

The Laughing Cow

A Play in Two Acts

Written by

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CAST

Buddy Cooper - Head of security guard at the studio. She takes the job very seriously

Sam -- Buddy's little buddy; a savant's brain and a teenager's emotions in an adult body.

Frankie Butts - A security guard; a self-created tough guy who feigns being from Jersey when he's actually from Mission Viejo, California.

Ottavio Suarez - A security guard whose first day on the job is when the play opens. He's in his 20's, Latino.

Rebecca Sternstein - mid 30's, a witty, all-knowing assistant.

Sarah Fulbright - Aggressive British reporter whose beat is the entertainment business.

Tiffany Cummings -- Actress, formerly a "Gurnsey kid", now an ingénue, who's determined to win the key female role in the pilot

Naomi - Tiffany's girlfriend.

Jean - The long-suffering assistant of Duncan Noble.

Cherisa - Duncan's second assistant. Pretty, blonde, ditzy, fresh off the bus from Kentucky.

Doreen - His assistant - part wife, part mother, part best guy pal.

Duncan Noble - Head of Gurnsey TV. A legend in his own mind.

Jason Hemanis - Uber-macho creative exec.

Josh Kaplan - an assistant

Ben Workman - A writer

William Hystrum -- of counsel at Gurnsey, gay, a key litigator who deals with the high profile cases.

Sets

The break room

Rebecca's office/William's office

Bathroom

The Void (copy room)

Duncan's office/Jason's office

Ben's living room

Dimly-lit restaurant

Hotel room

Naomi and Tiffany's bedroom

The sets are extremely spare, and should be moveable by either the actors themselves or outside help with minimal effort and without losing the rhythm of the play. For example, the offices should have one element that sets one apart from the other

ACT 1

SCENE 1

The stage is dark. Epic movie music plays. After a few bars, the LIGHTS GO UP, revealing BUDDY, SAM, FRANKIE and OTTAVIO sitting side-by-side on folding chairs, heads tilted, looking up at a 'movie screen' -- that is, out into the audience. The movie they're watching has just ended. All three are moved to snear tears. After a moment, Buddy turns to Ottavio:

What'd I tell you?

BUDDY

That was intense.

OTTAVIO

Fuck yeah!

FRANKIE

That last scene...

SAM

Was I right?

BUDDY

You were right.

OTTAVIO

Gets me every time.

BUDDY

You got heart, bro.

FRANKIE

It's the following your dreams part, you know?

BUDDY

... yeah.

OTTAVIO

Putting everything on the line for what you believe in.

SAM

Heavy.

FRANKIE

Even if people don't have faith in you.

BUDDY

SAM

And they didn't. People called Gary Gurnsey crazy.

BUDDY

For seeing what he saw in his head.

OTTAVIO

I couldn't believe that!

SAM

There's a thin line that separates vision from insanity...

BUDDY

But when he had the courage to bring it to life... you can bet people took notice.

FRANKIE

Dude.

BUDDY

And now an ordinary animal -- a cow --

SAM

Is a de-facto symbol of what the country stands for.

All 3 lose themselves in the thought...

OTTAVIO

I was just --

BUDDY

Yeah?

OTTAVIO

I was just wondering, what does it stand for?

FRANKIE

What kind of a question is that?

OTTAVIO

I mean, like, to you guys personally.

SAM

(to Buddy)

May I?

BUDDY

Go for it.

SAM

If I had to put it into words, I'd say very simply, the cow stands for a return to the innocence of youth.

FRANKIE
A sense of possibility.

BUDDY
Truth.

SAM
Beauty.

FRANKIE
Happiness.

BUDDY
Do you ever see that cow not smiling?

SAM
It's not in his physiological make-up.

FRANKIE
Whatever happens to him, the fucker's always got a big grin on his face.

Ottavio ponders this for a moment.

OTTAVIO
What does happen to him?

BUDDY
Huh?

OTTAVIO
He's got it pretty good, doesn't he?

FRANKIE
What are you talking about? He's a cow in America. He's probably seen a lot of his friends die.

BUDDY
You got kids, Ottavio?

OTTAVIO
Two. One's five, the other's ten and my wife's pregnant with-

BUDDY
You want to keep them young as long as you can, right?

OTTAVIO
Yeah, of course --

BUDDY
But it's up to you, right? Making sure they don't play the violent video games before they're ready --

FRANKIE

Or bust into your stash of 'Celebrity Skin'.

OTTAVIO

I don't have a --

BUDDY

That's what this job's about. We look at that cow and it gives us inspiration, almost like it's saying 'good job, guys. Keep protecting those people, making sure they're safe'. See, we're on the front lines.

OTTAVIO

You mean, like in the army?

FRANKIE

Exactly!

OTTAVIO

I have a cousin who was in Iraq. Special forces. He might not be too happy if I say that. Kind of disrespecting what he --

FRANKIE

Bro, now hold on, no one's disrespectin our men in uniform.

BUDDY

He knows what I mean. We're the first line of defense.

SAM

Better way of putting it.

OTTAVIO

What are we defending people from?

FRANKIE

This fuckin guy...

BUDDY

Ottavio, this is a big-picture job. You can't be too careful. You gotta look at those ID cards closely. Learn how to spot fakes. Got a pen?

Ottavio looks around him -- he doesn't. Frankie pulls a pen and a pad out of his breast pocket and hands them both to Ottavio.

BUDDY (cont'd)

You'll want to take this down.

Buddy turns to Frankie. They begin a debriefing process that, over time, has clearly taken on a rhythm and cadence all its own.

BUDDY (cont'd)
What's going on with --

FRANKIE
Still taking walks in the middle of the day. She seems... how should I put it... unhappy.

OTTAVIO
Is this someone who works here?

FRANKIE
Rebecca Sternstein. Legal, fourth floor.

BUDDY
Still giving attitude when you ask for her ID?

Frankie addresses Ottavio.

FRANKIE
Don't buy it for a minute when they're in too much of a hurry to show their ID's.

BUDDY
You gotta check every single one.

FRANKIE
And if they give you a hard time, let me know.

BUDDY
How's Jean?

FRANKIE
I worry about her. She's... how can I put it... unhappy.

BUDDY
I thought she'd gotten better. Went to a seminar or something.

FRANKIE
They brought some new chick in. Twenty-five, tops. That can't be easy.

SAM
Ageism affects us all.

BUDDY
You think she's a security risk? Jean?

OTTAVIO
Security risk?

SAM
You never know.

FRANKIE
Not yet, but I'm keeping an eye on her.

BUDDY
How's Hystrum?

FRANKIE
Haven't seen him.

BUDDY
You haven't seen him?!

FRANKIE
Maybe he's on vacation...?

BUDDY
That guy hasn't taken a vacation in eighteen months.

OTTAVIO
Wait -- who's this?

SAM
Will Hystrum. General counsel.

FRANKIE
When they don't come to work and they're not on vacation, you gotta take note.

OTTAVIO
... why?

FRANKIE
Because you never know.

OTTAVIO
(getting more and more rattled)
Guys, really? What is this place?

FRANKIE
Like the boss said, we're on the front lines.

LIGHTS DIM.

A phone starts ringing. It rings three times and stops, then rings again.

SCENE 2

Lights up on two office desks, one imposing and one unassuming, separated by a low partition. The ringing stops just as REBECCA ENTERS, carrying newspapers and a to-go cup of coffee.

She's just starting the work day and immediately turns both computers on, desk lamps on, as she talks to us:

REBECCA

Monday, March first. The day is starting out like every Monday for the two years and three months I've been at this job: I come in late, for one thing because I stopped at Starbucks and there was a line. Is it me, or do they always put the stupidest baristas on the Monday morning shift?

She finally sits down at one of the desks, and starts typing away at the keyboard, still talking:

REBECCA (cont'd)

Anyway, as many of you who read this blog know, there's always an undercurrent of resentment -- fuck it, let's call it what it is: rage -- when I come in here, but today is different. This Monday is different from every other Monday because -- and don't keel over folks -- I spent the weekend in Death Valley with --

The phone STARTS RINGING again.

