

A mother's love

THE STRANGE case of a mother in Romania has given Boston art lovers a new reason to plead for the return of the masterworks stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum 23 years ago. Authorities and forensic scientists in Romania fear that seven paintings stolen last October from Rotterdam's Kunsthal museum — including works by Claude Monet, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Paul Gauguin — are now in ashes after Olga Dogaru, the mother of arrested top suspect Radu Dogaru, allegedly placed them in a wood stove to incinerate the evidence against her son. She told police that she had burned a package containing the paintings “without even opening it,” then rolled the ash out to her garden in a wheelbarrow. But on Monday she changed her story. Facing at least three years behind bars for her destruction, she now denies burning the paintings.

Nonetheless, there is evidence that the

original story was true. Preliminary investigations of the ash from Dogaru's garden showed the remains of pigments and canvas nails and tacks. The case sent a shiver up the spines of those who are pursuing the whereabouts of Johannes Vermeer's “The Concert,” along with the three Rembrandts, five works of Edgar Degas, and other pieces stolen from the Gardner Museum in 1990. The museum is offering a \$5 million reward for their safe return, while federal investigators are holding out the possibility of immunity for anyone who leads them to the art. After obtaining some promising leads in recent years, the FBI may be closing in on the culprits. But as the events in Romania show, solving the case can mean little if the stolen goods have been destroyed. Both the Gardner and the FBI are right to prioritize the return of the paintings over the prosecution of those who perpetrated the crime or, for that matter, their moms.