want. I still ain't making Tina give you that painting!

ELBERT: My dear, you misconstrue my intentions.

DOT: I did what to your whats now?

ELBERT: I am not here to take the painting. I understand that what is hers is hers, and she shall not be forced to give it up. *(Holding out the flowers.)* These are for you.

DOT: *(Eying the flowers with suspicion.)* You got me flowers?

ELBERT: Call it a peace offering. I apologize for my actions yesterday.

DOT takes the flowers.

DOT: Tina, go put these in some water, please.

TINA: Yes ma'am. *(TINA takes the flowers and exits. As she passes the lava lamp, she eyes it suspiciously and gives it a wide berth.)*

DOT: So what are you up to?

ELBERT: Just a friendly visit. I wanted to make sure everything from yesterday is behind us so we can start fresh.

DOT: Right. I trust you about as far as I can throw you. And if you pull anything funny, you'll see just how far that is!

ELBERT: You misjudge me.

DOT: What's in the package?

ELBERT: This? Oh, nothing. I was just doing some shopping on the way here.

DOT: Really?

TINA returns.

ELBERT: Would you care to see what I bought? *(Starts opening package.)* You know, I was a little upset about losing that painting yesterday.

DOT: Here we go.

ELBERT: But today I found some that are even better!

ELBERT opens the package, which contains some paintings of the disciples on a boat in the stormy sea. They are hastily done watercolors he apparently had made for this occasion.

ELBERT: Very nice, don't you think?

TINA: Ohhhh! Colorful!

ELBERT: Yes, quite. You know, I sort of like these better than that old picture from yesterday. I think these are so much nicer—don't you, Terri?

DOT: It's Tina, and if you're trying to get her to trade—

TINA: I really do like them. Aren't they nice, Dot?

DOT: Something smells.

GERALDINE: I took a bath this morning!

DOT: Not you. Him!

ELBERT: What do you mean?

DOT: If these pictures are so wonderful, why do you want to trade them for that old picture?

ELBERT: That old picture has sentimental value. It has been in my family for years!

DOT: It has? Years, you say? Which way is the boat facing in that old picture?

ELBERT: (*Fudging.*) It is facing... the shore.

DOT: There is no shore in that painting!

TINA: May I say something?

DOT: Why do you really want that picture? Is it valuable?

TINA: I have something to say.

ELBERT: Of course not. It has been in my family for years.

TINA: (*Yelling.*) Listen to me! (*They stop talking and look at TINA.*) Thank you. I really like those pictures. They are very pretty.

ELBERT: Well, I will trade them all for that one painting from yesterday.

DOT: Don't do it, Tina.

TINA: I'm not done! Thank you. I do like them, but I am not going to trade, thank you very much.

ELBERT: Why not?

TINA: Because God wanted me to have the other picture. He gave it to me for a reason, and I don't know why, but it must be important or he wouldn't have given it to me.

ELBERT: I'll give you five hundred dollars for it.

TINA: No.

ELBERT: OK, then, a thousand. Take it or leave it!

TINA: I'll leave it.

DOT: You heard her. Hit the road.

ELBERT: Look, I'm a reasonable man. What do you want?

DOT: I want you to leave.

ELBERT: Not you—her.

TINA: I want everyone to stop fighting over the picture.

DOT: What?

TINA: All this arguing and fighting. Just stop it. It's just an old picture. It's mine. Just leave me alone and stop trying to get me to give it to you!

TINA storms off through the back exit, close to tears.

ELBERT: *(Yelling after TINA.)* Not give—sell! I want to buy it!

DOT: Geraldine, get the phone.

GERALDINE: Why? The phone's not ringing.

DOT: No, get the phone because you need to call an ambulance.

GERALDINE: Uh, what's the number for nine one one?

ELBERT: Now listen here—

DOT raises a large frying pan. ELBERT takes a step back.

DOT: Look, sonny, you don't want me to part your hair with this, do you?

ELBERT: *(Backing up.)* No need for violence. *(Gathering the pictures and wrapping, he accidentally leaves one picture behind.)* Let's just be calm about this.