REBECCA (cont'd)

Shit.

She studies the number on the phone's console.

REBECCA (cont'd)

I don't recognize the number.

After giving it some thought, she picks it up.

REBECCA (cont'd)

William Hystrum's office.

SARAH FULBRIGHT WALKS ONSTAGE. She wears a bluetooth headset and stands downstage.

SARAH

Hello. Mr. Hystrum please.

REBECCA

I don't have him. Can he return?

SARAH

Are you his assistant?

REBECCA

That's why I answered the phone with all cheeriness I could muster. Who may I say is calling?

SARAH

So he is there.

REBECCA

He's not. I just said that.

SARAH

Tell me something -- Mr. Hystrum's pretty left of center and vocal about it, correct?

REBECCA

I'm sorry?

SARAH

He's very involved in certain political movements, the blogosphere, etcetera, yes?

REBECCA

I'd say he's like any other liberal in this town, minus the limousine. Who is this?

SARAH

You would know if he were to do some of those writings at work, would you not?

REBECCA

Wait a minute -- is this Candace from H.R.?

SARAH

No -- I don't work at Gurnsey --

REBECCA

Is this about his pamphlet? Did they get it?

SARAH

Did who get it?

REBECCA

Who is this?

SARAH

So you have seen it then.

REBECCA

I -- I'm just his assistant --

SARAH

Why the word 'just'?

REBECCA

"Just" sums up the assistant's plight.

That resonates with Sarah and she jots something down on a pad.

SARAH

On a scale of one to five, one being Hollywood liberal, five being Mother Jones -- how would you rate it, the pamphlet?

REBECCA

I'm sorry, I can't have this conversation, not without talking to him --

SARAH

So you're confirming there is a pamphlet --

REBECCA

Hanging up now --

SARAH

If you change your mind and want to talk, I'm Hounding Hollywood-dot-com.

Rebecca recoils upon hearing the name.

REBECCA

Wait -- you're Hounding Hollywood?

But Sarah's already hung up. Rebecca dials a number, gets a machine:

REBECCA (cont'd)

Hi, it's me. I'm wondering what time you're coming in today. I got an odd call from the reporter Sarah Fulbright -- you know, Hounding Hollywood-dot-com? I'm sure it's nothing, but she was asking about the pamphlet, which seemed a little bizarre. Initially I thought it was Candace from HR, but then I realized Candace is on maternity leave and why would her temporary replacement be bothering to do any work? So then I thought maybe it had something to do with the litigation and... oh, shit -- that's where you are right now. You're in court. Forget I called.

She hangs up. She's still thrown. After a beat, she goes back to typing.

REBECCA (cont'd)

This is definitely an odd Monday.

LIGHTS DIM; but a spotlight comes up on Sarah, still downstage, once again talking into her headset:

SARAH

Hello Misses Hystrum. My name is Sarah Fullbright and I was wondering if I could ask you some questions about your son. I'm doing a story. ... oh, I don't know if he got arrested again for skiing naked in Aspen, Misses Hystrum. I'm just wondering if you could let me in on something that's defined William since he was a boy.

She listens. But Mrs. Hystrum likes to talk. After a few beats, Sarah tries to break in:

SARAH (cont'd)

Misses Hystrum, I --

Misses Hystrum won't be interrupted.

SARAH (cont'd)

Misses Hystrum, that's lovely but if you could --

Sarah starts to pace, growing more and more impatient.

SARAH (cont'd)

Misses Hystrum --

(a long beat, then:)

'He was always in his own special world, and I'm just grateful I got to visit from time to time.' Misses Hystrum, that's as close to symphonic as I've ever heard. Thank you.

A beat, then Sarah punches the air in victory -- quickly and Englishly -- and the SPOTLIGHT GOES OUT.

SCENE 3

SPLIT STAGE. On one side: the vanity area of a women's bathroom. TIFFANY CUMMINGS stands there, applying makeup, facing the mirror -- that is, us. She has a big bag of makeup and hair products by her side. As she works she tries on various personas:

TIFFANY

I was a tomboy when I was a kid. Back in... Scranton. You had to be, because the men were the only good role models. Me and my friends -- all boys -- we used to play hide and seek in the scrap yard. I'm still tough. I don't take shit. I --

She morphs into another persona:

TIFFANY (cont'd)

-- really want to get married. I just... I want all that new toys. The KitchenAid you don't have to buy at a yard sale on the good faith that the seller didn't put, like, Spam in it, the china pattern that wasn't made in China. I think John's the one. I'll take him shopping, introduce him to gaberdine. Buy him a wine-of-the-month club membership and read him the information about the vintage as foreplay and --

She morphs yet again:

TIFFANY (cont'd)

I learned this technique once? When you first meet a guy, you have sex with him all the time, like, whenever he wants? Then, just like that, you stop. When he asks what's up you're like, nothing, what do you mean? John, I'm just not -- and you don't finish the sentence. And he's like, you're not what, babe, c'mon, tell me. And then you get this really faraway look in your eye and --

Her cell rings. LIGHTS UP ON NAOMI across the stage at a "protest". She's holding a picket sign that shows a cow in a tiny stall and says "ARBY'S CRATES ON MY NERVES". She's on her cell.

NAOMI

Hey, babe --

TIFFANY

I really want this.

NAOMI

And you're totally gonna get it! I'm so bummed -- super low turnout for the --

TIFFANY

You think?

NAOMI

Think what?

TIFFANY

You really think I'm gonna get it?

NAOMI

Of course you are! You're gonna be the best warlock prince's girlfriend they've ever seen!

TIFFANY

Really?

NAOMI

Babe --

TIFFANY

You don't think I'm too old? I mean, when I was a kid dancing around a big grinning cow, I bet some of the other actresses coming in weren't even born!

NAOMI

That's what makes you so good.

TIFFANY

Really? You think having been a Gurnsey kid makes me a good actress?

NAOMI

It does.

TIFFANY

Well, you're wrong. It doesn't mean shit.

NAOMI

No! I mean, yes, it does mean shit! You've got, like, chops.

Naomi "sees" some fellow protestors and starts to get into the spirit of civil disobedience.

TIFFANY

What are you doing? Right now?

NAOMI

What?

TIFFANY

Where are you?

NAOMI

I'm protesting in front of Arby's.

TIFFANY

You're are not at work?

NAOMI

She's been on a non-stop shopping spree for the Greece trip, so I snuck off. There wasn't much to do today, just a little organizing... Anyway, she's been so obsessed with trying to fit into a bathing suit, she probably won't even --

TIFFANY

They're gonna wonder why I haven't worked in so long...

NAOMI

Babe, plenty of people take time off --

TIFFANY

At the height of their careers? Plenty of people take time off at the height of their careers?

NAOMI

Yeah -- they help out the Haitians or move to Italy to work in a shoe repair shop just to see what it's like to --

TIFFANY

Who.

NAOMI

Sorry?

TIFFANY

Name someone who's done that.

NAOMI

Babe, you know I'm not good with celebrity names. They all blend in. All except you.

TIFFANY

I really want this!

NAOMI

And you're gonna get it. Listen, I should go start the chant.

TIFFANY

I love you.

Naomi moves away from "the crowd".

NAOMI

I love you! Listen: after you've shot this pilot and raked in all that dough, I think we should go to Greece. We could work in one of those turtle hatcheries... you know, a volunteer vacation where you relax AND give back...

TIFFANY

I see this character as tough but femme.

NAOMI

And tough but femme is you.

TIFFANY

You think?

NAOMI

I do more than think. I know. You're like a Greek woman.

TIFFANY

A Greek woman?

NAOMI

In Greece, there are these women -- really striking and strong... wearing super sexy clothes with lots of sequins and painted on gold and shit, and sure their men were macho, but these women... they fucking arranged stuff -- the house, the laundry, people's lives. They told their men when to eat, drink, sleep and shit. And the men accepted it, because what was the alternative? Living without them? Or worse, pissing them off?

TIFFANY

Why are you telling me this?

