

SHADY LADIES

A two act comedy

by Jean Blasiar

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SHADY LADIES

AT RISE, lights up on the upscale two bedroom home of Jim Balsac, once successful television scriptwriter; living room complete with bar, sofa (facing audience; back to front door of apartment), comfortable chairs (facing each other), stereo, liquor cabinet, sculptures, arty type cocktail table, lamp and end tables; round table with laptop and two straight back chairs, upstage left; modern art on every wall, large window with view back stage center; one bedroom and bath stage left with door, other bedroom and bath stage right through an archway and hall.

Sound O.S. of a shower running.
Knock on the front door, stage right.

VOICE (O.S.)

Jimbo?

After a few seconds...
Doorbell rings.

VOICE (O.S.)

Jim?

Shower is turned off. After a few more seconds, more bell ringing and knocking, the door to the apartment, stage right, opens and JERRY SHACKLEBEE sticks his head in carrying a six pack of Bud and a large box of popcorn.

JERRY

Jim?

The door leading to the bedroom, stage left, opens and JIM BALSAC, dressed in a towel wrapped around his waist, still wet, hair wet, barefoot, stands there staring at Jerry Shacklebee.

JIM

Jerry? What are you doing here?

JERRY

What do you mean, what am I doing here...

Jerry enters, closes door behind him, settles down on the sofa, picks up the remote and, facing the audience, directs the remote out towards the audience and clicks it on.

JERRY (CONT'D)

The game's on.

Jim looks dumbfounded.

JIM

What game?

JERRY

Cut your kidding, Jimbo. What game!
Kerry's right behind me with buffalo
wings and chili.

The phone rings.

Jim moves to answer the phone.

Jerry sits on the sofa; takes his gun out of his holster and puts it on the coffee table.

JERRY (CONT'D)

What's the matter with your TV? This
should be the pre-game show.

Jim answers the phone.

JIM

(on the phone)

Hello?

(listens; after a long while)

Kerry.....

(listens another long while)

Where are you now? In front of MY
building?

(listens)

Well get in here fast. I mean it.

(hangs up)

Jerry... I may have a date.

JERRY

I hope it isn't Amy. She never shuts
up during a game. It isn't Amy, is it?

Doorbell.

Jim answers it, dripping as he goes.

KERRY is standing at the door with a tape in one hand and a bag of buffalo wings and a bag of chili in the other.

She enters even before invited. She hands Jim the bags of wings and chili, which he now has to balance and hold the towel around him.

KERRY

Here it is.
(holds up the tape)

JIM

Here what is?

KERRY

(whispers)
Last year's Super Bowl. He'll never
know the difference.

JIM

Kerry... I can't go through this again.
I may have a date. I barely know the girl.
(whispers)
How am I going to explain watching last
year's Super Bowl with Jerry?

KERRY

Your date isn't Amy, is it?

JIM

No... it isn't Amy. And even if it were
Amy, I wouldn't subject her to sitting
through a re-run of the...

Kerry shushes him.

KERRY

Quiet. Don't upset him.

JIM

Don't upset him.

KERRY

He's stressed out again. You know the
routine, Jim. He resorts to a comfortable
place and time.

JIM

Why does it always have to be my
place and my time?

KERRY

Because that's where he's comfortable.
Here... with you. It's a compliment...
actually.

JIM

How did I get so lucky.

Kerry walks over to the TV, faces the audience, and, pretending to fiddle with the sound, surreptitiously inserts the tape into a low VCR facing the sofa with its back to the audience. No monitor, only a VCR.

Sound of the pre-game comes on.

Kerry sighs as Jerry opens a beer and leans back to watch.

JERRY

God, I love this! Who do you want, Jimbo?
I'll take the Panthers and four.

JIM

(whispers hoarsely to Kerry
who returns to stand beside him)
Of course, he'll take the Panthers and four.
The Patriots win it by a field goal. You
sure this isn't a con game he's playing?

KERRY

Jim... please. Humor him. You know
what the doctor said. You want him to
freak again?
(she nervously hesitates,
decides to blurt it out)
I have to go to San Francisco today, Jim.
Can he stay here...with you? I'll be back
Wednesday, I swear. Thursday at the latest.

JIM

(totally exasperated)
WHAT? Stay here? In his... retro condition?

KERRY

He'll come out of it... I'll bet you as soon
as he gets to feeling comfortable and safe
again... maybe even before the half... he'll

wonder why in the hell you're sitting around watching last year's Super Bowl. Please? I have to go or I'd never leave him when he's having an anxiety attack.

JIM

Can't you call someone? What about his medication?

KERRY

I gave it to him myself.
(reaches into her pocket and hands Jim a small bottle of pills)
Every two hours until he... you know... until he's fully aware of where he is.

JIM

Every two hours? How long do these things last?

KERRY

Like I said... he may come out of it before the half. Worse case scenario...
(Jim waits anxiously)
well, once it was three days.