DOT: Tina's got nobody in the world but me, understand? And I am going to protect her any way necessary, so if you don't beat it, I'll beat it for you!

ELBERT: Couldn't we just—

DOT raises the pan as ELBERT hurriedly exits.

GERALDINE: You OK, Dot?

DOT: Yeah. Go check on Tina. I need to make a call.

GERALDINE: To who?

DOT: Someone who knows about art and paintings and all that. There's something odd about that picture, and I'm gonna find out what it is!

GERALDINE: OK.

GERALDINE exits as DOT places the painting ELBERT left behind the counter. Then DOT flips through an address book and dials the phone.

DOT: Sheila? This is Dot. *(Pause.)* Same to you. Say, I got a painting here that may be valuable. Can you come take a look? *(Pause.)* I don't know, Jesus and his disciples on a boat or something. You'll see it when you get here. It looks pretty old. *(Pause.)* OK, thanks! *(DOT hangs up the phone.)*

FRANK and JESSE enter the front door.

DOT: Good afternoon. May I help you gentlemen?

FRANK: You sure can. We's art collectors.

JESSE: And we's here to collect some art, so no funny business.

Both draw Tasers.

FRANK: Where's the otha two?

DOT: *(Pointing at the Taser.)* What is that?

JESSE: A Taser. And if you don't cooperate, you'll get the shock of your life.

DOT: *(Putting her hands in the air.)* OK, OK.

FRANK: So where are the other two?

DOT: What other two? I'm here alone.

JESSE: And I'm the King of England. Check out back, Frank.

FRANK: Ontday useay imay ealray amenay!

JESSE: What?

FRANK: Ontday useay imay ealray amenay!

JESSE: Oh, no! He's having a stroke!

FRANK: I am not having a stroke. (*Stage whisper.*) I am speaking in Pig Latin.

JESSE: I don't know any Latin. It's all Greek to me.

FRANK: (*Stage whisper.*) I said, don't use my real name!

JESSE: Oh! Sorry, Frrrr-ed, Fred. Sorry, Fred.

FRANK: Just keep an eye on her while I get the other two.

JESSE: You got it, boss! OK, sister. You just stay right there and you won't get hurt.

FRANK: And don't talk to her.

JESSE: No?

FRANK: No! Remember last time?

JESSE: What last time?

FRANK: The last time we were on a job and you were supposed to just clean out the cash register?

JESSE: Oh, I remember.

FRANK: And then you took that beer?

JESSE: I was thirsty!

FRANK: It's OK that you stole the beer. That's what we do. But when the cashier asked for your ID to see if you were over twenty-one, you actually gave it to her.

JESSE: Can you believe that? She thought I was a teenager! Must be my natural good looks and charm!

FRANK: She just wanted to see your name and address on your license so she could call the cops, you dope! What's the point of wearing disguises if you're going to show your ID to the victims?

JESSE: You're just jealous.

FRANK: You're lucky you didn't end up in jail. Please—no more conversations with the victims, OK?

JESSE: OK, OK. I'll keep quiet. No talking to the hostage here. Satisfied?

FRANK: Fine. I'll be right back.

FRANK exits to the back.

DOT: So, what do you two want?

JESSE: Be quiet. I'm not supposed to talk to you. I ain't showing you my ID!

DOT: OK. I guess it would be pointless to talk to you anyway.

JESSE: That's right.

DOT: Since you're just a lowly errand boy.

JESSE: A what?

DOT: Well, it's obvious that Frank—sorry, Fred—is the brains, and you just do what he says.

JESSE: Fred is not the brains. I do a lot of the thinking too, you know.

DOT: Sure, sure. But of course Fred will get all the credit for getting the painting. And you? Well, I guess you're used to being second banana by now.

JESSE: I ain't no second banana! I'm the first banana. I can get that painting myself!

DOT: Really?

JESSE: Yep. I don't need Frank—um, Fred—to tell me what to do. Now, where is that painting?

DOT: Well! I guess I underestimated you, then. I guess you *are* in charge.

JESSE: That's right! So hand over the painting.

DOT: Sure thing. It's right here, behind the counter.