NAOMI

Maybe to let you know that you can bring home the bacon AND fry it up in a pan?

TIFFANY

You mean Fakin' Bacon.

NAOMI

I love you.

TIFFANY

I love you.

They each do A VERY LOUD KISSING NOISE into their respective phones. It's their thing. Then they hang up.

LIGHTS DIM

And we move into

THE VOID

Where the stage is bare, save for a giant copy machine chugging and churning. It takes over the space to such a degree that it takes us out of space, out of time. Lights are low, creating an eerie effect, a polar opposite of the bright florescents these people work under.

JEAN ENTERS. She immediately launches into her best air guitar, transforming from a middle-aged woman into a teenaged boy in seconds. She moves around the stage, playing her own version of 'Rock and Roll', completely lost in the dance, the music, in touch with a guttural side the world never sees.

After exhausting herself, she stops.
She pulls her sweater down and EXITS.

SCENE 4

SPLIT SCENE: Two imposing office desks,
stage left and right. A partition
running the length down center stage.
We start on one side, with the other
side dark. JEAN walks onto the lit side
of the stage, carrying various items.
To call her professional would be an
understatement. She lays everything on
the desk with the precision of a
miniatures designer, fanning the
publications out, lining everything
up...

After a few moments of this, words come
out of her mouth in almost a Tourettes-
like way:

JEAN

Let me guess: when he fucks his wife that's always the same
way too. But look at me -- every morning for the last
fourteen years. Talk about repetition -- this is what you
call a missionary-style life --

She finds something on the desk. An
envelope.

JEAN (cont'd)

What's this? No return address -- how odd... What if it's
Anthrax? What if they think I sent it?

She rips it open.

JEAN (cont'd)

'How to Speak Truth When Everyone Around You Is Speaking
False' by William Hystrum. Wait a minute -- William Hystrum?
The gay man who always says please and thank you?

She examines it, gets lost in it even.
But she's interrupted by --

CHERISA ENTERING, out of breath.

CHERISA

God, I am, like, so sorry!

Jean startles and immediately puts the
publication down.

CHERISA (cont'd)

I swear, though -- it wasn't all my fault. Traffic was insane.

(extends her hand.)

I'm Cherisa, just in case you forgot.

Jean ignores it.

JEAN

I didn't. He called ten minutes ago. He's on his way in.

CHERISA

Oh shit, okay... Why so early? I mean, if I was head of Gurnsey TV I'd come in at noon.

JEAN

And that's why he is and you're not.

CHERISA

What?

JEAN

The flowers --

CHERISA

What?

JEAN

I left them in the kitchen. Would you go get them please? And the vases?

CHERISA

Flowers and vases. No problemo.

She exits, and Jean immediately sneaks a peek at the publication again. Once again, under her breath:

JEAN

Duncan may need a pretty face, but he doesn't handle trashy well. And that tattoo will make him worry she may have hepatitis. He also has a thing about asses. They can't be much bigger than a bread box but they've got to assert themselves. This one has a behind that blends in too much. It won't speak to him, I'll bet my next paycheck on --

CHERISA COMES BACK ON STAGE, once again breathless, carrying a bouquet of flowers and two vases.

CHERISA

Sorry --! I had to locate a brawny guy to replace the water bottle. Kidney thing -- I'm not supposed to get dehydrated.

JEAN

Let's get these arranged. We don't have much time.

She separates the flowers, giving half to Cherisa, along with one of the vases.

JEAN (cont'd)

Don't cram them in. He hates that.

They both start arranging flowers in their respective vases.

CHERISA

What's his deal?

JEAN

His deal?

CHERISA

Married, girlfriend, boyfriend, what?

(Jean won't gratify that with a response.)

I got a good vibe when I met with him. He seems comfortable in his power, like he was born into it or something. But I never can tell with these guys -- should I be treating them like gods and be kind of in awe? Or just, I don't know, be myself? I'm from Kentucky.

JEAN

Do they have flower arrangements in Kentucky?

Jean exasperatedly takes the vase out of Cherisa's hands and does it herself.

CHERISA

Oh, yeah, we have everything, it's --

DUNCAN NOBLE enters the stage. As he moves to his desk --

DUNCAN

Good morning, ladies.

JEAN/CHERISA

Good morning.

DUNCAN

Is that meeting still happening at ten?

JEAN

Yes. They just called.

DUNCAN

Okay. Jean lets roll some calls. You -- have a seat, take down these script notes.

Cherisa takes a seat. Jean doesn't move.

JEAN

But I do script notes.

DUNCAN

I want this one to learn. Ready? 'The Warlock Prince' -- notes on the second draft.

LIGHTS DIM. The other side of the partition lights up. This office is a mirror image of the other one. JASON HEMANIS, wearing a Bluetooth ear piece, sits at his desk as his assistant DOREEN, 6 months pregnant, stands near him and removes a food item from a thermo delivery bag. She's reads the label on the item:

DOREEN

Chicken lasagna: Ten grams of protein. Twelve grams of carbs. Two hundred twenty grams of sodium. Fifty grams --

JASON

And riboflavin?

DOREEN

Riboflavin?

JASON

Riboflavin. How much?

DOREEN

Why would you care about Riboflavin? I don't care about Riboflavin and I'm pregnant.

JASON

Pregnant?

DOREEN

Just in case you didn't notice.

JASON

I read that a riboflavin deficiency can cause cracked lips. Wait -- did you say two hundred twenty grams of sodium?

DOREEN

I keep telling you -- processed foods are loaded with sodium. You never listen to me.

Just then, TIFFANY enters from the side of the stage closest to them. She wears the outfit we saw her leaving in in Scene 3. She tentatively walks into the space, poking her head in, as it were.

TIFFANY

Jason?

Neither Jason nor Doreen respond.

TIFFANY (cont'd)

Tiffany Cummings... from 'Vanilla Beach' -- thirteen episodes, you were the --

He moves out from behind his desk.

JASON

Tiffany. Tiffany. Tiffany.

TIFFANY

You remember.

JASON

Remember? You made that show. Jesus, you look --

He very boldly looks her up and down.

TIFFANY

I'm testing for the role of Karen in 'The Warlock Prince'.

JASON (cont'd)

Great role. Great girl.

TIFFANY

I just... I want to be her. In life, you know? She's the girl I always wanted to be.

JASON

And she's the girl I always wanted to date.

TIFFANY

Sounds like it could be a good fit.

He hasn't taken his eyes off her this entire time. She moves toward the door.

TIFFANY (cont'd)

Anyway, I just came by to say hi.

JASON

Glad you did. Be great if we ended up working together.

TIFFANY

It would.

She holds a look, then EXITS. Jason addresses Doreen:

JASON

Get me Duncan Noble.

DOREEN

... isn't she a little old for Karen?

He doesn't answer. She reluctantly EXITS the stage. A PHONE RINGS on the other side of the partition. The LIGHTS COME BACK up on that side. Now both sides are lit. Duncan's at his desk, alone in his office.

DUNCAN

I was just gonna call you.

JASON

Does the name Tiffany Cummings ring a bell?

DUNCAN

The hot blonde in that piece of shit series you did ten years ago?

JASON

Nine. And if you weren't my boss I'd fight you on your ratings system.

DUNCAN

Whatever. You shot, what thirteen episodes, aired five?

JASON

She's testing for Karen in 'The Warlock Prince'.

DUNCAN

Interesting. And?

JASON

Nothing. Just... we may want to consider it.

DUNCAN

You fucking her?

JASON

No --

DUNCAN

Trying to? Good luck -- I hear she's a dyke.

JASON

Really? I mean, no, I'm not. Trying to or --

DUNCAN

It's on hold. The pilot.

JASON

On hold?

DUNCAN

Some jackass is claiming we stole his idea to the tune of three million bucks, and the lawyer assigned to the case is M.I.A.

JASON

What?

DUNCAN

William Hystrum. We can't find him. His assistant says the last time she spoke to him was Friday evening.

JASON

So that means we can't move forward.

DUNCAN

We can pretend to, but we can't actually do anything.

JASON

You're kidding.

