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SF PERUSALS

ART HEIST

By Jack Bradfield and Poltergeist

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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ISBN 978-0-573-11677-3

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Cover artwork by © Guy J Sanders, Keeper Studio

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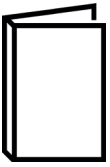

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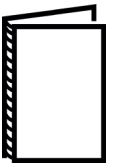

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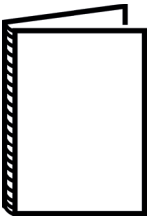

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ABOUT THE COMPANY

Poltergeist make joyful, inclusive theatre with an experimental edge. We push the boundaries of structure and form, break rules and tackle big, difficult ideas. We stage risk. We play games. Sometimes, we dance.

We are an Associate Company at The North Wall, Oxford. We are also founder members of Staging Change, a new environmental movement in the arts.

ART HEIST

Art Heist was first performed at the Edinburgh Fringe 2019.

Writer/Director Jack Bradfield
Deviser/Performers Alice Boyd, Rosa Garland, Will Spence and Serena Yagoub
Producer Charles Pidgeon
Designer Shankho Chaudhuri
Lighting Designer Lucy Adams
Sound Designer Alice Boyd
Assistant Producer/Costume Designer Georgia Crump

Produced in association with The North Wall.
Supported by New Diorama / Underbelly Untapped Award and Arts Council England.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

"What you see is all there is."
– Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast And Slow* (2011)

On 20 August 1911 an Italian workman broke into the Louvre and hid in a cupboard overnight. Early the following morning, he removed the Mona Lisa from its frame and walked calmly out of the museum.

In 1911, barely anyone had heard of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*. In fact, twenty-four hours passed before anyone noticed it was missing. When the theft was eventually reported, the painting appeared on the front page of every newspaper in Europe. Within days, this previously unremarkable portrait had become the most famous and valuable artwork on the planet.

The *Mona Lisa* became valuable because of the story we told about it. Life is chaotic and arbitrary. The universe is a mess. Yet as human beings we are hard-wired to seek pattern, story and meaning, often where none exists. Most of us, most of the time, find reasons to get up, work, love, argue, create and destroy; at a cosmic level this makes no sense at all. So, as we hurtle towards an uncertain environmental and political future, with the age-old existential questions still looming (Why am I here? What happens next?), why do we find it so easy to believe in so much?

Back in the 1980s', psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky proved the human brain isn't the rational machine we like to think it is. Instead of taking time to weigh up data, or consider the facts, they argued, it prefers to substitute an answer as quickly as possible. A "System One" response. Take surgery: patients are more likely to go under the knife if they're told that the survival rate is 90 per cent, rather than if they're told of a 10 per cent mortality risk. If we've successfully robbed a gallery once, we're more likely to think we'll get away with it again. Even after we've been presented with the facts, it's a struggle to substitute an instinctive belief for a reasoned one. When an idea has been framed one way, it's difficult to swap that frame out for a new one.

In 1994, at Frankfurt's Schirn Kunsthalle, a group of thieves stole two Turners on loan from the Tate. For some reason they passed over several much more valuable paintings hanging in the same room. Sandy Nairne, the then programme director at the Tate, has many theories as to why the Turners were targeted – the most likely being that they featured as the poster image for the exhibition. Once the thieves had processed this piece of visual information, it proved hard to shift.

Art Heist is a show about an art heist. Three thieves break into the same gallery on the same night. To them, nothing is more important than their own story. An audience can see, however, that they're ignoring a few major details. Indeed, that's how farce works. It's about how the brain curates the world, and how it gets it wrong. *Art Heist* is sneaking around in that territory, and asking a few extra questions: what happens when we put a frame around something? What happens when we hang it in a certain room, give it a title and label it? We make these calls so often, and so quickly, we barely see ourselves doing it. We create value without meaning to. We create meaning without meaning to. In the end, do we ever see the chaos for what it is?

Art Heist is asking if we can live in the mess. If we can see the mess for what it is. I'm writing this in the form of a play text, complete with a structure, a title and a price. I suppose we can't help but tidy up.

