

**BLACKMAIL**  
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**BLACKMAIL**

**Tag Line**

A well-to-do woman is blackmailed by her maid but  
emerges triumphant.

## BLACKMAIL

### Synopsis

HOLLY GOODYEAR, a successful businesswoman, is confronted by her maid, LUCY. LUCY shows HOLLY a photograph (which we never see). HOLLY is horrified and begs LUCY not to show the photo to anyone. LUCY agrees...for the payment of \$2,000 a month. HOLLY reluctantly agrees but insists on having a reason, to show her CPA, why she is sending such sums to LUCY.

LUCY is a painter, so they agree that each month she will send a picture to HOLLY.

Six months later, HOLLY is visited by JOSEPH BLUMENTHAL, an art gallery owner, and his assistant JENNY.

JOSEPH is ecstatic about the paintings and buys two from HOLLY for \$25,000. Each.

Eventually, "Time" magazine sends a reporter to interview HOLLY. She knows that, once the story is printed and LUCY sees it, she will get no more paintings. She successfully stalls the publication but, the story does come out.

In the final scene, VICTOR, who had been LUCY'S boy-friend, shows up to confront HOLLY. He's angry but has brought back the fateful photograph, as well as some "pretty pictures" which LUCY had painted for him before her untimely death.

JOSEPH and JENNY arrive and tell VICTOR what they think of the pretty pictures.

HOLLY emerges triumphant.

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TECHNICAL NOTE for **BLACKMAIL**

It will be necessary to make seven "paintings" for this play. **This is easy!** I have done it in 20 minutes.

First, get seven 18 x 24 pieces of cardboard. Just cut the sides out of boxes. Or buy from an art supply or office supply store.

Next, get two or three cans of spray paint. For six of the paintings, just spray away. **THERE IS NO WAY TO DO THIS WRONG.** As long as you make markings on the cardboard, you have created the "art" necessary.

The seventh painting is supposed to be never seen by the audience so anything will do. Best is to cut some pictures of cows, bunnies and kids out of magazines. Do that and paste them onto the cardboard. Spray some paint around and you've got it.

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BLACKMAIL

Cast of Characters

HOLLY GOODYEAR.....pre-matronly executive  
LUCY.....HOLLY'S maid; 20+  
JOSEPH BLUMENTHAL.....art dealer; 35+  
JENNY.....JOSEPH'S assistant; 20+  
MICHELE.....reporter for "Time": 20+  
VICTOR.....LUCY'S man; age appropriate

**NOTE:** The roles of LUCY, JENNY and MICHELE can be played by the same woman as the characters are never on stage at the same time.

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Set Requirements, etc.

The action takes place in the den of an upper-middle class home. The set pieces are a small sofa and a chair. US of the sofa is a table on which HOLLY can keep various costume items. As HOLLY is on stage for the entire play, it will be helpful for her to have a sweater, jacket, scarf etc. to change into during the four 10 second dim-outs.

There are five scenes; all but the first are delineated by a 10 second dim-out.

**OPTIONAL CAST CHANGE:** If there is a shortage of men who might play VICTOR, the author suggests casting a woman. She will play the role of VICTORIA, who is LUCY'S sister. Minor changes in the wording of the script will be necessary.

SCENE 1

(Discover HOLLY in her den/office, sitting at a desk or table. All action takes place here. There is a knock on the door.)

HOLLY

Yes; who is it? Come in.

LUCY

Uh, it's only me, ma'm. Can I talk with you?

HOLLY

Yes, of course; certainly. Why did you knock just now? You always just walk right in.

LUCY

Well, Mrs. Goodyear---

HOLLY

"Mrs. Goodyear"? Why so formal? You're looking a little odd...not like yourself. What is it, Lucy?

LUCY

Well, I'm not feeling so good. I'm here....

HOLLY

I'm here because I need money.

HOLLY

Need money? You need money? How much money? And why are you telling me?

LUCY

I need a lot of money...a real lot.

HOLLY

I'm sorry to hear that; I could perhaps give you a small advance on your salary---

LUCY

No; I need a lot more than that. A lot more. And you're going to give it to me!

HOLLY

Lucy, I don't like that tone. I'm not a rich woman. But, even if I were, I wouldn't give you "a lot of money." Why should I?