JIM

(groans)
What am I supposed to do about Scarlett?

KERRY

Scarlett? Johanssing?

JIM

(a bit embarrassed to say...)
O'Hare.

KERRY

(can't keep from laughing)
You're kidding.

JIM

I'm gonna get her to change it as soon as I know her better. It's her real name, I swear to God.

KERRY

You should definitely get her to change it.
Sounds like one of Jerry's hookers.

JIM

I will. When I know her better.

KERRY

Let me guess... an aspiring actress.

JIM

No. An aspiring screenwriter.

KERRY

Will you do it?

JIM

Get her to change it?

KERRY

Watch Jerry for me. Until Friday.

JIM

A second ago you said Wednesday...
maybe Thursday.

KERRY

Maybe Friday. Thanks, Jim. I owe you.

JIM

And for the last two times also.

KERRY

Put it on my tab. Some day when YOU
freak out...

JIM

Like that will ever happen.

KERRY

You're in a very stressful job, like Jerry.
Don't think it can't happen.

(walks over behind Jerry; kisses

the top of his head)
I have to go, baby. I'll call you from the
airport.

JERRY

Have fun.

KERRY

Yeah. You, too.
(whispers to Jim just before she
exits)
I don't have to tell you that it means his job
if his... anxiety attacks get around. Three
years, Jim. That's all he's got till retirement.
Please take care of him.

Kerry reaches up and kisses a place somewhere near Jim's wet face.
She waves two fingers and exits.

Jim heaves a big sigh, walks over to Jerry.

When Jim's back is to the front door, it opens and Kerry slips a very large suitcase just
inside the door. She sneaks out, closing the door quietly behind her.

JIM

(standing to the side of Jerry
so he can be seen)

Jerry... I met this gorgeous redhead on the
airport limousine. She wants to be a screen-
writer and she may come here, Jerry...
TODAY... to my house to talk to me about
screenwriting.

JERRY

Hey, Jimbo... that's great. I'll keep the
sound down but I have to hear the
commercials, Jim.

(looks at Jim for the first time)

You're wet.

Jim looks down at his dripping body.

JIM

I'll get dressed.

Jerry gets re-absorbed in the game.

Phone rings.

JERRY
(looks around)
Want me to get that?

JIM
(calls out)
Get that Jerry, please.

JERRY
(walks over; picks up the phone;
one eye on the TV)
(on the phone)
Hello?
(listens)
I won't, okay.
(listens)
Honey... the game's on. The Super Bowl.
Goodbye.
(hangs up)

In another few seconds, Jim comes out.

JIM
Who was on the phone?

JERRY
Kerry. She wanted to remind me to take
my medicine.

Jim walks over to pick up the vial that Kerry left with him.

JIM
How many?

JERRY
I don't know. Usually two, I think.

Jim takes out two tablets and hands them to Jerry which he takes and finishes off with a beer.

JERRY
Who's the babe?

JIM
(checks the TV)
What babe?

JERRY
Who's coming over?

JIM
Oh. Just a girl I met on the limo
coming in from the airport.

JERRY
(chuckles)
Only you would meet a babe on a bus
and get a date. What's she like?

JIM
Straight off the farm... Iowa. Wants
to be a screenwriter. Have I heard that
before?

JERRY
Yeah? No kidding? Did she know who
you were?

JIM
You mean... did she recognize me? Like
I'm recognizable. Even when my series
was a hit... for nine years... nobody knew
who Jim Balsac was.

JERRY
Come on. You had that notice in PEOPLE
once.

JIM
You know how many people saw that? My
folks, their friends, a few industry-types.

JERRY
That's what you get for sharing a column
with a picture of Britney.

JIM

Even the people who watched the series faithfully every week, AND the reruns, I bet they wouldn't recognize the name Balsac.

JERRY

You'll be up there again, Jimbo. It only takes one series.

JIM

(discouraged;
accepts a beer from Jerry)
I'm not under thirty any more, Jer.
You know who's reading scripts at Paramount now? Twenty year old interns. If they like it... it moves on up.

JERRY

But you got that contract?

JIM

Yeah. The guy who wrote that contract and the attorney who had me sign it... both gone. You'd be surprised how fast they forget your name in this town. Watta'd you do last season? That's all they want to know.

JERRY

Go back to writing commercials. I'm in.

JIM

Even our commercial wouldn't sell in this market, Jer. You gotta have a gimmick. A geico or a cow or a Clydesdale.
(they both stare at the TV a few seconds)

JERRY

Yeah.

The game comes back on.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Why are we sitting here watching this

boring re-run?

Jim looks at his friend and smiles.

JIM

You okay?

JERRY

(gets up; puts his gun back in his holster)

Sure, I'm fine.

(yawns)

What time is it?

JIM

(checks his watch)

Two thirty.

JERRY

What time's your date?

