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*DESPERATE WRITERS*  
(a zany comedy in one act)

by

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## DESPERATE WRITERS

### CAST LIST

ASHLEY (32, attractive, determined with her baby clock ticking)

DAVID (late 30s, funny, attractive in an offbeat kind of way, wants to make Ashley happy, wants to get his ducks in a row)

JESSICA VANE/ (40s, attractive, been there done that, hardened over the years, but still has a soft side)

BURKE/ ( 50s, shark, in love with the business, losing his golden touch)

LEO GOLDBERG/ (Jewish, 60's, back-stabbing, double dealing producer)

VANESSA (40s-60s, dedicated, supportive, but a bad multi-tasker)

JACKSON/, YOUNG HUSBAND, /MARTY/SYCOPHANT TWO/ZENO. (tough, 30s)

CAROL, /TINA/ WAITRESS/ (20s' 30s)

RICK, BRANDON, WAGNER //TREVOR/ ED's VOICE) (attractive, early 30s)

NIKKI /LAURA,/ YOUNG WIFE/ SYCOPHANT ONE (attractive, 20s)

Roles are divided for 10 actors. If you want nine actors, the actress playing Nikki, etc. can also play Vanessa. If you want to use more actors, simply don't double up on roles.

Depending on budget, stage effects can be very symbolic. This is high comedy. For treehouse for example, simply have sign saying treehouse. Falling down and fighting action can be very stylized. Halloween masks should be comic - Halloween characters or current political figures...

THERE IS NO INTERMISSION

DESPERATE WRITERS

TWO STORY SET.

DAVID AND ASHLEY'S APARTMENT. LARGE LIVING SPACE WITH A BAR AREA STAGE RIGHT AND AN OFFICE WITH A SMALL DESK, OFFICE CHAIR AND BOOKCASES STAGE LEFT. THERE IS A DOOR DOWNSTAGE RIGHT WHICH LEADS TO THE KITCHEN AND TO THE BACK DOOR. THERE IS A DOOR NEXT TO THE BOOKSHELF IN THE OFFICE WHICH OPENS TO THE BATHROOM. WHEN THE BATHROOM DOOR IS OPEN, THE TOILET IS VISIBLE. THE BEDROOM IS ON A RAISED PLATFORM TO THE REAR OF STAGE LEFT. ABOVE STAGE RIGHT IS A PLATFORM FOR THE TREEHOUSE. SLIDING DOORS ARE PLACED UPSTAGE AND ARE USED THROUGHOUT THE SHOW. ON STAGE ARE STACKS OF PACKING CARTONS. DAVID AND ASHLEY ARE CLEARLY IN THE PROCESS OF MOVING.

SOUND TRACK OF DREAM/NIGHTMARE -  
SOUNDS OF ANIMALS PLUS DAVID'S VOICE:

DAVID

Pregnant? Ashley. No, no, ducks not ready. Guaranteed, first rewrite? New timing belt? No, no more cats! More scripts? Where are you, Vanessa? Option to direct? Jackson? Pregnant, pregnant? Ashley....

THE RINGING ALARM CLOCK GETS LOUDER.)

DAVID

*(waking, whispering)* Pregnant? Pregnant? Pregnant?

(ASHLEY REACHES OVER, TURNS OFF THE  
CLOCK. SHE KISSES DAVID.)

ASHLEY

Wake up David, you're having a nightmare. I'm late.

DAVID

*(slowly opening his eyes, sitting up)* You are?

ASHLEY

Not late late... just late. So are you. You have a shoot at nine.

DAVID

*(getting out of bed)* What a dream.

ASHLEY

Were we fighting?

DAVID

No. No, there was this bidding war for our script...

ASHLEY

Did we get guaranteed first rewrite?

DAVID

Weird, it got really weird. Vanessa was in it and Jackson...

ASHLEY

Jackson? With or without his limo?

DAVID

God, what a dream. Pregnant....

(ASHLEY COMES DOWN THE STAIRS.)

ASHLEY

Wow, a pregnant girlfriend and Vanessa, the bearer of bad news. No wonder you woke up screaming.

DAVID

I wasn't...Ash, let's not start.

(ASHLEY PUTS ON HER BATHROBE AND WALKS DOWNSTAGE TO TALK TO THE AUDIENCE.)

ASHLEY

Isn't it pathetic? He has to dream our deals. That's what my mother calls him, a dreamer. Find someone with some money. Forget about this fikachta business. We get by. Don't think we don't. I cook. I'm really good, actually. I could probably have my own catering business if that were my dream. And David's a really good photographer.

(DAVID WALKS DOWNSTAGE AND KISSES ASHLEY. SHE STOPS A MOMENT, SMILES. THEN HE CONTINUES TO THE COUNTER, WHERE HE PREPARES THE COFFEE AND TEA.)

ASHLEY

But that's not what we dream about. We've been writing together for over ten years. We've been dreaming of success a long time. Now, I have other dreams. I've been dreaming about getting married and having a baby. I don't have much time left. Like maybe an hour. But we've been waiting, waiting to sell a script, waiting to get married, waiting for him to get his stupid ducks in a row. My friends all have their mommy and me's. I want to be in a mommy and me before I start menopause. And now the owners are selling this place. We have to move in two weeks!