DOT backs away pointing as JESSE looks behind the counter, reaches back, and takes the painting.

JESSE: So this is what all the fuss is about, huh?

DOT: Yep. Go ahead, take it.

JESSE: Well, well, well! Won't Frank—uh, Fred—be surprised when he finds out I got the painting all by myself?

TINA and GERALDINE return with their hands up, followed by FRANK.

TINA: Dottie, he says I have to give him the picture or he'll shock us with that laser thing. Do I have to?

DOT: It's OK, Tina. Be quiet. I'll handle this.

FRANK: OK, last chance. Tell me where the painting is, or I'll zap these two.

JESSE: I got it right here, Frrrr-ed, right here.

FRANK: Let me see that.

JESSE hands the painting to FRANK, who looks it over.

FRANK: Jesus, the disciples, boat, storm. Yep, this is it, all right.

TINA: That's not—

DOT: *(Quickly.)* Yours. She is saying it doesn't belong to you. *(To TINA.)* Be quiet, dear. Let me handle this, OK?

TINA: But—

DOT: Shush!

JESSE: I found it! Myself. I am not just a second banana, you know.

FRANK: OK, just stop talking, all right?

JESSE: Won't Mr. Johnson be impressed!

FRANK: On'tday useay amesnay!

JESSE: Again with the Greek!

FRANK: Don't say any names. Don't say anything, OK? Let's just take the painting and go!

JESSE: Sorry.

FRANK: OK, we're leaving. Don't no one do anything stupid!

DOT: *(Aside.)* Too late.

FRANK: No callin' the cops or anything, and no one gets hurt!

JESSE, trying to hold the Taser and painting while backing out the door, hits himself with the door while opening it.

JESSE: Ow!

FRANK: *(Looking back at JESSE.)* OK, starting now, no one gets hurt.

They back out the door with their Tasers drawn. DOT runs up and locks the door behind them.

DOT: That was close!

TINA: But that was the wrong painting! Didn't they want the other one? The one God gave me?

DOT: No, dear, they came back to get the painting that the other guy left by mistake.

GERALDINE: So whadda we do now?

DOT: I'm gonna hire some muscle to come watch this place till we get this figured out. I have a couple big guys that come to the soup kitchen that can help. They used to be security guards or something.

There's a knock on the door.

GERALDINE: They're back! They must have figured out we gave them the wrong painting.

DOT: Sure, right after they finished a crash course in art appreciation.

DOT goes to the peep hole and looks out, then opens the door. SHEILA enters.

DOT: Sheila!

SHEILA: Dorothy. Why are you closed so early?

DOT: Long story. *(To TINA.)* Tina, dear, go get your painting so Sheila can look at it, OK?

TINA: Sure. Hi, Ms. Sheila.

SHEILA: Hi, Tina.

TINA exits.

SHEILA: So, what's the story?

DOT: We get a painting in a box of donations. Then this guy comes in and says it was donated by accident and tries to buy it back. He offered as much as one thousand dollars!

SHEILA: So why didn't you take the money? Are you thinking it's worth more, so you're gonna try to find another buyer?

DOT: No. I already sold it to Tina, and she doesn't want to sell it.

TINA returns with the painting and hands it to SHEILA, who unrolls it and looks at it.

SHEILA: Wow! This is quite a find. I'm no expert, but I think I may have seen this painting before.

DOT: Really?

SHEILA: It looks like a Rembrandt. See that guy in the blue, right there in the middle? He looks like Rembrandt. He painted himself into many of his paintings.

DOT: A Rembrandt, huh? It must be worth a lot!

SHEILA: If it's real. There are a lot of fakes and forgeries out there.

DOT: How can you tell if it is real?

SHEILA: I can't, but I know someone who can. May I take it to show him?

TINA: No!

SHEILA: I will only keep it for a few days.

TINA: No. I need it!

DOT: For what?

TINA: It helps me. It just makes me feel safe.

DOT: Can you get your expert to come here?

SHEILA: To see a Rembrandt? He'll get here as fast as he can!

DOT: Well, make it happen as soon as possible. I'll hire some bodyguards to keep it safe. Tina, go hide this really, really well, and don't tell anyone where it is.