Jack Bradfield, 2019

BIOS

Jack Bradfield – Writer/Director
Jack is a writer and artistic director of Poltergeist. He trained on the Royal Court Writers' Group 2017, and is a resident director at the Almeida Theatre. Previous work as writer and director includes: *Lights Over Tesco Car Park* (national tour); *Garden* (The North Wall); *The White Guard* by Mikhail Bulgakov in a new version (Albion Beatnik Bookstore); and *xx (kiss kiss)* (Edinburgh Fringe).

Alice Boyd – Performer/Sound Designer/Deviser
Alice is an actor, musician and environmental campaigner based in London and Bristol. Credits include: *Lights Over Tesco Car Park* (Edinburgh Fringe); *The White Guard* (Albion Beatnik Bookstore); and *xx (kiss kiss)* (Edinburgh Fringe). Alice has also composed both live music and sound design for performance, including *Art Heist*, *Lights Over Tesco Car Park* and Poltergeist's *Garden* (The North Wall). Alice works with Poltergeist as its sustainability manager, with the aim to reduce the company's environmental impact and campaign for a greener industry. She is founder and co-director of the sustainable theatre network, Staging Change.

Rosa Garland – Performer/Deviser
Rosa is an actor and theatre-maker, based in London and represented by the Actors' Creative Team. Her previous work with Poltergeist includes: *Lights Over Tesco Car Park* (national tour); *Garden* (The North Wall); and *The White Guard* (Albion Beatnik Bookstore). Other previous acting work includes: *Edward II* (Oxford Playhouse); *Bacchae* (Edinburgh Fringe); and Sleepless Theatre's *The Master and Margarita* (Edinburgh Fringe). She has trained at Identity School of Acting and London Clown School.

Will Spence – Performer/Deviser
Will is a theatre-maker, performer, and poet from Manchester. Credits as theatre-maker and performer for Poltergeist include: *xx (kiss kiss)* (Edinburgh Fringe); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Michael Pilch Studio); *The White Guard* (Albion Beatnik Bookshop); *Lights Over Tesco Car Park* (Edinburgh Fringe); as dramaturg, *Garden* (The North Wall). Other stage work

includes: *The Tree of War* (Burnage); *The Fairy Queen* (Oxford Playhouse); *Cold / Warm* (Burton Taylor Studio). Film work includes *Pomegranate* (Requiem Pictures, short). As a poet, he has performed as part of HOME's Viva Festival 2019, as well as at Young Identity's *One Mic Stand*.

Serena Yagoub – Performer/Deviser
Serena is an actor and producer currently based in London and Paris. Her acting credits include: *xx (kiss kiss)* (Edinburgh Fringe); *Pentecost* (Oxford Playhouse), *Cold Warm* (Oxford New Writing Festival); and short film *GOLEM* (winner, Earl's Court Film Festival 2018). Serena has produced productions of *Constellations* (Keble O'Reilly) and *Orphans* (Michael Pilch) for the Experimental Theatre Club, and Quicksandance's *Ten Duets on a Theme of Proximity* (Burton Taylor), as well as producing several short films (Oxford Screenwriting Festival 2015 & 2016), and Khartoum's music video "Save Me" (released by Kodak in 2018). Production manager credits include the short film *A Battle in Waterloo* (winner, Bumble Female Film Force 2018), music videos for Universal Music (2019), commercial content for Nike, Sony Music, Renault, deGrisogono and Elie Saab, as well as extensive events film coverage including the Paris Fintech Forum 2019. Serena was recently producer on the *Off-White* and *French Deal* SS20 shows during Paris Fashion Week.

Charles Pidgeon – Producer
Charles is a producer, theatre-maker, and writer. As producer of Poltergeist, he produced the Edinburgh Fringe sell-out show, *Lights Over Tesco Car Park* (national tour) as well as *Garden* (The North Wall, 2017) and *The White Guard* (Albion Beatnik Bookstore, 2017). As a writer he has contributed to *Voiceworks*, *The Isis* and *Cherwell*.