DUNCAN

No, Jason, if I were kidding, there'd be laughter. I always laugh at my own jokes.

JASON

I've only got two pilots this season. Am I gonna even have a job if this pilot doesn't go?

DUNCAN

Jason, don't be so dramatic.

LIGHTS DOWN on both sides of the stage.

SCENE 5

A messy, post-college apartment. A ratty couch; big-screen TV, a laptop and an open pizza box on the coffee table. BEN sits on the couch watching TV. He looks like he's been in more or less this same position for days now and he's both bored and agitated.

He CHANGES CHANNELS with the remote, comes back to the game, then TURNS THE TV OFF. He picks up his laptop, stares at it for a few moments, then puts it down. He turns the TV on again and puts his hand in his pants, starts to feel around for signs of life. The PHONE RINGS. He lets it ring a few times out of sheer laziness, then picks it up. He uses his professional voice:

BEN

This is Ben Workman. ...hey... not much, just getting some writing done. ... going well, yeah... the new script, yeah, the turtle story... no, it's cool, I'm not distracted, not at all. ...baby, can we not talk about that? I... I'm trying to just put it on hold, you know, like mental layaway. Tell me about you -- what did you do today?

As he listens he puts his hand back in his pants, starts distractedly playing with himself.

BEN (CONT'D) (cont'd)

... uh-huh... yeah... yeah... yeah... you're kidding.... yeah... yeah... well, that's New York.... ... I mean, people can be a little uptight there, I don't know, everybody probably just wishes there could be more contact with things that don't answer back. ... no, it's not perfect here, it's not even better, it's just... different. Is... everything okay? You seem a little tense.

He keeps touching himself, not sure what deserves more attention...

BEN (cont'd)

... yeah, no, I understand... yeah... yeah... yeah... fuck yeah... no, you totally should apply to UCLA ... but all due respect, what does an oral surgeon know about art history? ... no, I am not insulting your dad, Elise, I practically worship the guy. I mean, if he's your god he's mine, too, right? ... nothing, forget I said that. ... dammit, Elise, I thought we weren't gonna talk about that.

He takes his hand out of his pants -- the moment has gone. He stands, and for the next few moments starts to walk around the room as he talks.

BEN (cont'd)

... I'm sorry he's not happy, but for the record neither am I. ... 'brought it on myself'? Did he say that? ... Elise, they stole my idea -- do you know how wrong that is?

(MORE)

BEN (cont'd)

I worked -- sorry, sweated over -- that script for two years, working practically every shit job known to man, never taking you to dinner, buying you a tennis racquet for your birthday and --

He locates a cannister of peanuts, grabs a handful and devours them.

BEN (cont'd)

... that's not the point -- I wanted to give you more. The thing is, I just can't give up that easily. The story is mine. Those guys, they're people I went to school with and yes, I may have used warlocks metaphorically, but if you follow the plot you'd see it's totally my story. You may even notice, Elise, that Karen bears a striking resemblance to you. ... career? What career? All I had was a meeting with these people -- they didn't buy anything, they felt it was easier and a lot cheaper just to steal it. ... I know you've supported me and I will never forget how your dad let us live in West Hampton rent-free that summer, but this is just something I have to do, something I feel strongly about and frankly I thought you'd be more supportive of --

(He stops mid-chew.)

Yes, I know how powerful this company is, but if you'd open up a newspaper from time to time you'd see there's a great big world out there they don't own, a world where people stand up for what they believe in and expect to get compensated for their hard work and fight back when someone takes something that doesn't belong to them. Why do I feel like I'm quoting some obscure poet here?

He goes back to the couch. He's dejected, worn out.

BEN (cont'd)

... okay, just... stop worrying and have a little faith, okay? It's gonna be okay. ... I love you too.

He hangs up. He sits for a moment digesting the conversation, then puts his hand back in his pants.

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 6

SPOTLIGHT on REBECCA at her desk. She alternately taps away at her keyboard and talks to us:

REBECCA

I spent the weekend in Death Valley with Josh. For you readers who've been following this bizarre turn of events, pardon the repetition, but I feel the need to run through the story again just to convince myself it actually happened. Josh and I -- he an assistant to Mallory Heldin, another attorney here; me, the assistant to the general counsel and pathologically wary of anyone possessing less than a healthy hatred for the place, neither one of us having exchanged more than a thank you when one held the door open for the other in the past year we've worked together -- Josh and I started talking in the kitchen two weeks ago when we realized there was an awful smell coming from the refrigerator and both of us had Tupperware containers trapped inside. As I backed away from the swampy fragrance of stale milk mixed with months-old pad thai, Josh took a deep inhale and rescued both our meals in one courageous heist.

LIGHTS UP. Her desk is now a counter. There's a refrigerator on stage and JOSH's head is in it. Rebecca stands by, directing him where to go:

REBECCA (cont'd)

It's the big one. Just salad. Greens mostly. Healthy, but not anorexic fare. Abundant, in its own way --

JOSH

This it?

He pulls out a container, hands it to her.

REBECCA

You're a firefighter.

He extends his free hand.

JOSH

I'm Josh.

REBECCA

Rebecca.

JOSH

You wear the beret.

REBECCA

Once. I had just been in Prague for a week. It felt right. Until the end of the day when it felt very wrong.

JOSH

I liked it. It was... unique.

REBECCA

Unique -- that'll really jump-start a career here.

(He laughs.)

And you came in one day carrying a Bunsen burner.

JOSH

It's a camping stove. I was lending it to a friend here. He was taking his girlfriend to Joshua Tree -- he was planning to propose. I figured they'd need to eat.

REBECCA

Did he? Propose?

JOSH

Well, the thing is, he forgot matches.

REBECCA

Oh, no. So what happened?

JOSH

They left camp and went to a restaurant in town where he ran into an old girlfriend. It caused an argument with new girlfriend and he didn't propose.

REBECCA

Ever?

JOSH

Not yet.

REBECCA

(Slightly droll:)

I love camping.

JOSH

You do?

REBECCA

Oh, I... sure.

JOSH

I love it. Love it.

REBECCA

Really?

JOSH

You sound surprised. Yes -- it's the perfect antidote to this place.

REBECCA

I love it already. Tell me.

JOSH

Well, there's the simplicity of it, the fact that you're paring everything down to the most basic of issues: do you have food? Will a bear come along and eat that food? Working here, when you keep things simple, people think you're --

REBECCA

Simple.

JOSH

Exactly.

REBECCA

I get it.

JOSH

I think you do.

REBECCA

You do?

JOSH

I do.

REBECCA

You do. And I do. Too.

JOSH

This is getting weird. Listen, enjoy your... uh... abundant salad.

He starts off --

REBECCA

This might sound a little crazy, but would you ever consider going camping with a perfect stranger?

JOSH

As long as that stranger was prepared to do a little heavy lifting.

REBECCA

As long as you don't mean that metaphorically, she would be.

LIGHTS DIM; back to Rebecca in
SPOTLIGHT:

REBECCA (cont'd)

We went. It was as simple as figuring out who was bringing the Clif Bars and who the tequila. I'll admit, I was nervous about the five hour drive and made sure my iPod was stocked with enough music to eradicate the need to make inane conversation. But after we got the preliminary stuff out of the way, we talked.

(MORE)

REBECCA (cont'd)

It felt so natural, like it had always been just the two of us in this bubble going eighty miles per hour. And then it got dark and the shadows played on his face -- which of course I've only been focusing on half of -- and he looked different than he looked an hour before and yet so weirdly familiar... We talked about everything...

SPOTLIGHTS now on both Josh and Rebecca, side by side, staring straight ahead:

REBECCA (cont'd)

What would you do if you weren't afraid to fail?

JOSH

(he so wants to understand...)

... what?

REBECCA

In life. You know -- if failure wasn't the post-modern concept it's become -- what would you do?

JOSH

If you're asking me what my dream is, it's easy: teach high school biology and coach basketball. High school basketball. I need to start studying for the teachers' exam.

REBECCA

Wow...

JOSH

Yeah?