LUCY

I don't like doing this but *I'M GOING* to. My guy...Victor...he's got a bad habit...and I love him...and I need a lot of money...and you're the only one I know who's got much...and I really need it bad..and---

HOLLY

Now, stop that. Pull yourself together. I've had just about enough of this. I'm not going to give you money and, from this moment on, you are no longer employed by me. Now...please take off that uniform, which I own, and leave this house.

LUCY

No, I ain't going to do that. And I'll tell you why. Let me show you something.

HOLLY

I have absolutely no interest in anything you might wish to show me.

(gets up)

Now, please leave!

LUCY

No, I'm not going until I show you...this.

(passes photo to Holly)

HOLLY

My god; where did you get this? Whom have you shown it to?

LUCY

Never mind where I got it. I got it. And, no, I ain't shown it to nobody. Why would I? If I did...if everybody knew about this...then you'd never pay me a dime. I don't want to embarrass you, ma'm. But I will, I will, unless you pay me what I *WANT.*

HOLLY

If this got out...if my friends knew...I'd be ruined. Shunned. My daughter...my sons...they'd never speak to me again. You can't, please, you simply can not show this to anyone.

LUCY  
*WANT*

I don't want to...if you pay me what I *WANT*. But, don't think that's the only copy...if you burn that...or if you hurt me, I've got other copies. They'd be found if anything happened to me.

HOLLY

God; oh, god...this is awful. But, I simply can not have anyone see *THIS* photo. Ever. How...how much do you want?

LUCY

That's more like it...ma'm. I want to go back home. And take Victor with me. He's a good guy, really, if he just



WEEED

gets enough to  
keep him happy. I want \$2,000. A month.

HOLLY

Why, that's over \$20,000 a year! I can't afford that!

LUCY

Oh, I think you can. When I dust? I look at what I'm  
dustin'. I seen your check book; I know what you pay in  
taxes; I know what you make. Twenty-FOUR thousand a year.  
ain't chicken-feed for you...but you'll manage.

HOLLY

(paces; speaks to herself)

This is awful; dreadful; horrible. But what options do I  
have? I can not, CAN NOT, have <sup>THIS</sup> photo become public  
knowledge.

(to Lucy)

All right; I see I have no choice. But I can't simply write  
you a check each month. How would I explain that to my  
accountant? He's a nosy old bugger...AND he's my uncle. I  
must have some reason for paying you such sums. Now, how can  
we work that out? WHY would I write you a check each month?

LUCY

Oh, I bet you think of something.

HOLLY

Let me think. Your room...I've glanced in, once or twice.  
And...there were paintings, weren't there? On the walls?  
Are they yours? Do you paint?

LUCY

Yeah; they're mine. I took a class at the junior college; the teacher said I had "real native talent." I didn't like that "native" stuff but, I do like to paint. And I can do one in about 10 minutes.

HOLLY

I can't believe I'm doing this but that photograph--- All right; I will pay you \$2,000...for each painting. Go and get one.

(Lucy exits; Holly sits back down at desk/table; puts head in hands; straightens up; gets check book; writes check. Lucy enters, with painting. NB: Any Jackson Pollock-like smear will do.)

LUCY

(semi-proud; semi-embarrassed)

Here. Here's one.

HOLLY

Oh, god. That is...is...I can't begin to tell you how bad that is.

LUCY

Yeah; well, some rich broad told me she'd pay me two thousand dollars for it. Didn't she?

HOLLY

Yes, she did. I did. Here you are...\$2,000. But, mind you, I can't pay more than that...don't try to raise the ante on me.

LUCY

Oh, no; back home Victor and me can live pretty good on that. Even with his habit...well, we know some ~~guys~~. *✓*this will do us OK.

*GUYS WHO GROW THE WEED*

(she exits)

HOLLY

(looks at, and speaks to, painting)

And to think, I've got to actually hang you. People will think I've gone crazy. But I've got to justify the expense. So I'll have to at least pretend to like you. And all your ugly brothers and sisters that Lucy is going to send me.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 2

(same setting; six months later. The only change is that a half dozen of Lucy's paintings hang on the walls.)

JOSEPH

(looking from one painting to another; holds one up; looks at it)

Amazing; just amazing. Your uncle told me about your sudden interest in art, so I simply had to see what you've been buying. And, my dear, I congratulate you...I've <sup>NEVER</sup> seen such power, such strength. Don't you agree, Jenny?