SHEILA: Wait a second. Hold it up so I can take a photo of it to send to the expert.

TINA and GERALDINE hold up the painting while SHEILA takes a picture with her cell phone.

DOT: Now go hide it.

TINA: OK.

TINA exits with the painting.

SHEILA: I'll let you know what he says.

DOT: Geraldine, lock this door and don't let anyone in. I'll be back in a few minutes with some security guards.

GERALDINE: OK.

SHEILA and DOT exit and GERALDINE locks up. She then goes behind the counter, props her feet up, and opens a book.

GERALDINE: Guess it's gonna be a slow sales day today, what with the door locked and all.

Act Two ends. The entrée dishes are cleared and dessert and coffee are served.

ACT THREE

AT START: *The action begins when all the guests have been served coffee and dessert. Scene opens on interior of the Widow's Mite thrift store. DOT enters from back door and changes the date on the calendar. There is a loud knocking on the front door.*

DOT: Who is it?

GERALDINE: Geraldine and Tina. Let us in.

DOT unlocks and opens the door, letting them in. Then she relocks the door.

GERALDINE: Why are you locking the door? Ain't it time to open?

DOT: Not until the security gets here. Tina, go get the painting and put it behind the counter. The art guy will be here soon to look at it.

TINA: He can't have it. It's mine!

DOT: Of course, dear, but we need to know more about it.

TINA: I know God gave it to me. That's all I need to know!

DOT: Fine, dear. Just go get it so he can look at it, then you can take it back.

TINA leaves to get the painting, and then there is a patterned knock on the door, like some sort of secret code.

DOT: Oh, brother. Is that you, Aaron?

AARON: You need to do the code knock like we discussed yesterday so I'll know it's you!

DOT: About time you guys got here.

DOT unlocks and opens the door, letting them in. AARON is carrying a small box and DARRIN is carrying a sack lunch.

AARON: You didn't do the code knock!

DOT: I said we weren't doing that.

DARRIN: We can't tell who it is without the code knock. How do we know this is really the thrift store if you don't do the code knock?

DOT: Maybe the sign out front is a clue. Are you guys ready?

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TINA returns with the rolled-up painting. She places it behind the counter.

AARON: Where's the money?

DARRIN: Yeah. Cash first.

DOT: We discussed this already. I'll pay you each five dollars an hour, but only after the art guy gets here and tells us what is going on, OK?

AARON: You ain't tryin' to gyp us, are you?

DARRIN: Yeah, we ain't your average run-of-the-mill fools, ya know!

DOT: Of course not. Not *average* fools, anyway. Just guard the store for a few hours, and you'll get paid.

AARON: OK.

DOT: What's in the bag?

DARRIN: Our lunch.

DOT: And the box?

AARON: You said to come armed, didn't you? Well, we got weapons.

DOT: Weapons? Let's see.

AARON: OK, feast your eyes on this.

AARON takes out a police whistle.

AARON: Yeah, just look at this baby!

DOT: Wait a minute—a whistle? You have got to be kidding!

AARON: We also have this!

AARON takes a rubber band gun out of the box.

AARON: And I got ammo too! Some real big rubber bands too!

DOT: Anything else?

AARON looks into the box.

AARON: A canteen, a compass, and a pocketknife.

GERALDINE: (*Sarcastically.*) Great. Now we're all ready to go camping.

DOT goes behind the counter and gets a wrist rocket slingshot and some pepper spray. She comes around the counter and hands the slingshot to AARON and the pepper spray to DARRIN.

DOT: Here.

They hold the weapons a second, then look at what the other has. AARON takes the pepper spray from DARRIN, who takes the slingshot. They then hold the new weapons a few seconds, rethink their options, and trade again. After a second AARON reaches for the pepper spray, but DOT steps between them.

DOT: OK, that's enough. Darrin, go put your lunch in the fridge. When you come back, guard the front door. Aaron, you guard the counter.

DARRIN goes out the back door and AARON stands in front of the counter practicing his quick draw, trying various "holsters"—his pants pocket, his belt, and behind his back. He knocks the phone off the counter with one draw and then manages to drop the slingshot during another draw.