JIM

It isn't a date. I just suggested that maybe she stop by... I gave her my card... and we could... "talk" about her screenwriting possibilities.

JERRY

(grins)

Yeah. You don't need me hanging around.

(starts to head for the door)

I gotta go downtown. We got a bust scheduled for tonight.

JIM

Jerry... you sure you're okay?

JERRY

I'm fine.

(yawns again)

I could use two days sleep.

JIM

You're gonna stay here for a few days.

(notices Jerry's suitcase at the door)

Just while Kerry's out of town. Okay?

JERRY

I guess.

JIM

So come back here for dinner.

JERRY

What about your date?

JIM

It isn't a date. She just said she MIGHT stop by on Saturday.

JERRY

I don't know. I could go home and just sleep till Kerry gets back.

JIM

That could be awhile. You're coming here. I won't take no. Kerry brought buffalo wings and chili. We'll watch the Lakers game tonight.

JERRY

(nods back and forth;
likes that idea)

You got a date.

(starts to leave; opens the door;
turns back)

If Miss... what's her name?

JIM

(embarrassed)

Scarlett.

JERRY

(holds back a grin)

Scarlett. Sounds like...

JIM

(stops him)

I know. One of your hookers.

JERRY

You know her last name... right?

JIM

(even more embarrassed)

O'Hare.

Jerry stares at Jim, tries to keep a straight face. Slowly closes the door behind him.

Jim sighs; walks over and picks up the six pack and takes it into the kitchen.

He re-enters the living room, looks at the computer on the round table next to the window; sits down and stares at the screensaver. He sits there quietly a few seconds.

KNOCK on the door.

Jim looks at the door, but doesn't move.

Another KNOCK.

Jim sighs, gets up and answers the door.

A gorgeous, buxomy REDHEAD is standing there with a large bag from Ben and Jerry's in her hand. She smiles.

JIM

Scarlett?

SCARLETT

Hi, Jim. I told you I'd come.

(she hands him the Ben and Jerry's bag)

Hope you like Cherries Garcia.

JIM

It's my favorite.

SCARLETT

Good.

(looks around the room;

sees the computer; walks

over and looks at the screensaver)

What are you working on?

JIM

I'll be right back.

Jim exits with the ice cream to the hallway, stage left. He returns immediately.

JIM

You look wonderful.

SCARLETT

Thanks. Tell me what you're working on.
I'm a great listener.

JIM

Well... to tell you the truth... I'm...
(sighs)
I'm... stuck.

SCARLETT

In the middle of something?

JIM

I don't even have a good idea. I sat at
that computer all morning, and then I
thought I'd shower and go for a walk
or something... but my friend and his
wife stopped by. He needs me right
now, so I...

SCARLETT

Oh? Shall I go?

JIM

Oh, no... No. Sit down.

They both sit on the sofa.

SCARLETT

Tell me what's going on?

JIM

Well... Jerry Schaklebee's been a good
friend of mine forever. We lived next
door when I was a struggling screenwriter.
He and his wife used to feed me when I

JIM (CONT'D)

hardly made enough bartending to cover
the rent. And then, I sold a commercial
that I made with Jerry. It was crazy.
There's these two guys sitting out on a

lake fishing. They're not catching anything. Then all of a sudden, the one guy... Jerry... gets a bite and he struggles like crazy to land this honkin' fish. He hauls it into the boat and it's flopping all over the floor. Well... he looks at me. I look at him and we both grab an end of the fish and flip it overboard. He sits back down and drops his line back into the water and I do the same. "Nobody'd ever believe it," he says. And then this booming voice comes out of the clouds and says...

(Jerry cups his hands in front of his mouth to echo...)

"Believe it!"

Scarlett laughs. She has a very sweet, sincere laugh.
Jim laughs; looks at Scarlett and smiles.

JIM

I sold this rough commercial we made... with Jerry's wife, Kerry, filming it... and that started me off on the road to screen-writing.

Scarlett applauds.

SCARLETT

That's a wonderful story.

JIM

It's true. I owe both of them. They saved my life a number of times in the lean years. That's why when Kerry asked if I'd keep an eye on Jerry for a couple of days while she goes to San Francisco for a business meeting, I couldn't turn them down.

Scarlett looks around.

SCARLETT

Where is he?

JIM

Oh. He... Wait a minute. Would you

like something to drink? I have some Chardonnay chilled. Beer? Anything?

SCARLETT

I'll have a glass of wine.

JIM

Great.

(he disappears into the kitchen to get the wine but keeps talking)

Anyway... Jerry has a very stressful job with the L.A.P.D., Special Unit. He's an undercover man heading up a division of the Vice Squad. He busts prostitution rings wherever they pop up in L.A.

Jim returns with two glasses and a bottle of Chardonnay; pours Scarlett a glass and hands it to her)

SCARLETT

Thanks. Wow. That's fascinating.