REBECCA

So, like be one of those people.

JOSH

What people?

REBECCA

Normal people. People who like what they do and know their place in the world. Were you born that way?

JOSH

I have no clue what you're talking about. In Wisconsin, where I grew up, everyone's like that.

REBECCA

Fuck -- you grew up in Wisconsin?

JOSH

Is that okay?

REBECCA

It's just... unusual. How did you end up here?

JOSH

This college buddy of mine, Kevin Malone, he decided to move out here. Just to do it. He was driving across country. It sounded so cool -- the idea of coming to the end of the continent -- in a car. So I jump on it. We decide to drive the southern route -- it took us, like, two weeks -- we made the usual stops -- Graceland, the Grand Canyon. Amazing. Seriously -- everyone says it, but it's true. In Tempe we meet a guy at this crazy diner who tells us he just quit his job at Gurnsey and do I want it? I'm like, sure. We rolled into town at noon; at one-thirty I had my interview, two I have a job. Insane, huh? It's always been like that for me.

She turns to him and just stares -- is this guy for real? After a beat:

JOSH (cont'd)

So what about you, Rebecca? What's your goal in life?

REBECCA

You said my name.

JOSH

Rebecca -- yeah. I like it. Is something wrong with that?

REBECCA

No, it just sounded different than when other people say it.

JOSH

Tell me everything about you, Rebecca.

REBECCA

God, let's not scare you off just yet...

JOSH

Well, what's your ultimate goal?

REBECCA

I want to write on a show I can be proud of -- to work with people with real vision. To learn from them. And then I want to have my own show, something that really reflects my voice, that projects it out into the world...

JOSH

And says 'My name is Rebecca --'

REBECCA

You don't even know my last name. Sternstein --

JOSH

'My name is Rebecca Sternstein and I want to be heard.'

REBECCA

... something like that.
 (beat; then, a confession:)
 ... I have a blog.

JOSH

A blog? What's it say?

REBECCA

It's about my life. My life at Gurnsey -- you know, the ins and outs of being an assistant struggling to be seen as something more. It's anonymous.

JOSH

Really? Why?

REBECCA

I don't know.. Maybe I feel freer saying something knowing no one's going to contest me on it. Maybe I can make up a persona and project it. Maybe it's safe.

JOSH

Is safe good?

REBECCA

Sometimes. Sometimes safe is good.

He wants to say something more but doesn't. Then:

JOSH

How close are you? To reaching your goal?

REBECCA

I can see it in good light, with an excellent pair of binoculars.

JOSH

Let's make a pact. In three months we evaluate how close we are to our goals.

REBECCA

... does that mean we'll still be speaking in three months?

LIGHTS UP, spotlights out.

Back to the present: both Rebecca and Josh are standing by her desk. There's an awkwardness here, of words and feelings unsaid.

JOSH

... hey.

... hey.

REBECCA

Listen, I --

JOSH

-- had a great time.

REBECCA

Me too.

JOSH

Even the smallest noise seems loud today.

REBECCA

The lights seem too bright --

JOSH

I wish ...

REBECCA

... what?

JOSH

Never mind.

REBECCA

... want to go to lunch?

JOSH

Oh -- yeah.

REBECCA

(a beat, then --)

I'll get my purse.

She BUMPS into the corner of the desk
as she goes to get her purse --

REBECCA (cont'd)

Mother fucker --!

(then:)

Sorry, I --

JOSH

Hey, what's this I hear about your boss going on a drug
binge? I overheard Mallory talking about it.

REBECCA

... your boss was saying that?

JOSH

Seems like it's the word on the street.

REBECCA
Whose words and what street?

JOSH
Did he?

REBECCA
Josh --

JOSH
Want to go out sometime?

REBECCA
... what?

JOSH
Anyway, they're talking about pushing production on the
'Warlock Prince' pilot --

REBECCA
But wait -- you asked me something else a second ago --

JOSH
The guy does seem like a whack job.

REBECCA
He's... eccentric. Not necessarily a crime.

JOSH
A lot of money's at stake --

REBECCA
Way too much, it would seem, to make major schedule changes
based on conjecture. Did you just ask me out on a date?

JOSH
I thought you hated the guy.

REBECCA
Hate's a word I overuse and thus its value gets diminished. I
don't hate him. He's... difficult and our relationship is...
complicated and... You know what? I should probably work
through lunch.

JOSH
You said erratic.

REBECCA
What?

JOSH
On our trip. You called him erratic.

REBECCA

Our trip... seems so far away at this moment. Hey --I keep hearing that bird outside my window -- the one that annoyed me but now I feel intense nostalgia for. Erratic, eccentric -- I'm sure they both fall under the same heading in the DSM. Who are you?

JOSH

What?

REBECCA

You're ambushing me. It's not nice.

JOSH

I'm sorry --

REBECCA

Do I even know what sorry looks like on you?

JOSH

I am. The whole place seems to be going crazy --

REBECCA

Never mind, it's... Listen, I should get some work done --

JOSH

I'll check in with you later.

REBECCA

Whatever.

JOSH

What?

REBECCA

Have a good lunch.

JOSH EXITS. Rebecca just sits there, digesting what just happened. Then she stands, and we move into...

THE VOID

The stage is bare, save for the giant copy machine.

REBECCA ENTERS, runs right for the copy machine and kicks it -- or rather does a very violent fake kick -- with all the apparent strength and emotion and power she has, again and again. This is a Rebecca we've never seen: unrestrained, unapologetic. Relieved, at least for now, SHE EXITS.

The copy machine continues to whir
as...

CHERISA ENTERS. She carries the same bouquet of flowers. She ambles across the stage, slowly, dreamily, dropping petals as she meanders, humming a tune, completely oblivious to the deafening noise, completely oblivious to anything, really.

When she gets to the other side SHE
EXITS.

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 7

The break room. OTTAVIO, in uniform, sits at the table leafing through a shiny packet of papers. SAM is sitting in another chair, reading GODEL, ESCHER, BACH or some equally esoteric fare. After a few moments, FRANKIE WALKS ON STAGE wearing a black leather jacket, jeans and motorcycle boots.

FRANKIE
Got stuck in traffic. I'm an asshole for not taking the bike.

OTTAVIO
You have a bike?

FRANKIE
BMW. Vintage. We were gonna do a little refresher before you start your shift.

OTTAVIO
It's all good -- I've been going through the benefits package.

FRANKIE
Pretty sweet, huh?

OTTAVIO
They even have pet insurance.

FRANKIE
You got pets?

OTTAVIO
No.

Frankie starts to get undressed,
changing into his uniform as he talks.

FRANKIE

I just saw Duncan Noble's new assistant. Nice piece of ass.

OTTAVIO

Which one is she?

FRANKIE

Blonde, with a gap between her legs which for some reason is
a weakness.

OTTAVIO

There are a lot of hot girls here.

FRANKIE

Tell me about it.

OTTAVIO

You ever been with any?

FRANKIE

Hey -- I thought you were married!

OTTAVIO

We're separating. Have you?

FRANKIE

... yeah... a while ago...
(He starts to get a little
wistful. Meanwhile, Ottavio is
impatient:)

OTTAVIO

What happened?

FRANKIE

... nothing, I... nothing.

(This kind of talk makes Sam
nervous; and in turn Frankie
is nervous having him there.)

FRANKIE (cont'd)

Hey, Sam -- want to go get me and Ottavio a cappuccino or
somethin?

SAM

You don't drink cappuccinos, Frankie. They're -- to quote --
pussy pee.

FRANKIE

I do at this moment. I do when I'm enjoying one with a co-worker. That's what a cappuccino is for -- enjoyment.

He pulls some cash from his pocket,
hands it to Sam.

FRANKIE (cont'd)

Enjoy one on me.

SAM EXITS. Ottavio leans in:

OTTAVIO

Did you fuck her?

Just at this moment, SPOTLIGHT ON JEAN,
on her hands and knees trying to get a
piece of jammed paper out of the copy
machine. She will do this through the
next few speeches, getting increasingly
irritated.