JENNY

Oh, absolutely, Mr. Blumenthal. A true primitive, a truly original voice. The explosion of passion; the incredibly deep emotions...all expressed in two dimensions. It's almost unbelievable.

JOSEPH

The artist speaks universal truths but in a distinctly original voice.

JENNY

Yes; he delves into his own temptations, fears, hopes...and shares them with us. Who, Mrs. Goodyear, IS this artist?

JOSEPH

Yes; Holly, do tell us who this near genius is. I simply must see more of his work. Is he local?

HOLLY

No; I can't tell you HIS name. Rather, I won't. I have the artist under contract, so to speak. I can tell you this...HE is a SHE.

JOSEPH

A woman? Then I'm even more amazed at the driving force that each painting projects. As I said...the power, the sheer power---

JENNY

The strength!

JOSEPH

Yes; thank you, Jenny. Strength! Astonishing.

HOLLY

I'm glad you like them.

JOSEPH

Like them? Like them? My dear friend; I'm in love with them!

JENNY  
And, Mr. B...have you noticed the clever titles on each one?

JOSEPH  
(squints at paintings)

Ah, Jenny; I'm afraid you'll have to help me there.

JENNY  
Well, each one depicts some famous person. This one is called DONALD TRUMP IN THE SHOWER. And this is BARBRA STREISAND KISSING GEORGE W. BUSH.

JOSEPH  
Clever; so clever.

JENNY  
Here's MOTHER TERESA MASTURBATING. And...you'll love this, Mr. B....STEVE SPURIER WINNING THE SUPER BOWL.

HOLLY

So...what do you think they might be worth? Ah, just a ball-park figure---

JOSEPH

Now, that's hard to say. I mean, just what the top figure would be---

HOLLY

Well, forget "top" right now. How about a bottom figure.

JENNY

I'm thinking <sup>LENNY</sup> Liebowitz---

JOSEPH

Yes; thank you, Jenny. Holly, Jenny just reminded me of a similar situation we ran into, oh, maybe 18 months ago. A young man, with a good deal of talent, burst...just burst...onto the art scene. His shows sold out in a matter of hours. I'm sure your mystery woman could do the same thing.

HOLLY

Yes, but how much did <sup>LENNY</sup> whats-his-name get for the paintings?

JENNY

Mr. B, I've got the figures right here.

(takes note pad out of purse)

Let's see...the first show, he got from five to twelve. Right now, he's getting between twenty and twenty-five. He's got another exhibit next month...the chatter is he might hit fifty.

HOLLY

You mean...those figures...you were talking about thousands, weren't you? For each painting?

LENNY

JOSEPH

Of course; young <sup>LENNY</sup> is doing very well for himself. And the gallery.

HOLLY

And...you think that Lu...

(bites her tongue)

that these paintings might bring something like that?

JOSEPH

Holly, nothing is ever certain in the world of art. But, my 20 years of experience tells me that your Ms. Whoever has far more talent than <sup>LENNY</sup> Liebowitz ever dreamed of. So, I'd estimate...just, as you asked, a ball-park figure...that each of these painting is worth a minimum...a minimum of \$25,000. I'm so sure of that figure that I'll take any two, right now, and give you my check for \$50,000.

HOLLY

My god; my god. Oh, yes; pick the two you like. Please.

JENNY

Now, Mrs. Goodyear; you know we're in the business. We're going to sell these. And I'm certain we'll get a very fair mark-up. That won't bother you, will it? You won't be angry?

HOLLY

My dear young lady, sell them for what you can get. I have these four and I'm pretty sure that I'll be getting more.

BLACKOUT



SCENE 3

(Holly and Joseph in den/office. There are 2 paintings on the wall.)

JOSEPH

Holly, my dear. I have some excellent news...EXCELLENT news, indeed. Your mystery artist is about to become even more famous.

HOLLY

Really?

JOSEPH

I've just spent hours and hours with a reporter from TIME. *SHE* was enthralled with the paintings. *THEY* plans a two page spread in the magazine...it'll come out in six weeks or so.