Jim pours himself a glass, clinks glasses with Scarlett in a silent toast.

Jim sips his drink, sits back down.

JIM

Yeah. He has a big department. Special Agents. Undercover call girls. Very stressful. He's a mother hen. Worries about his Agents like he used to worry about me getting enough to eat.

SCARLETT

So these agents go out there like a sting?

JIM

Exactly. They put themselves in danger. Not only with the Johns but with the other girls... and guys... on the street. It's not infrequent that Jerry gets a call

that one of his agents been knifed and
in the hospital.

(sips)

Then about a year ago, Jerry started
having these attacks. He only has three
years till retirement and Kerry's been
trying to hold things together so he can
get his pension and retire to a desk job.

SCARLETT

What kind of attacks?

JIM

Anxiety. When things get too stressful,
he reverts to a more comfortable place and
time.

(shakes his head)

Unfortunately, that place and time are here
in my apartment and usually a football game
on TV... just the two of us. That's where
he's most comfortable. He came over here
this afternoon wanting to watch the Super
Bowl. The Super Bowl was two months ago.
Kerry brought over a tape.

SCARLETT

I think that's... sweet.

JIM

Sweet?

SCARLETT

Yes. There was a young man in our little
town of Pleasantville, Iowa who used to
disappear for days on end. The whole town
would be on the lookout for him, but no one
ever found him. Then about three or four
days later, he'd just show up. He'd say he'd
been away. We don't know where he went.
Probably, like your friend, he went some place
comfortable.

SCARLETT (CONT'D)

This is your friend's comfortable place.
That's such a compliment to you.

JIM

That's what Kerry said.

SCARLETT

It is. Your best friend turns to you when he needs a...

(searching for the right word)

JIM

A blankee... like my little sister used to carry around.

SCARLETT

Yeah. I guess you're just a true definition of a friend. I like that.

JIM

You do?

SCARLETT

Yes. I'm just a small town girl. I have lots of good friends like that who make me... comfortable. I'm an orphan. Raised by an aunt who passed away recently. That's when I decided to come to California and study screenwriting.

Jim is hanging on her every word, watching every move she makes. He's in a trance over her beauty and appeal.

SCARLETT (CONT'D)

(smiles coyly)

It is funny though. You know?

JIM

Funny?

SCARLETT

Yeah. It could be. I mean a series based on a Vice Squad with undercover call girls and maybe... even guys dressed up like call girls because... as you said... it is a dangerous job.

Jim stares at her.

JIM

I never thought of it that way.

SCARLETT

You must have a hundred stories from Jerry about things that happen on the job. Probably... if you look beyond the seriousness of it... they're very funny things actually. You know... a parody, like sex in the city can be funny... or bigots like Archie Bunker can be funny... or...

JIM

(pipes in)

The funeral home business.

SCARLETT

(smiles sweetly)

You get it. I'll bet you could come up with a series that would be hysterical... like a Saturday Night Live take on this very bleak... and sad... world.

JIM

When you talk, I can see the possibilities.

SCARLETT

You should sit down and write while you're into it.

(looks around)

Where is your friend now?

JIM

He had to go downtown. There's a bust tonight.

SCARLETT

I thought you were supposed to be keeping an eye on him.

JIM

(suddenly realizes)

You're right.

Jim puts his glass down; takes the cell phone out of his pants pocket.

JIM (CONT'D)

I better make sure he's okay.

(dials; waits)

Hi. This is Jim Balsac. Is Jerry Schaklebee there?

(listens)

You haven't seen him at all? He was supposed to be there 20 minutes ago.

(listens)

Okay. If he shows up, have him call me, will you? It's very important. He knows the number.

(listens)

Thanks.

(snaps his cell phone closed;
turns to Scarlett)

He hasn't shown up yet.

SCARLETT

I better let you find him. What if he has one of his attacks and blacks out... or something.

JIM

Oh, God. I promised Kerry. His job!

SCARLETT

(heading for the door)

Go.

JIM

Wait a minute. I want to see you again.

SCARLETT

You will. I'll check with you later. It was fun picking your brain.

(she winks)

Believe it.

She exits.

Jim stands there looking at the closed door. Finally, he realizes that he has to find Jerry. He takes out his cell phone and dials a number.

Listens.

JIM

(on the phone)

Jerry? Where are you? I'm going down to the station in case you show up there. call me the minute you get this message,

okay? I'll leave the door open in case
you get back before I do.

Jim hangs up, sticks the cell phone in his pocket and exits.

After several seconds (and Jim is long gone),
KNOCK on the door.

JERRY (o.s.)

Jim?

Another KNOCK.

Jerry tries the door and it opens.
He enters carrying a large cup from Starbuck's.

Jerry walks over and sits down on the sofa. He looks around, then at the TV (into the audience) which is off. His head nods. He continues to nod, but tries to stay awake. Finally, he picks up his coffee cup and heads through the archway for the guest bedroom, stage right. Offstage, a door to the guest bedroom closes.