FRANKIE

Of course I fucked her -- up the ass, two or three times.
Jesus, you really haven't been getting any lately. I'll tell
you something, though -- as sweet as some of the skirt is
here, don't mess with it.

OTTAVIO

I know, I know...

FRANKIE

Besides, this girl that I refer to -- she wasn't even that
hot. It was her way -- quiet, but there was something going
on behind the eyes. She had a ... a craziness about her.

OTTAVIO

One of those. Dude.

FRANKIE

I'll never forget the way she looked at me while I was
fucking her. She was challenging me. If she was in pain she
never showed it. She was too proud. She was challenging me to
keep going but mostly she was challenging herself to let me.

OTTAVIO

So then, what? You broke up with her?

FRANKIE

It was mutual. She knew it too. I wanted to like her -- and
by that I mean, I wanted to do normal things with her:
dinner, take in a theme park... the fact is, I did like her.
It just didn't feel right. I can't explain it. It wasn't even
that she was married, it was --

OTTAVIO

She was married?

FRANKIE

Yeah, to some dude who got sick all the time. No, we just didn't work when we weren't in uniform.

OTTAVIO

Dude, who is it? Does she still work here?

FRANKIE

Yeah, she does. We're friendly.

JEAN has finally managed to pull out the jammed paper. She takes it and rips it into tiny little pieces. Then she EXITS.

OTTAVIO

Who is she?

FRANKIE

I can't. I can't say. It's the lowest form of life to give away that kind of information.

Just then BUDDY ENTERS, SAM right behind her, full of bluster.

BUDDY

We got a situation. Hystrum's a code red security risk.

FRANKIE

Get the fuck outta here!

OTTAVIO

Who?

FRANKIE

Take this down: William Hystrum. H-Y-S-T-R-U-M.
(He turns to Buddy.)

What'd he do?

BUDDY

He bombed the White House.

FRANKIE

No fuckin way. No fuckin way!

BUDDY

Can you believe that? A lawyer.

SAM

General Counsel.

BUDDY

(to Sam)

Correct.

SAM

No better than a common terrorist.

FRANKIE

Always knew the guy was a whack job. And not just because he drives that piece of shit VW bug when he could be driving a brand new mustang convertible with the do-re-mi you know he's bringing down.

BUDDY

We're checking every ID even if traffic's backed up down the street.

OTTAVIO

So we don't let him in?

FRANKIE

Fuck no!

OTTAVIO

How do we stop him? I mean, if he tries to come here?

BUDDY

This is an excellent time to go over part two of the security manual. Got a pen?

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 8

Rebecca's office. REBECCA sits at her desk, writing and talking to us:

REBECCA

As you readers know, like many things in my life, my relationship with William is complicated. For one thing, there's good William and there's bad William. The good William and I laugh and talk politics. He tells me about his weekend and the fun dance party where he wore the Carol Channing wig. The bad William sat around stewing all night, staring into a crowd of people half his age who look at him the same way they look at the alcohol warning behind the bar. He thinks about the world's problems and moves on from there.

OFFSTAGE WE HEAR:

WILLIAM (V.O.)

How am I doing? What kind of a question is that? The country's a mess. People are dying every minute -- of poverty, AIDs, homelessness. And no one cares. Do you care?

(MORE)

WILLIAM (V.O.) (cont'd)

Even I care only minimally -- there's only so much I can, given the cultural imperialism I've made a choice to defend. If I were to die -- and don't think I haven't entertained the thought -- would anyone care? Or, a better question: might this world not be a slightly better place simply because of what I wouldn't be doing in it?

Rebecca addresses the voice as if William were standing right outside her door:

REBECCA

But you have your writings!

WILLIAM (V.O.)

Fuck the writings! They're nothing but an exercise in redundancy given the climate of passivity that grips the country right now. People consume, they don't act! If they did, we wouldn't be drowning in this media-generated Ganges!

REBECCA

All it takes is one person -- one person to be affected by that pamphlet --

WILLIAM (V.O.)

I'm doubtful even one person will be moved. That's how cynical I've become.

REBECCA

And yet you wrote it. One person, William --

WILLIAM (V.O.)

God, you sound like Oprah. Stop it --

REBECCA

No, you stop it --

WILLIAM (V.O.)

No you!

REBECCA

No, you!

She can't take anymore. SHE RUNS OFF STAGE, away from her desk, the voice, the person she is there --

She runs into --

THE VOID

Where JOSH RUNS in from the opposite of the stage. They meet in the middle.

They talk over the noise of the copy machine:

REBECCA
I thought we could try this again.

JOSH
Try what?

REBECCA
Ask me if I want to have lunch.

JOSH
What?

REBECCA
ASK ME IF I WANT TO HAVE LUNCH!

JOSH
DO YOU WANT TO HAVE LUNCH?

REBECCA
YES!

JOSH
OKAY!

She takes his head and plants a kiss on his lips -- deep, sexy and physical. They kiss for a long time. Then:

THE SCENE CHANGES and we're now in Death Valley. REBECCA and JOSH are perched on an overlook -- the copy machine, now turned off -- staring out. Lights are soft, romantic -- it's that magic hour of the day. They take sips from a bottle of wine. There's a sense of anticipation between them. After a few moments:

REBECCA
Can I give you a check? For my half the gas?

JOSH
It was only, like, twenty bucks.

REBECCA
The Prius --

JOSH
Great car.

REBECCA

I'll buy you a drink sometime. This is unbelievably beautiful.

JOSH

We got here at the perfect time of day.

They both take it in. He looks around, sees something on the ground, near the 'overlook' they're sitting on, picks it up. It's a rock.

REBECCA

What's that?

JOSH

Limestone. I collect rocks.

She examines it.

REBECCA

But this one's kind of plain, isn't it?

JOSH

It's the energy of the place. I like to keep it with me after I've left it.

REBECCA

... okay... cool. I would never have pictured you using a word like 'energy' but I love that I'm surprised.

(beat)

You should know I'm clueless when it comes to pitching a tent.

JOSH

No worries.

REBECCA

And I've never been camping before -- I'm not sure I made that completely clear.

(He says nothing.)

I've always wanted to. Growing up, there was this family down the street -- the Hendrickson's -- they camped. They were cool. They had tents and Mrs. Hendrickson didn't wear a bra and Mr. Hendrickson built shit and... Do you?

JOSH

Do I --?

REBECCA

Build stuff? You seem like you do.

JOSH

... yeah, I'm... handy with a hammer.

REBECCA

So to speak. Oh, God -- are we crazy?

JOSH

In what way?

REBECCA

We never exchanged two words until last week, then we go to a remote place just the two of us?

JOSH

You're having second thoughts.

REBECCA

I'm seeing myself from another point of view.

JOSH

I get it. You're worried I'm some nut who lures people into the woods.

REBECCA

I'm worried I'm some nut who lures people into the woods.

JOSH

I think you're one of the most interesting people I've ever met. I could have spent ten more car rides talking to you.

REBECCA

Me?

JOSH

And for the record, I loved the beret. Now, come here, so I can kiss you.

He doesn't give her a chance. He moves right in, kissing her deeply, lovingly, intensely -- and she kisses him back. This continues a good while... then:

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS UP, and we're back in

THE VOID

The stage is empty. The copy machine is back on. For a few moments we just watch as it whirs effortlessly, never missing a beat, a rhythm you could get used to if you heard it enough.

DOREEN ENTERS. She moves to center stage. She stands very still and takes a deep breath.

Then she raises her arms above her head, then slowly lets them float down to her stomach. She touches her stomach -- really touches it, bringing life to it -- even more life than is already there. She does that again. For a few moments she just stands there, then --

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 9

SPLIT STAGE. Only one side is lit: JASON'S at his desk mesmerized by what's on the computer screen.

JASON

Holy fucking shit. Fuckin-A.

He dials the phone. THE LIGHTS COME UP ON THE OTHER SIDE. Duncan's at his desk, also engrossed in the computer.

DUNCAN

I'm reading it now.

JASON

Sarah Fulbright?