HOLLY

Oh, that's dreadful. Just dreadful---

JOSEPH

"Dreadful"? How can you say that? I thought you'd be pleased. Of course, the reporter wants to interview you. To learn how, only two years ago, you discovered this major talent.

HOLLY

NO! I will NOT be interviewed. It's out of the question.

JOSEPH

Really, Holly, we thought you would be pleased. It's bound to increase the value of your collection. Of course, you've only kept a couple of the paintings. With each one bringing at least \$50,000, I can see why you wanted to sell. Once this TIME article comes out, we can expect the prices to double again.

HOLLY

Well, even at 50K, I'm more than pleased. A jump in value would be nice, but---

JOSEPH

Is there a problem? Something we should know about?

HOLLY

Well, I can't be sure, of course, but I...rather suspect...that there wouldn't be many more paintings. At least, not that I would get. Sorry; I just can't tell you any more. But, might we delay that TIME story for a month? Or even two? Tell the reporter to phone me; maybe we can work something out.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 4

(same setting; Holly and the reporter are discovered. The two paintings, from Scene 3, are still on the wall)

MICHELE

Mrs. Goodyear, I appreciate your seeing me but I must say that I'm confused. You don't seem to want publicity. Usually, we have to turn the fire hoses on people who DO want to be in the magazine.

TO BE

HOLLY

Let me be frank with you...or, at last, semi-frank. May I do that?

MICHELE

Why, yes; certainly, of course.

HOLLY

For reasons which I can't discuss, I prefer that this story not come out. However, I'm a realist. I know that you will publish it. What I want to do, between us, is to strike a bargain. If you will not publish for, say, three months, I'll tell you the entire story.

MICHELE

I'd have to talk to my editor, but yes, if you give <sup>US</sup> an exclusive, we won't publish for three months. If I can use your name and a photograph... <sup>WE'</sup>ll hold the story.

HOLLY

(to herself)

Three months. And, with a bit of luck, a couple more <sup>MONTHS</sup> before the magazine gets to the hinterlands. That's five more paintings. At \$100,000 each...I can live with that.

MICHELE

I beg your pardon?

HOLLY

Sorry; I was just doing some mental arithmetic. All right; we have a deal.

(spins a tale to the reporter)

I first met the artist while I was traveling in France. She was one of those poor creatures one sees in the Louvre...desperately copying master-pieces...hoping that somehow, genius will flow from the Picassos and Klee's to themselves. Well, I watched this girl...sorry, I can't give you a name...and realized that she had something special. Something very, very special. I asked if she had any works of her own that she could show me. We went to her grubby little flat and I saw paintings with such power, such strength, such vitality

(here she waxes ecstatic, mimicking Joseph)

that I was almost overcome.

(Michele scribbles frantically)

You've seen her work, beautiful but confounding. The strong visual narrative in each! The radical, electrifying balance among shape, color and composition! How, in a few strokes, she uses the painting to represent all of humanity. Of course, all this is well known now but you can imagine how I felt, seeing it for the first time.

MICHELE

Yes; yes. What happened then?

HOLLY

I discovered three things. The woman...girl, really...lived to paint. Two, she was almost pathologically shy. She simply hates the idea of publicity. And, three...how to say this...she has a friend with a habit.

MICHELE

I beg your pardon? A habit?

HOLLY

Yes; the man is heavily addicted to drugs. The artist...let's call her Ms. X, shall we...is very protective of him. That's part of the reason she shuns publicity. So, Ms. X and I struck a bargain. I'd pay her a certain sum a month...I'm not without assets, you know...and she would paint. Paint whatever she felt like; just paint. I would attempt to sell her works. And we would divide the sales price.

MICHELE

You divide it 50-50?

HOLLY

Oh, no, that wouldn't be fair, would it? It's more like ninety-ten...in that range.

MICHELE

Well, I must say, that's very generous of you. Most people would have struck a harder bargain.

HOLLY

When one finds a person of good character,

(said thru gritted teeth

one wants to do all one can to see that justice is done.  
Don't you agree?

MICHELE

Oh, yes; certainly.

HOLLY

Well, that's why it's 90-10. Did you have other questions? I'm afraid I've told you all I can, in good conscience.

MICHELE

That's about all, Mrs. Goodyear. Mr. Blumenthal says that the paintings are now selling for upwards of \$100,000 each. That must make you, and Ms. X, very happy. It's nice to see deserving people do well.