Georgia Crump – Assistant Producer
Georgia is a freelance producer and production manager. With Poltergeist, Georgia produced *xx (kiss kiss)* (Edinburgh Fringe) and production managed *Garden* (The North Wall) and *The White Guard* (Albion Beatnik Bookstore).

Shankho Chaudhuri – Designer
Shankho is a London-based designer working in the multidisciplinary intersection between technology and performing art. Trained first as a mechanical engineer (Imperial College London), then as a designer (Royal College of Art / Imperial College London), his thesis was a speculative project exploring augmented-reality set design. His professional design work began with *White Noise* (VAULT Festival) and *Wood* (VAULT Festival). He joins Poltergeist as a set and video designer. In September 2019 he will begin as a production design assistant at the National Theatre.

Lucy Adams – Lighting Designer
Lucy is a London-based lighting designer working in devised work and new writing. She's an associate artist with ThisEgg, having designed *Goggles*, *Me and My Bee*, *UNCONDITIONAL* and *dressed* (Fringe First Award winner) for the company. She's also worked with BREACH Theatre on *It's True, It's True, It's True* (Fringe First Award winner), Barrel Organ on *Anyone's Guess How We Got Here* (Edinburgh Fringe), YESYESNONO on *[insert slogan here]* (Edinburgh Fringe), Willy Hudson on *Bottom* (Edinburgh Fringe and Soho Theatre), Haley McGee on *Ex-Boyfriend Yard Sale* (Camden People's Theatre) and Paula Varjack on *Cult of K*nzo* (UK tour). Her lighting design for new writing includes *Skin A Cat* (UK tour), *One Jewish Boy* (Old Red Lion), *A Hundred Words for Snow* (VAULT Festival and Trafalgar Studios) and *The Amber Trap* (Theatre503).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We'd like to thank Sandy Nairne, former director of the National Portrait Gallery for his sage insights, support, and encyclopaedic knowledge of art heists. Our top advice? Don't break into the National Portrait Gallery, you've got no idea who or what you're dealing with.

Robert Gibbon at Christie's, who gave us the low down on managing one of the world's most famous private galleries (but refused to give us the code to the vault).

Steven Atkinson and the team at HighTide, who have supported and mentored us for two years now, and have been such kind guides.

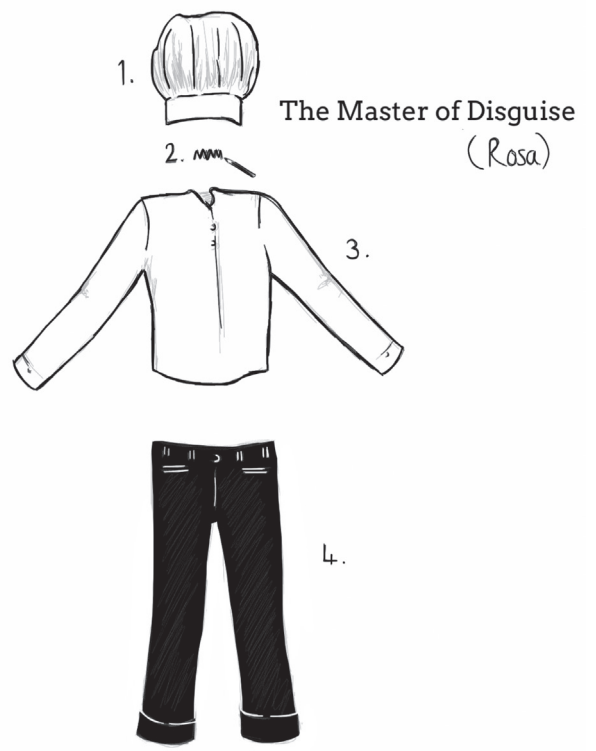
Aisling Galligan, Matt Keeler, Marina Dixon and the team at Underbelly, for bringing *Art Heist* to Edinburgh this year. Thanks to them the Fringe is everything it's meant to be, creating opportunities for artists from every discipline.

Sam South and the Almeida Theatre for opening up the rehearsal room and letting us experiment. Also to Sam for his expert help on *Art Heist*: The Game.