DUNCAN

And the New York Times, the LA Times, the Drudge Report... Each one tells a different story. Sarah Fulbright talks about how badly it'll hurt the studio. The Times calls it a case of wrong place, wrong time. And Drudge calls him an unstable liberal who went off his meds. I didn't know he had it in him. To me he was just some brainy fairy.

JASON

A brainy fairy who set a bomb off.

DUNCAN

Possibly set a bomb off.

JASON

Okay, we don't know that he actually did it, but isn't this just too weird? It's all so... politico-y. And then the quote from his mother --

DUNCAN

I wish she hadn't said that.

JASON

'He's always lived in his own special world and I'm just happy I get to visit from time to time.'

(MORE)

JASON (cont'd)

(He asks the question he's had
on his mind for hours:)

What are you thinking here, in terms of the 'Warlock Prince'
production schedule? I mean, what if he can't work this case?

DUNCAN

He will.

JASON

What if he can't? Because he's in jail?

DUNCAN

Jason. I've been in this business almost thirty years. In '99 I had an actress who went and got herself a nose job to the point where she became a completely different person than the one we cast in our pilot. When we fired her two days before we were starting to shoot, she sued us for two mil and filed a cease and desist. We paid her a quarter of it and she went away; we found someone else and kept to schedule. In '04 I had a sexual harassment suit on a show that threatened to shut it down. We found out the plaintiff traded blowjobs for good grades in college and stayed right on schedule. We'll get someone to make this kid go away and shoot your show.

(His pacing speeds up.)

So get those deals signed and get your people ready. And please -- don't worry. I won't.

LIGHTS DOWN on Jason's side of the stage. Duncan continues to pace for a few moments. JEAN walks into his office and stops when she sees him. He notices she's there but says nothing, just silently walks back and forth. She doesn't quite know what to do, and starts to leave:

DUNCAN (cont'd)

Jean.

She stops in her tracks.

DUNCAN (cont'd)

What do you know about William Hystrum?

JEAN

Me?

(He doesn't respond; she has no
choice but to answer.)

I... I really haven't had that many dealings with him. He seems... nice.

DUNCAN

... nice?

JEAN

He always says please and thank you.

Duncan stops pacing. He stands and looks at her for a moment. She gets even more uncomfortable.

JEAN (cont'd)

Is that... the right answer?

DUNCAN

You think he's too nice to set a bomb off at the White House?

JEAN

... I'm sorry?

DUNCAN

That's what it says he did. Didn't you hear?

JEAN

No, I -- it's just today I-- the morning was --

DUNCAN

They're holding him for questioning. He sent a pamphlet to the president. Giving him advice on winning the next election. A picture where he's standing under the Lincoln Memorial and the words 'We Will Do it!' underneath. Excuse me, but do what? A week later they find a bomb in a catering truck parked outside the home of the man running our country. Was it his? I don't know. Do you?

JEAN

Well, gosh, it's always hard to tell with people --

DUNCAN

A good job. A coveted job. A lawyer for a company whose business is to entertain the entire world. To make sure the planet enjoys itself after it eats its samosas and fights its religious wars and builds its houses made of shit. And yet apparently that's not enough. He needs to send his writings to the leader of the free world. Hell, even if he didn't set a fucking bomb off, isn't that just... weird?

JEAN

... yes, yes, it is. It's --

DUNCAN

Why would anyone do that? I'm trying to understand.

JEAN

I don't know honestly and you have a meeting in ten --

DUNCAN

Think.

JEAN

... I don't know, maybe he thought he could make a difference or something.

DUNCAN

But he is making a difference. He's helping people enjoy themselves. People who have dreary lives.

JEAN

Maybe he has dreary life himself.

DUNCAN

... I'm sorry?

JEAN

... maybe being a part of something that helps people enjoy themselves doesn't exactly mean you're enjoying it.

DUNCAN

I'm trying to follow. Keep going.

JEAN

What I'm saying is, maybe making something for people to enjoy themselves actually makes life very unenjoyable.

DUNCAN

Elaborate.

JEAN

Well, I don't get to see people enjoying themselves, do I? No one here does. We're just making this stuff, these shows, getting caught up in the particulars -- production schedules, ratings, do we like this actress or does she look fat, etcetera, etcetera. For what? For you. You say people all over the world enjoy our product. What world, I ask? My world is right here -- it doesn't shrink and it doesn't expand. It stays the same. And yet I'm supposed to be happy -- to enjoy myself. So -- and I'm going out on a limb here -- maybe William Hystrum wanted to extend the boundaries of his world a little. Maybe he got tired of everything being so fucking enjoyable to everyone else but him.

Duncan is shocked. And so is she.

JEAN (cont'd)

Your meeting's starting in eight minutes. Should I call and say you're running late?

DUNCAN

No, I'm leaving now.

He grabs a few things of his on his desk, and EXITS. She doesn't move;

she's even more bowled over than he is.
After a second, HE COMES BACK ONSTAGE.

DUNCAN (cont'd)

Jean, I have to ask: are you... happy here?

JEAN

You don't want to get into a discussion about my happiness right now.

DUNCAN

I mean, you're not gonna bomb the building or anything --?

JEAN

Not today.

A beat. He doesn't know quite how to take that. Then:

DUNCAN

One more question: the new girl -- really doing a bang-up job, am I right?

JEAN

We're talking about the little bumpkin with the tramp stamp?

DUNCAN

I'm sorry?

JEAN

Very much so.

DUNCAN

(what?)

If she looks like that and has half a brain, she'll be running the place one day, don't you think?

JEAN

... is this the Jewish humor I never seem to get? The irony?

DUNCAN

Not at all.

JEAN

Oh, fuck, we're all in trouble now.

They share a nervous laugh and he EXITS the stage once again.

LIGHTS DIM.

SPOTLIGHT ON TIFFANY DOWNSTAGE. She's nervously pacing as she dials her phone. WE HEAR NAOMI'S RINGTONE OS, but no answer. Tiffany leaves a message:

TIFFANY

Where are you? Shit -- I really need to talk to you --

Tiffany clicks off. Paces some more. Then, dials again, and once again WE HEAR NAOMI'S RINGTONE OS. Tiffany leaves another message:

TIFFANY (cont'd)

Why aren't you answering? I really need to talk to you. I'm about to meet with this executive -- you know, the one I was telling you I worked with on 'Vanilla Beach'? And I don't know what to... I'm not sure how to... Sure, the acting is... it's easy. It's what I do. The other stuff is when it gets confusing. The talking. How nice should I be? Do I let my humor shine through? What if he's wearing a really ugly tie that he obviously wants people to pay attention to? Should I lie and say it's nice? I can't believe you're not there! I need you right now and you're not... okay, screw you. Seriously. Screw you.

She hangs up. SPOTLIGHT OUT.

SCENE 10

A restaurant: dark and male, with a red leather banquette tucked into the corner. JASON HEMANIS sits in it, with 2 martinis in front of him. His head cranes to see the various other "patrons" in the place. After a few moments, TIFFANY ENTERS the stage. She takes a seat next to him.

JASON

Tiffany Cummings. I never thought I'd see the day.

TIFFANY

And what day would that be?

JASON

The day I share a booth in a dimly-lit restaurant with you. Here -- I took the liberty of ordering you a martini. You do drink martinis --?

TIFFANY

I did, but now I --

(changes gears)

Sure. I love a good martini.

JASON

This is gonna sound crazy but back when we were shooting 'Vanilla Beach' -- did we ever hook up?

TIFFANY

Not to my knowledge --

JASON

Good. I'd want to remember it.

(He raises his glass:)

To not hooking up back then. I gotta ask you something else.

TIFFANY

Ask.

JASON

What happened to you?

TIFFANY

... sorry?

JASON

Your career was smoking. You wore a silver see-through dress on Letterman. You presented at the Golden Globes in a white dress that if you bent over ever so slightly showed your ass crack. Then, the movie about the bi-polar kid --

TIFFANY

'In The Shadow of Darkness' -- and he was schizophrenic --

JASON

Emmy material. Hell, you made 'Vanilla Beach' despite the shitty time slot. And then... nothing. I've been waiting for years to ask -- where the fuck did you go?