Seconds pass.

Jim storms into the room

He takes out his cell phone as he plops his car keys onto the desk; dials.

JIM

Kerry? Where are you? It's Jim.

(listens)

Listen... Kerry... Jerry went to work
about half an hour ago. I got to worrying
and thought I should check on him.

Anyway, I went down to the station but
he wasn't there. He told me that's where
he was going.

(listens)

Where else might he go?

(listens)

Wait. Don't do that. What about your sister?

(listens; resigned)

Okay. I'll be here.

Jim hangs up, thinks a few seconds, dials again.

JIM

Is Tony there?

(listens)
Tony? Jim Balzac. Is Jerry Shacklebee there?
(listens)
Have you seen him?
(listens)
Okay. If he comes in, have him call me, okay.

Jim hangs up. He doesn't know who else to call.
He looks over at the computer, at the screensaver.

Walks over, and sits down at the computer.
He moves the mouse, hits enter; starts to type.

He types very slowly at first, then moves the chair closer and types and types and types as he gets into it.

Lights fade over typing.
Typing continues into blackout and into

Lights up.

DOORBELL rings frantically, keeps ringing until Jim answers it.

Kerry is at the door, very harrassed.

JIM
I'm sorry, Kerry.

KERRY
He didn't answer his cell?

JIM
I left him a message.

KERRY
Did you keep trying?

JIM
(digs his cell phone out of his
pocket again; dials)
It's ringing.
(listens)

Damn! His message machine.
(listens)
Jerry! Call me the minute you get this.
You hear? The minute. Kerry's here in
the house. She's back... and she's worried.
Call me, you hear?

Kerry takes the phone out of Jim's hand.

KERRY
(yells into the phone)
JERRY SHACKLEBEE!! Call home!
You get it? I'm not kidding! I drove like
a maniac from the airport to get back here.
I have to get to San Francisco by ten o'clock
tomorrow morning. Don't make me nuts
worrying about you.
(suddenly Kerry stops talking
and listens)
(Jerry has picked up.)
You're where?

Kerry goes over to the arch leading to the hallway and disappears.

When she returns, she is still talking on the phone to Jerry.

KERRY
I don't believe it.

Jerry walks out of the guest bedroom with the phone in his hand, talking to Kerry over the phone.

JERRY
Believe it.

Kerry and Jerry look at each other with their phones to their ears.
Simultaneously, they take their phones down, snap them closed and stare at each other.

JERRY
Is it Friday already?

Kerry stares at him.

KERRY
(to Jerry)
Sit down.

(to Jim)
You, too.

The guys sit in the chairs facing each other.

KERRY
Start at the beginning. I want to know everything. Don't leave out anything.

JIM
(sighs)
After you left, Jerry snapped out of it. He knew the Super Bowl was a re-run and he said he had to go to the station. You did expect him to go to work, I assume. And after Jer left, Scarlett arrived. She brought Ben and Jerry's.

JERRY
What happened to the ice cream?

JIM
I put it in the freezer.

KERRY
Hold it! Back up here. Who is Scarlett again?

JIM
My date. I told her about Jerry staying here and she suggested I go look for Jerry.
(turns to Jerry)
Where were you by the way? You weren't at work. I called there.

JERRY
I must have left my phone in the car when I stopped for coffee. I got sleepy.

KERRY
That pill I gave you. It makes you drowsy.

JIM
And the two I gave him.

KERRY

TWO?

JERRY

Jerry said you give him one or two.

KERRY

You gave him two tranquilizers after I left? I gave him one before we came here. No wonder he fell asleep.

JERRY

You give me two sometimes.

KERRY

The other one's a vitamin. Oh, Jerry!

(She hugs him.)

Go on.

JERRY

I got sleepy. I brought my coffee back here and I thought Jim and Scarlett were... you know... in the bedroom, and I didn't want to arouse them...

(smiles at Jim)

Funny, huh? Anyway... I went into the guest bedroom and sacked out for awhile. I'm still sleepy.

KERRY

You stay awake until I hear all of this story. Scarlett O'Hara stopped by...

JERRY

Not Scarlett O'Hara. O'Hare. Her real name is Scarlett O'Hare. She's hoping to become a screenwriter.

KERRY

That's her honest-to-God real name? Sounds like one of Jerry's hookers.

JERRY

I should have stayed around to get a look at her.

JIM

She's gorgeous. She's from Iowa, or some place. I could have talked to her all night. She just sat there and listened to every word I said.

KERRY

You TOLD her about Jerry? Jim!

JIM

I'm sorry, Kerry. She was just so easy to talk to. I felt like I knew her all my life. Like she was from my childhood. She said the same thing you did about it being a compliment that Jerry would turn to me during one of his... attacks. She even told me a story about some kid in her home town who used to disappear for days at a time when he was having one of his... attacks. Then he'd reappear after a few days. Nobody ever found out where he'd been.