David Byrne, Helen Matravers, Caroline Simonsen, Jack Heaton, and everyone at New Diorama, without whom none of this would be possible. They spotted us early on, and gave us mentorship, support and friendship. It feels very special to be part of the NDT family.

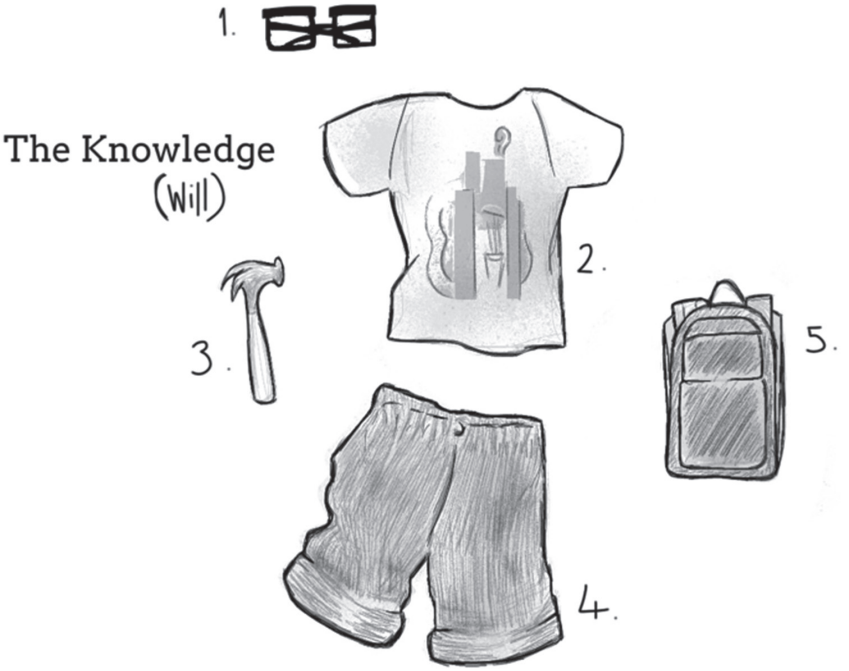
Finally we'd like to thank The North Wall. This regional venue is doing something unbelievable for the country's theatre ecosystem. The theatre-makers who've passed through the building have had their lives changed by artistic directors John Hoggarth and Ria Parry. We are so lucky to be creative associates here, and consider ourselves their friends. The North Wall's generosity made *Art Heist* happen. John, Ria, Amy, Sherrell, Maria, thank you, we couldn't have done it without you.

CHARACTERS



The Professional
(Serena)

The Knowledge
(Will)



1.

The Guard
(Alice)

2.

3.

***Les Choristes*, 1887**

An empty frame.

A few white plinths.

ALICE, *a security guard, sat behind a desk.*

There is a microphone at the desk.

Three duffel bags are at the front of the stage, labelled: **SERENA, ROSA, WILL.**

The thieves enter, and stand behind their respective bags.

They are wearing white vests and boxers.

ALICE *Art Heist.*

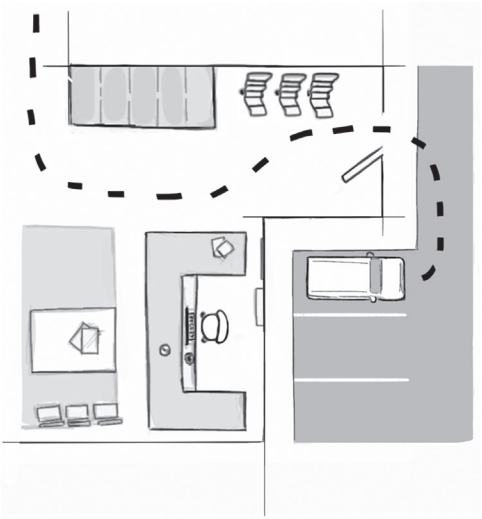
She presses a button.

Music.

The thieves open the duffel bags and get changed frantically.

ROSA *into a catering outfit,* **SERENA** *into a stealth suit,* **WILL** *into T-shirt, shorts and cap.*

The Service Entrance, 2019



ALICE Okay Rosa, what's your name?