TIFFANY

I actually did some theater in New York.

JASON

Okay, fine -- I guess in New York that counts for something.

(He studies her for a moment.)

You gay?

TIFFANY

Me?

JASON

I gotta be honest -- it's making me a little nervous about putting you in the pilot.

TIFFANY

The idea of my possibly being gay?

JASON

The idea of your being a dope fiend or a bi-polar whack job which are pretty much the only reasons I can come up with for you to have dropped off the face of the earth. The gay thing I just threw in because my mind went to a very dirty place.

(He takes a sip.)

See, people don't walk away from this. Once they get a taste of five people making a fuss over a sweat bead on their forehead and having a trailer the size of a Mexican home, they don't really feel like going back to normal life. And you -- you've been at it since you were a kid.

TIFFANY

You know about that?

JASON

That you were a Gurnsey kid? Everyone does. It's total cachet. I ask again: what happened?

TIFFANY

Would it be okay if I told you standing up?

JASON

Why?

TIFFANY

It's easier to think that way.

She stands. She will tell the following story as if she were performing a monologue at an audition:

TIFFANY (cont'd)

My mother was sick -- throat cancer. A horrible punishment for something she must have done in another life because in this one she was a saint.

JASON

Most are.

TIFFANY

She was alone, it all fell to me. I remember it was right around pilot season; my agent begged me not to go, but I --

JASON

Family -- I get it. It's noble. Where's home?

TIFFANY

Caruthers, Missouri. The place was a mess -- the wreckage of my step-dad's hobby of drinking until he passed out: unpaid bills, trash from the '70's... Anyway, I was gone about six months and during that time my husband started having an affair with a groupie who came to his shows.

JASON
Musician?

TIFFANY
Of course.

JASON
Do I know him?

TIFFANY
No one does. Anyway, so, when I got back after burying my mother and selling her house and fighting with my sisters over who got what, I went through a divorce. This being California, he wanted half of what I had, and even though he was a lying, cheating slacker, I had to give it to him.

JASON
Been there myself. Fuck.

TIFFANY
Well, after that was all said and done, I started getting migraines. Every day. For months on end. The doctors said it was stress, but to me it was just relentless pain. I tried to be a good soldier and work even though I had a cattle prod burrowing into my temple, but the pain was too great. In the end, I didn't work for a total of about two years. Who are the other actresses?

JASON
... come again?

TIFFANY
Name one and I could give you a list of addictions and personality problems.

JASON
I'm not at liberty to say. Holy fucking shit -- you're what they call a survivor.

TIFFANY
Most people, when they suspect something bad happened, avoid asking about it. They say to themselves it's because they don't want to invade someone's privacy but it's really because they don't want to be reminded that bad things can happen to anyone, including them. So thank you -- for caring.

JASON
... you're welcome.

They hold a look. Tiffany sits back down, takes his drink out of his hand and kisses him.

TIFFANY

So, where am I on the list? Top five?

JASON

Top of the top five. There's a table read Friday. I'm gonna make sure you're there.

(They kiss again.)

That's something I've been wanting to do for a long time.

TIFFANY

There's something else I've been wanting to do.

She looks around, checks to see if the coast is clear. Then she slides under the table, and WE HEAR A LOUD ZIP. For a second, he can't comprehend what's going on, but then he leans his head back and gives himself over.

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 11

REBECCA in her office:

REBECCA

The second reason William and I have a complicated relationship is because even when I know it's going to be a Bad William day, I walk into his office every morning and ask how he is. Why? Because I care? No, he's right -- I don't. I ask because I can't not attempt to make a connection with him. I can't have him in there and me in here and us not acknowledge each other. I'm thinking this is what people mean when they talk about boundaries.

THE PHONE RINGS. Rebecca looks at the console and immediately clicks on:

REBECCA (cont'd)

William Hystrum's office.

SPOTLIGHT on CHERISA downstage, stage left. She wears a headset. Her demeanor has changed: she's more polished than she was previously. Entitled.

CHERISA

I have Duncan Noble for you.

REBECCA

(doesn't recognize the voice)

... Jean?

REBECCA
 Actually, yes --

DUNCAN
 Anything produced yet?

REBECCA
 I wrote a few episodes of 'Amazing Second Homes' two years ago.

DUNCAN
 Don't know it. Good show?

REBECCA
 It's... informative.

DUNCAN
 So is the dictionary but who wants to see that televised? We could get you on one of our shows. You funny or serious?

REBECCA
 ... kind of both, depending on the situation.

DUNCAN
 I'm asking, do you write comedy or drama?

REBECCA
 Oh -- drama.

DUNCAN
 We got four dramas staffing next month.

REBECCA
 Wow, that's --

DUNCAN
 You have a sample?

REBECCA
 I -- of course --

DUNCAN
 Let's do this: email me your strongest script and I'll figure out a good fit.

REBECCA
 ... are you serious?

DUNCAN
 And as soon as you find his files, email them to me.

He EXITS THE STAGE. She just sits there. LIGHTS OUT. The VOICE OF WILLIAM comes from out of nowhere:

WILLIAM (V.O.)

I don't think you want to do that.

REBECCA

Do what?

WILLIAM (V.O.)

It's not you.

REBECCA

What are you talking about?

WILLIAM (V.O.)

'Make the women more likeable,' they'd tell you. 'Just like your best friend in high school.' Then you'd have to remind them that you didn't have a best friend in high school -- unless you count that faggy theater guy you smoked cigarettes in the stairwell with.

REBECCA

How did you know about Pepper?

WILLIAM (V.O.)

They'd urge you to make people feel happy when the show ends. Do you even know how to do that? Or, better yet, could you fake it? 'No one's happy all the time,' you'd answer. And they'd look at you like you had a piece of snot dangling from your nose, then say you were awfully surly for someone with such nice tits.

REBECCA

No, they wouldn't, they'd get sued --

WILLIAM (V.O.)

They say, 'write what you know'. Well, if the truth is what you know, you must write it.

REBECCA

I'm trying! But I've been struggling a long time! Besides, why is writing bullshit any different from living it? The inane niceties -- 'happy Friday!'; 'how was your weekend?'... hell, even 'good morning' from some stranger you could care less about can send me over the edge. The smiles, the feigned enthusiasm. Do you realize how much energy that takes? The energy it takes for me to look happy every day and not look like... I don't know -- you to you?

Just then WILLIAM WALKS ON STAGE, briefcase in hand. This is the William we've been hearing so much about, and yet his entrance -- his entire being -- is really quite unassuming.

Rebecca musters all the cheeriness she has in her:

REBECCA (cont'd)

Good morning! What a surprise!

He says nothing -- just moves to his office on the other side of the partition. Rebecca has no idea what to do. She can't see him, but William is sitting at his desk unable to move. She cranes her neck, listening for the slightest peep, when suddenly HE STARTS TO WEEP -- loudly and cathartically. Rebecca can't help herself and she starts to cry too. Each listens to the other. They do this for a while, getting everything out, until William gets up, still holding his briefcase, and WALKS INTO REBECCA'S OFFICE.

WILLIAM

Are you... okay?

REBECCA

... yeah. You?

WILLIAM

My therapist told me to come in today. I shouldn't have listened to him. I'm leaving now.

REBECCA

... oh, okay. Is there... anything you want me to do?

WILLIAM

Actually, there is. The illustrious files -- the ones that got me into this fresh hell -- you still have them, right?

REBECCA

... I think so... on my laptop...

WILLIAM

This is highly unethical, but let's pretend you don't. Create a new email account. Email them to me on from your laptop using that account to my private email and then delete everything you've sent. Can you do that?

REBECCA

... sure... yeah...

WILLIAM

Then go home. There's no reason for you to be catching all the shit intended for me. That's not your job.

REBECCA

... um, it kind of is.

WILLIAM

Well, that needs to change. You're better than that.

WILLIAM EXITS. Once again, Rebecca is stumped. Then she starts crying all over again.

LIGHTS DOWN.