JERRY

A psycho. Like me.

KERRY

JERRY! You are not a psycho!

JERRY

I have fits.

KERRY

You do not have fits! Who told you you have fits!

JERRY

Jim.

KERRY

JIM?

JIM

I never said that. Never.

JERRY

Every time you say... attacks, you pause

first. You're thinking "fits", but you're too polite to say it. Can I watch TV?

KERRY

(takes out her cell phone)
I'm calling Edmund.

JERRY and JIM

(simultaneously)
Not Edmund!

KERRY

(ignores them; dials; listens)
Edmund? Kerry. I need you immediately.
It's an emergency.

(listens)
I don't care about your golf game. It's an emergency. Jerry will pay for it.

JERRY

What? Listen, if I have to see a shrink, I sure as hell don't want your brother.

KERRY

(her hand over the receiver)
He'll see you for half price... you're family.
(listens)
Jerry's had another of his anxiety attacks.
And Jim's... well, we'll talk about him when you get here. Jim's house.
(listens)
Okay. I won't. But hurry. I have to be in San Francisco at ten o'clock tomorrow morning... if I have to take Jerry with me!
(hangs up)
Edmund was on his way to play golf. He's in the neighborhood. Everybody be calm. He'll be here in ten minutes.

JERRY

Can I watch TV?

KERRY

Honey, why do you want to watch TV?

JERRY

It's Saturday. There's sports on.
(looks around)
What happened to the beer?
(picks up the bottle of Chardonnay)
This'll do.

KERRY
(takes the bottle from Jerry)
Not on top of three tranquilizers. Sit down.
Be calm. Edmund will be here any minute.

All three sit and stare at each other.

JERRY
I have to go to work.

KERRY
You're not going anywhere until you talk
to Edmund.

JIM
I have to get back to my script.

JERRY
What script?

JIM
About your job... prostitutes. It's hysterical.

Kerry and Jerry stare at Jim.

Kerry gets up and goes to the window.

KERRY
(almost under her breath)
Edmund... hurry.

JERRY
There's nothing funny about prostitution,
Jimbo.

JIM
But there is, Jer. You have to look at
it from a comedian's viewpoint.
(Jerry stares at him like he's flipped)
We bring in cross dressers... they pummel

the guys who try to pick them up.

JERRY

They're cops?

JIM

Yeah.

JERRY

Cops can't pummel the public. Even Johns breaking the law. We can't lay a hand on them.

JIM

In a funny world, you can, Jer. Bigots weren't funny either back in the sixties. Remember Archie Bunker? Did the networks take a chance on him? You better your sweet life they did. And look what happened. And "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy". Whoever thought that would click. And "Six Feet Under". Nothin' funny about a funeral home, right? Wrong. Saturday Night Live, Jer. Saturday Night Live. That's where it's at. Prostitution is a riot. Believe it.

JERRY

"Believe it", again. You're starting to believe your own commercials. I'm worried about you, my friend.

KERRY

Hurry, Edmund.

(looks out the window, up the street)

Thank God! He's here.

Kerry rushes out to talk to Edmund before he gets inside.

Jerry and Jim slouch in their chairs.

JIM

It's a great idea, Jer. Best idea I've had in three years.

JERRY

I don't know you.

EDMUND (Kerry's brother) enters. He's wearing golf attire.

EMUND

I waited two weeks to get this tee time.

JIM

Good afternoon, Edmund. What can I get you?

EDMUND

I gather this is not a social call.

(looks at Jerry; sighs; pulls over a chair;
takes out a notepad and pen, glasses
and sighs again)

Start at the beginning, Jerry.

JERRY

(resigned)

I was home.

JIM

That's not the beginning. You were here.

EDMUND

Jim. Please don't interrupt, Jerry. You'll have your turn to tell your side of it.

JIM

But that's not the beginning.

JERRY

Jim's right. I was here. I stopped in on my lunch hour on Friday with a pizza. I just visited this agent in the hospital with a shiv stuck in her upper arm.

EMUND

(interrupting)

Never mind the graphics, Jerry. We know what you do for a living.

JIM

I noticed that Jerry was looking...

Both Edmund and Kerry shoot him a look.

JIM

Sorry.

(he sits back and lets Jerry
tell the story)

JERRY

Jim's right. I was feeling funny. Like
anxious for no reason. I fidgeted a lot.
Couldn't eat more than three slices of
pizza. My appetite went kaput. I told
Jim I thought it was all the caffeine I
had that morning.

Jerry looks at Edmund for some comment.

EDMUND

Go on.

JERRY

Well, I decided not to go back to work.
I'm not sure where I went. I think I went
to a movie. I remember driving past that
theatre on Colorado and I kind of remember
going into the parking structure. From then...
it's a blur until I walked in the house later that
night.