ROSA Rosa—

ALICE No, you have to come up with a *thief name*.

ROSA Okay. Er. Rosa Burgle.

ALICE To the point. I like it.

It's the night of the heist. Rosa Burgle is all alone.

Where do you start?

ROSA *is finding the story as she speaks.*

ROSA I'm outside the service entrance.

ALICE Yep. Give me more.

ROSA It's a cold night, it's raining, and I'm standing on cobblestones.

I look down and I'm dressed head to toe like a canteen chef.

Studies show it takes thirty seconds to trust a woman, but only five to trust a man.

She draws a moustache on her face with a make-up pencil.

How do I look?

ALICE It's like you're a different person!

ROSA That's right. I'm a master of disguise.

ALICE I love it. Now, backstory.

ROSA Every night I'm out taking risks:

There I am disguised as an usher getting free cinema tickets.

Then I'm dressed as a lifeguard. Free swim.

Now I'm at the self-checkout paying for a regular croissant when it's actually an almond croissant.

In that situation the croissant is disguised.

ALICE What's the motive?

ROSA You know how people fall in love with random objects?

Like the woman who dated a train station.

Or that guy who married a Nintendo DS?

That's what's happened to me and this painting.

ALICE Are you sure about that?

ROSA I was at the gallery last week at a work drinks.

And I was talking to someone important but they were...

So.

Boring.

And then I turned and saw her.

At the end of a long corridor.

The painting.

I spent the rest of the night pressed up at the Tensa barrier, just staring at her.

And I know if I just had her, I'd be happier.

All of my problems at home and at work would just disappear.

ALICE There's a metallic "cling" to your left.

It's a two pence coin.

ROSA *picks it up.*

ROSA Suddenly I feel a bit nervous.

Maybe I could...

Okay, heads, I go in.

Tails, I go home.

She flips it.

ALICE It rolls into a grating on the street.

ROSA Fine. I knock on the door.

ALICE It's a buzzer.

ROSA Okay, I buzz on the door—

Buzz.

ALICE And the security guard answers.

ALICE *is the security guard.*

Hello?

ROSA, *in an appalling French accent:*

ROSA *Hello. I am ze chef. I left my phone charger.*

ALICE *You know, you're not meant to be here after hours.*

ROSA *I'll... make you a sandwich?*

ALICE *Really? Okay, go right in!*

She buzzes **ROSA** *through!*

ROSA I deeply regret saying that, but I can't let it affect me now.

Adrenaline is surging through me.

I divert to my mantra.

The same words I said to myself at the Year 6 talent show,

While I performed Soulja Boy.

She goes through the motions of the dance.

I am the best. I am the best.

You've got to have confidence, or you're left with questions:

Why am I doing this?

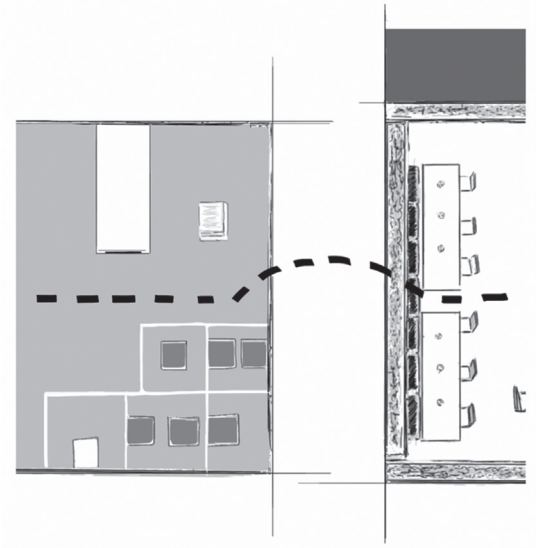
Why am I disguised as a chef?

Why do I feel so nervous?

I don't have time for stupid questions.

This is my night, this is my heist, and I'm in the gallery.

The Rooftop, 2019



ALICE OK Serena, where do you start?

SERENA, *all nervous:*

SERENA What do I do—I don't know what to do?