DOT: Here is some ammo. *(Takes out a bag of marbles and hands it to AARON.)*

AARON: *(Looking in the bag.)* There's a couple of steelies in there... and a few big ones!

DOT: Just don't waste ammo. *(Looks around the store.)* If you shoot at them, try to aim towards the door. There's a lot less to break that way.

As AARON plays with the slingshot, DARRIN returns without the pepper spray but holding a bottle of Tabasco sauce and stands by the door. He puts the Tabasco in his belt like it is a holster, then rubs his eyes and blinks like they are irritated.

DOT: Uh, Darrin, did we lose something?

DARRIN: Well—

DOT: What happened?

DARRIN: lthhhh not my fault.

DOT: Where is the pepper spray?

DARRIN: Well, I put my lunthh in the fridge, and then I got kinda hungry, thoo I took out one of the thandwiches...well, I like my food kinda spithy, tho I put thome pepper sthpray on it.

DOT: Darrin, it's not that kind of pepper!

DARRIN: You're telling me! One bite, and powie!

DOT: So what happened to the pepper spray?

DARRIN: Well, I couldn't eat it! It burned my tongue. (*Pulls out tongue with fingers.*) Theeee? lth'ss all burned!

DOT: Please put that away. So what happened to the pepper spray?

DARRIN: I guess I uthed a bit too much. It wath all gone. But I did find thome Tabathco! It thould work jutht ath good.

DOT: You wasted the entire pepper spray on a sandwich? That was brand new!

DARRIN: That remindth me—don't go in the kitchen! It hurth the eyeth.

DOT: Just guard the door. I'll be right back. And stay out of trouble! Come on, Geraldine.

GERALDINE: Why me?

DOT: To help me open windows and ventilate the kitchen. We serve lunch in a couple hours.

GERALDINE: OK.

DOT and GERALDINE exit. ELBERT enters the store.

AARON: Hold it! Who are you?

ELBERT: I'm Elbert Johnson. Who are you?

DARRIN: We're asking the questions here!

AARON: State your name and business.

ELBERT: As I said, I'm Elbert Johnson, and my business is none of your business!

DARRIN: Is that so?

AARON: If you don't tell me what business you have here, we ain't lettin' you in!

ELBERT: My business is my own business, so you just mind your business.

DARRIN: He's trying to give you the business!

AARON: Just tell us why you're here.

ELBERT: Please stand aside and quit bothering me.

AARON: Look, pal, we're bodyguards, see? But we are not responsible for *your* body, so beat it before it gets beaten for you!

DARRIN: That's tellin' him!

ELBERT: Fine. I am here to talk to Theresa. *(Points at TINA.)*

TINA: Tina.

ELBERT: Whatever. I want to talk to you.

TINA: You can't have the painting.

ELBERT: I just wanted to ask you a question. You read the Bible, don't you?

TINA: Yes.

ELBERT: So, what does the Bible say about helping other people?

TINA: That you should always help someone in need.

ELBERT: And what does it say about worldly possessions and riches?

TINA: That you shouldn't be too attached to them.

ELBERT: I thought you should know that I bought this building yesterday. And I noticed that your friend Dorothy is six months behind on the rent. Soooo.... I guess I'll just have to foreclose on the thrift store and the soup kitchen.

TINA: No!

ELBERT: So here's the real question: would you be willing to part with a "material possession" like that painting to help a friend in need?

TINA: You can't close the soup kitchen and the store!

ELBERT: *(Taking some papers out of his pocket.)* I can. I have right here the foreclosure notice. I just have to sign it and call the sheriff. You'll be thrown out on the street.

TINA: No!

ELBERT: *(Takes out more papers with his other hand, holding up a set of papers in each hand.)* On the other hand, I have here a bill of sale for the building in exchange for the painting, which I am prepared to sign. Which will it be?

TINA: You can't close the soup kitchen!

ELBERT: It's up to you, isn't it? Your choice.

TINA: Oh, what do I do? I need to ask Dot.



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WIDOW'S MIGHT

by Richard Van Den Akker.

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