KERRY

Four hours late. I was frantic. I called
downtown.

(turned to Edmund)

Did you know you have to be missing for
more than...

EDMUND

Kerry. Let Jerry tell it, please.

Kerry sits back and keeps quiet, like Jim.

JERRY

I had dinner, watched a little TV and
went to bed. Kerry dragged me over
here today to stay with Jim while she
went to a meeting in San Francisco.

That's it. Sorry you wasted your tee time. There's nothing going on. End of story.

EDMUND

You had a blackout. There's a period of...
(checks his notes)
at least five hours that you can't account for.
Do you have any idea what movie you saw?

JERRY

No.

KERRY

I don't know what Jerry saw, but I think Jim's been watching "Gone With The Wind" on late night TV.

JIM

The only TV I've had on was the Super Bowl this afternoon.

EDMUND

You were watching the Super Bowl here this afternoon?

KERRY

Edmund, I can explain.

EDMUND

Kerry... I may have to ask you to wait in the bedroom until I've gotten the whole story here.

Kerry sits back in disgust.

EDMUND

Jim... what's your story?

JIM

It's no story, Edmund. I was here, taking a shower, when Jerry comes in and starts watching the Super Bowl. I'll let Kerry fill you in on that one. Anyway, I was

maybe expecting this girl that I met on
the limo Friday, coming in from Chicago,
and I was a bit... annoyed to find Jerry here.

KERRY

The girl's name is Scarlett O'Hare, Edmund.

Edmund glares at Kerry. She shrinks back into her chair.

EDMUND

Go on, Jim.

JIM

So, Jerry snapped out of his... attack and he
said he had to go downtown to work. I thought
that was okay. He'd taken his medicine...

KERRY

Two more tranquilizers on top of the one I
already gave him.

All three men glare at Kerry.

JIM

Well... this girl, Scarlett, does stop by. We
have a nice little chat over a bottle of wine.
I tell her about Jerry... sorry Kerry... and
she tells me about this kid from her home
town in Iowa who had... attacks like Jerry.
Disappeared for days at a time and nobody
knew where he'd been when he showed up
again. Anyway, I told her how crucial it was
to Jerry's job that no one find out about these...
attacks. We talked a long time, mostly about
what a funny sit-com series Jerry's work
would make.

Kerry and Jerry shake their heads in disbelief.

EDMUND

Busting prostitution?

JIM

Yes. But, like I told Jerry and Kerry, think of it as a Saturday Night Life rendition. It's hilarious. I owe it to Scarlett. I've been typing away ever since she left. That's the title, incidentally... "Away". It's about this cop who retreats to a more comfortable place when he's... you know... stressed.

KERRY

Oh! Tell the world, right.

JERRY

Actually... I'm beginning to see the possibilities.

JIM

(excited)

See?

EDMUND

Whose idea was the sit-com, Jim? Yours or this girl's.

JIM

Both of ours, I guess. No, wait. It was hers. She just said that she thought a series based on call girls could be very funny. And I agreed.

EDMUND

You've seen this girl...
(checks his notes)
Scarlett O'Hare... before.

JIM

Well, of course, I've seen her before. I met her on the airport limo coming back from Chicago Friday. We started talking and when she heard what I did for a living, she admitted that she was

an aspiring screenwriter and she was coming to L.A. to try to get into a screenwriting program. I gave her my card and told her to contact me when she got settled and I'd have a look at her scripts and maybe direct her to the right program.

EDMUND

And she just showed up.

JIM

Yes.

(defensively)

She's a lovely girl. She gave me this super idea for a sit-com. The idea was right here in front of me all the time.

EDMUND

So Scarlett O'Hare shows up here this afternoon. Alone. Did she bring samples of her writing with her?

JIM

(embarrassed to say...)

I didn't see any. She had a bag of Ben and Jerry's Cherry Garcia with her. My favorite.

Edmund makes a note.

EDMUND

Have you been experiencing writer's block, Jim?

JIM

(reluctant to admit...)

Yeah. About a year.

JERRY

Ever since his contract was up at Universal.

JIM

Okay. I ran dry. I admit it. Nothing seemed to come any more. I was thinking of writing a novel, but I'm used to writing a TV script in one week.

I don't have the discipline for a novel.
It takes too long.

EDMUND

So this girl, who came here to talk to you about her scripts, actually gave you an idea for your own script. Did she suggest that she help you, that you work on it together?

JIM

Writing it, you mean? No. No, she didn't. Like I said, she's a nice girl from Iowa. Nobody here in L.A. would dare give an idea they had to a scriptwriter without submitting it through an agent or a lawyer and copyrighting or registering it with Writer's Guild. Nobody gives anything away in L.A. Especially not a hot idea.