ALICE Just pick something.

SERENA Err.

ALICE You're on top of a building?

SERENA I'm on top of a building.

I've got a whole Tom Cruise thing going on.

The wind's blowing in my face.

It's raining.

It's night.

And it's like.

It's like...

She breathes.

Yeah. It's like I *am* the night.

Her posture changes. Soundtrack kicks in. She's on the rooftop.

ALICE Name.

SERENA Serena Metropolis.

ALICE Occupation.

SERENA Professional art thief.

ALICE Backstory.

SERENA Total successes one hundred and thirty-seven.

Total failures zero.

An international ghost.

I move apartments every two months,

Burn my phone weekly,

I have no friends. I have no family.

I live on ready meals and Kellogg's Variety packs.

I've pulled off jobs all round the world.

Paris, New York, Hong Kong, Antarctica.

I prepare meticulously, and everything always goes according to plan.

ALICE But tonight is different.

SERENA Yes! Tonight is different because...

It's my *last heist ever*.

ALICE Woah. Why this painting?

SERENA All I know is that it's Extremely Valuable.

My client is offering enough to quit the business for good.

Meet people, start a family,

Hell, I need to mean something.

And so:

Grab the painting,

Drop it at the safe-house,

Head for the airport.

Board a plane to Malta.

Start again.

Standard building vault—

Thirty-one metres, two-hundred and seven possible foot-holes. One gargoyle.

She spins a grappling hook, and it loops round the gargoyle.

First time.

ALICE It's a sharp drop if you don't make it.

SERENA Must check the wind speed—

She tosses a coin. She times on her watch.

ALICE It lands near a chef outside the service entrance.

SERENA Ha. He won't look up. People are so self-centred.

Therefore acceleration due to gravity, therefore wind speed,

Therefore air resistance—

She jumps. Nails the landing. She's on the roof.

Standard area scan—

ALICE You're looking at the rooftop restaurant.

SERENA Glass door. Cute, but total security risk.

She smashes the door with her elbow.

Hm.

It's nice in here. The chandelier. The atmosphere.

For a second I imagine booking a table with friends.

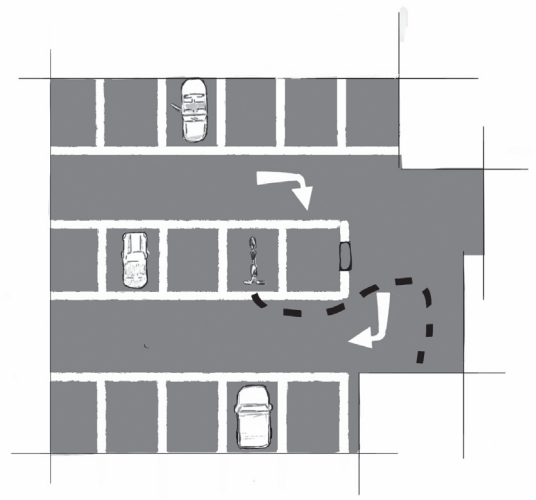
For a birthday party maybe…

She snaps out of it.

Anyway. ANYWAY.

I breathe, I clear my head, and I'm in the gallery.

The Underground Car Park, 2019



ALICE Will—your turn.

WILL *bursts on, irritable.*

WILL Yes Alice, I *know*.

ALICE Okay, name.

WILL My name is William Hatch.

I'm in the underground car park.

There's a flickering fluorescent above me.

Very atmospheric.

I've been hiding here since sunset.

This is what is known as a Stay Behind Robbery.

ALICE There's a door with a yellow sign on it that says Danger Electricity.

Next to it there's a code pad.

WILL Luckily, I've been stalking the electrician for the last week on Facebook,

I've hacked his Messenger and I've memorised the code.

two two two nine.

ALICE It doesn't work.

WILL Yes. It does.

Two. Two. Two. Nine.

ALICE It doesn't, they changed it last night.

WILL Okay then I get out my hammer.

He gets out his hammer.

ALICE It's a puzzle Will—you have to investigate the cars—

He smashes the code pad.

WILL I completely destroy the system, and the door opens.