HOLLY

Yes; it is pleasant to think that Ms. X is getting what she deserves.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 5

(discover HOLLY and VICTOR; there are no paintings visible.)

HOLLY

Very well, Mr.....Mr.....you said your name was Victor?

VICTOR

Yep; that's me...Victor in the flesh.

HOLLY

All right; I've agreed to see you. It's against my better judgement...but you said it was about Lucy?

VICTOR

You bet it's about Lucy...about Lucy and some pictures!

HOLLY

Well, it was bound to happen---

VICTOR

You thought I wouldn't find out, didn't you? You never thought that peons like us would ever see TIME magazine. Well, you were wrong! Lucy saw the thing in the beauty shop. Her paintings...HER paintings...right on the cover! I couldn't believe my eyes. And the prices! Jesus H. Christ! The prices! There she was, getting a miserable \$2,000 for them...and you, you bitch, selling them for fifty times that much. Well, the party's over. You don't get no more paintings from Lucy. From now on, I keep all the money.

HOLLY

You? Lucy does the work and you get the money?

VICTOR

Yes, I'm her man. Or was. So don't you worry about my poor Lucy. Poor Lucy has passed away.

HOLLY

Well, I am sorry to hear that. How did it happen?

VICTOR

Poor Lucy. She saw the magazine and come running to tell me. She was so excited, bam, she had heart attack. Never knew what hit her. But not before she found how much you were making!

HOLLY

Well, I knew that you...Lucy, that is...would see the magazine. Eventually. And you did. And here you are---



VICTOR

You bet, I'm here. And I call the shots from now on.

HOLLY

And the photo? The one that started all this?

VICTOR

Well, you ripped us off. But, without you, we'd never had no idea how much her paintings are worth...so, I brought *THE NEGATIVE.*

(digs in pocket; hands *NEGATIVE* to Holly)

Here. I'm mad at you but you done me good...so, take it. And I burned the copies...too.

HOLLY

Oh, thank you. Thank you. I can start breathing again!

*VICTOR*

Like I said; I'm mad but figure you earned it. Lucy's world-famous now. I'm gonna be rich! Lucy painted good pictures for me...pretty pictures. I got maybe a hundred.

(takes painting out of bag; hugs it to his chest)

Lady, this is just going to blow your sox off. My Lucy painted, sure. But she learned something new...she pasted things ON the picture. That's call collage. See?

(now shows picture to Holly)

HOLLY

Lucy? Lucy painted...that?

VICTOR

Uh-huh.

HOLLY

I see. You have a hundred pictures like this...that Lucy painted.

VICTOR

Yeah; they must be worth...what?...maybe \$200,000 each?

JOSEPH

(at the door, with Jenny)

May we come in?

HOLLY

Of course, Joseph, come in. But, why are you---

JENNY

We got a phone call from a man who said you had some brand new paintings by the mystery artist. Is this....? Are you---

VICTOR

Yeah, I called But, no; I ain't the artist. Lucy was; my poor Lucy has passed away. But I got almost 100 of her pictures.

JENNY

A hundred? Did you say a hundred?

JOSEPH

My God, man, you'll be a millionaire...ten times over.

VICTOR

I know.

JOSEPH

And *DID BRING* you any work to show us?

VICTOR

Oh, yeah. Once we read that TIME article, I locked most of them up. But I brought one. She...she seen it.

HOLLY

Oh, yes; I seen it, all right.

JENNY

May we see it? Please?

HOLLY

Of course. I think you'll be amazed.

JOSEPH

What's this?

(holds painting; he and JENNY can see it but audience can't.)

Lucy...was that her name?.. painted this...this---

VICTOR

Yes, she did. Can I have my money now?

JOSEPH

But...this must be a joke. These are nothing, nothing! like the paintings Lucy did.

VICTOR

Oh, that's right. *THIS IS* lots better. Pretty! See the cows..and the little kids? The bunnies?

JOSEPH

Cows? Little kids? They might as well be painted on velvet. These pictures are...mannered..

JENNY

.....stiff....

JOSEPH

...PLANNED...

JENNY

...AND WORTHLESS!

HOLLY

Tell you what I'll do, Victor. I'll give you \$15.00 for it.

BLACKOUT