EDMUND

Exactly. I mean, that's what makes it very curious, don't you think? Here is this aspiring screenwriter who comes across a great idea for a hot new sit-com and she gives it to you, without asking for anything in return.

JIM

Maybe she thought she owed me since the idea for the series came to her right here in my house... from Jerry.

JERRY

I want co-authorship.

KERRY

Jerry! Are you crazy? You know what will happen to your job... your PENSION... if the Chief of Police finds out that your friend is making a comedy out of you and your department?

Jerry stands, heads for the sofa.

JERRY

I'm going back to the game.

Edmund looks at Kerry.

KERRY

It's a tape.

EDMUND

Jerry... we're not finished here. You can watch the game in a few minutes.

Reluctantly, Jerry sits down again, slouching in his chair, pouting.

EDMUND

How do you feel, Jerry?

JERRY

Sleepy.

KERRY

Three tranquilizers in five hours.

Jerry yawns.

EDMUND

Would you like to take a nap, Jerry?

JERRY

Now you're talkin'.

EDMUND

Why don't you go in the other room and lie down for awhile.

Jerry get up, yawns, stretches, heads for the guest room.

JERRY

Let me know when it's halftime. I don't wanna miss Janet Jackson.

He walks into the guest bedroom singing a Janet Jackson tune.

Edmund, Kerry and Jim look at each other.

Edmund turns his attention to Jim.

EDMUND

I've been treating Jerry for a few months now, Jim. He's suffering from anxiety attacks. I suspect it was something that occurred in his childhood. He may have experienced something traumatic at a very young age. He's repressing it. Anyway, when he feels threatened or overly stressed, he retreats to a time and a place that makes him feel secure and comfortable.

JIM

My house.

EDMUND

Yes. Sitting here with you, watching a football game, having a few beers allows him to push down his feelings of panic. He stresses over the safety of his agents out there in the streets.

JIM

Oh, come off it, Edmund. He's had stress for almost twenty years.

EDMUND

And, so far, he's handled it. But the rubber band will only stretch so far so many times without...

(puts his hands in fists in front
of him and snaps them)

breaking. Jerry is close to breaking. The frequency with which he suffers from these anxiety attacks is accelerating.

JIM

Man... who doesn't occasionally panic.

EDMUND

Of course. We all do. And that's when we need help. But, in Jerry's case, there aren't many people around he can trust, evidently.

KERRY

If he asks for a transfer at his age, they'll put him on a desk job. He doesn't want a desk job, at least not until he's retired.

EDMUND

I know, Kerry.

JIM

He can afford early retirement if we sell this sit-com idea. I'm gonna need Jerry. I still have that contract with Universal to deliver three scripts in the next five years.

EDMUND

You're suggesting that he move from one stressful job into another.

JIM

What?

(thinks about that)

Well, what job doesn't have stress? He'll get used to a script a week. Maybe we don't go to the suits until we've got the whole thirteen weeks ready to show them.

EDMUND

I wouldn't wait that long if I were you.

JIM

What's that supposed to mean?

EDMUND

How well do you know this woman who came here this afternoon?

JIM

We're back to Scarlett again. I thought that's where you were heading. I don't know her at all. I met her on the airport limo this week. I gave her my card after she told me that she came to L.A. to learn screenwriting.

EDMUND

And she showed up here this afternoon.

JIM

In the limo I told her about the various

programs available for screenwriters around town, like Robert McKee's, UCLA, USC's... there's a slew of them. I told her I'd meet with her and we'd discuss her options.

EDMUND

Call her.

JIM

Excuse me.

EDMUND

Call her. Ask her to come over. I'd like to meet Miss O'Hara.

JIM

O'Hare!

(Jim thinks a second)

I ... I don't have her number.

EDMUND

You have no way of getting in touch with her?

JIM

(realizes)

No.

(sits back)

She'll call.

EDMUND

She left here with a great idea for a new series, but you think... she'll call you.

JIM

Yes. I don't like what you're implying, Edmund.

EDMUND

I don't know much about scriptwriting, Jim, but what I hear around this town is the need to protect your script. I know stories about some very

important people in this town who were “betrayed”... is the only word for it... when it comes to stealing scripts or ideas. What exactly do you know about this woman?

JIM

Oh, come on, Edmund... she’s just off the boat. Or the plane. She lives in Iowa. She wants to be a scriptwriter, so she came to L.A. Where else would you go if you wanted to be a scriptwriter? Boise?

EDMUND

That’s in Idaho. Did she tell you her home town?

JIM

(realizes)

No. Yes. Wait a minute.

(thinks)

Pleasantville. Or Pleasantown. Something like that.

EDMUND

(makes a note of that)

Did she show you a sample of her writing?

JIM

(realizes that she didn’t)

No.

EDMUND

But...

JIM

She said I should go and find my friend. And she said something else.

Kerry and Edmund wait patiently, inch forward to hear.

JIM

Oh, yeah, she said... “Believe it.”