ALICE *Okay...*

WILL Now, backstory.

I've been planning this my whole life,

I'm an Art Heist Aficionado.

It started when I was thirteen,

I saw the remake *The Thomas Crown Affair* with Pierce Brosnan

All cocktails and glamour and danger.

I would spend my weekends in the library reading:

Renaissance Pirates robbing the Medicis.

Thieves disguised as policemen at the Gardner Museum.

The man who slipped into the National Gallery through the loos.

And one thing struck me,

One thing above all else.

Art heists are so easy.

It's a victimless crime.

No one gets hurt.

The thief is the hero; they leave their mark on history.

I don't even care if I get caught.

I'm even going to leave a calling card—I just haven't worked out what it is yet.

ALICE Why are you stealing this painting?!

WILL I'll tell you that later.

I head through the door.

I'm in a low corridor.

Pipes at funny angles. Gurgling. Steam.

ALICE At the end of the corridor there's a hatch.

WILL I pop it open.

ALICE It's a sewer, the smell makes you gag—

WILL I jump right in.

Plop. Sewer.

These tunnels…

Such a complex system running beneath the conscious city.

Easy to forget about it when it's dealing with unmentionables.

ALICE Something rattles through a grate and hits you in the eye.

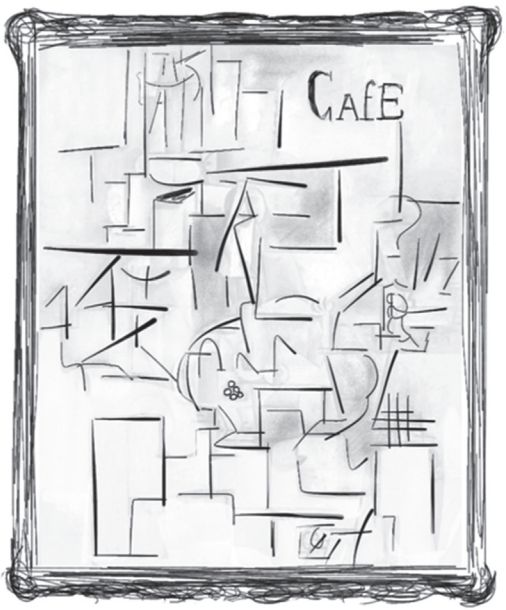
WILL OW.

ALICE It's a coin.

WILL I pocket the coin and keep going until I'm standing under a lift hatch.

I pop it open and I'm in the basement toilets. I'm in the gallery.

***Le Pigeon aux petits pois*, 1911**



The game shuts down.

ALICE Welcome to the gallery!

I'm the security guard. Night shift.

Now, this is a really important job.

And while this is an opportunity for me to see how you work,

It's also a chance for you to develop as a human being.

I'm going to need a volunteer.

Someone who is alert. Direct. And has good knees.

Not you.

Borderline.

Yes. You. Get up.

An audience member hops on stage.

What's your name?

So...er...if you could just come over here.

And if you could hold your hands out like this...

The audience member puts their arms out.

And listen to this sound?

She plays a rhythm.

Now I just want you to lift up and down to the sound.

Really good.

First exercise you learn as a guard, this.

Pause.

What do you think is going to happen?

More questions about the plot of the show. Then:

...You never know what's going to happen in the gallery.

You've got to be vigilant—

Tonight, three things out of the ordinary.

When I came to the gallery tonight, one of the taps was running.

I turned that off.

A pigeon sat outside my window and stared at me,

Like it was going to ask a question.

Tapped on the window, it flew away.

There was a buzz at the door, and I was really cautious.

But then I saw it was the chef. He'd left his phone charger.

I said can I have a sandwich? And he was like yeah, anything for you!

Then he was like oh do you want to come round for drinks on Friday?

And I said no. I've got orchestra.

I'm sure we'll rearrange.

She crosses her fingers tightly.

We're like *this,* me and the chef.

I play trumpet. In orchestra.

Anyway, look at you!

You've done really well.

Round of applause.

She turns to the thieves.

Alright.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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SF **PERUSALS**