(ASHLEY STARTS MOVING TOWARD THE BATHROOM.)

DAVID

*(calling after her)* It's our time, Ashley.

ASHLEY

In more ways than one.

DAVID

I know, I know...it's just that...

ASHLEY

*(yelling over the shower)* I don't want to hear about your ducks, David. Shoot, I promised to bake something for pregnant Tina's party. What time's the meeting with IMAGINE FILMS?

DAVID

Ten. MIRAMAX at 4. *(pulling on some pants)* I'm making coffee.

ASHLEY

Tea!

(THE PHONE RINGS. DAVID ANSWERS IT.)

DAVID

*(into phone)* Hello.

(SOUNDS OF PHONE STATIC AND THEN OF RUSHING WATER AND THE WHIRRING OF MACHINES.)

SPOTLIGHT OPENS STAGE RIGHT ON VANESSA. SHE IS ON HER BLACKBERRY.)

VANESSA

David?

DAVID

Vanessa? It's hard to hear you.

VANESSA

I'm at the Carwash. So, listen, Davey, your meeting with Miramax has been changed to 5. They're very excited. What? Yeah, wax. David?

DAVID

I'm here.

VANESSA

Love it, they love it. Think it has great potential. I think this is going to be it, Davey.

(DAVID CARRIES THE CUPS OF COFFEE BACK INTO HIS OFFICE.. PICTURES OF PEOPLE WITH THEIR PETS ADORN THE WALLS:: A POLICE OFFICER WITH SHADES, HOLDING A LITTLE PUPPY, A BALDING MAN WITH A PARROT ON HIS HEAD, A LITTLE GIRL WITH HER GOLDEN RETRIEVER.)

DAVID

From your mouth to God's ear, Vanessa.

VANESSA

Believe me, I've been talking to Him a lot. So, think positive. Oh, Capital passed. They only want kids' films now. Omni passed, said it was too soft, Brooks Films passed, not sweet enough, Magic passed, they have something like it. But, don't get depressed. Are you getting depressed?

(DAVID OBSESSIVELY PUNCHES THE PILLOWS AS HE ARRANGES THEM ON THE COUCH.)

DAVID

Who said anything about suicide? We're behind on the rent. I'm driving a '75 junker, needs a timing belt and a head gasket. I've got no business and no money to promote the business that I don't have. We don't have a pot to piss in and Ashley wants to get married and have a baby.

VANESSA

We ne...mo (*sound drowned out by water*)

DAVID

Can't hear you, Vanessa?

VANESSA

I need more copies. Oh, for the ten o'clock meeting - bring some new ideas. Let me know how it goes.

(ASHLEY COMES OUT OF THE BATHROOM, WRAPPED IN A TOWEL. DAVID HANDS HER THE TEA. SHE TASTES IT.)

ASHLEY

You forgot the sugar.

DAVID

She wants us to pitch something new. What about Frankendad... the kid who puts together a new father with pieces of dead bodies?

ASHLEY

I hate that idea, always hated that idea.

(ASHLEY CROSSES TO THE COUNTER STAGE RIGHT TO GET THE SUGAR)

DAVID

It's funny.

ASHLEY

It's gross. (*stops a moment*) If she's so certain about MIRAMAX why does she need more copies?

DAVID

It's not gross, it's....it's bent.

ASHLEY

John Cusack would be perfect for the script. Why can't we just get his number, call him and... (SCREAMS)

(ASHLEY TURNS, STOPS SHORT AND SCREAMS.

DAVID TURNS TO SEE BRANDON, WEARING JEANS, A T-SHIRT AND CARRYING A NOTE PAD.

ASHLEY HOLDS THE TOWEL TIGHT AROUND HER. DAVID TURNS TO REACH FOR A WEAPON, GRABS A TOILET PLUNGER.)

BRANDON

*(raising his hands, cowering)* Carol told me to walk right in, said no one would be home.

DAVID

We're home.

CAROL

*(walks into the bathroom, dressed in a suit)* Oh...you're home. David, Ashley, this is Brandon Sussman. He loves the place.

BRANDON

I love your place.

ASHLEY

Carol, I'm naked.

(ASHLEY EXITS TO GET DRESSED)

CAROL

Beautiful counter. Great for entertaining.

BRANDON

Great counter.

DAVID

*(fuming)* Carol, we told you, you have to call before you come in. You're supposed to give us warning.

CAROL

Sorry. We'll just sneak a quick peek at the backyard on our way out. Seems like you have a ways to go with the packing...

DAVID

We have it under control, thanks.

(CAROL STARTS LEADING BRANDON OUT.)

BRANDON

Nice meeting you.



DAVID

Likewise.

CAROL

Brandon just sold his first spec script - first script he's ever written. Maybe he can give you some tips. *(to Brandon)* David and Ashley are writers too... *(sotto voce)* They haven't sold anything yet.

(CAROL AND BRANDON EXIT.)

DAVID

Nice.

(TELEPHONE RINGS.)

DAVID

*(into phone)* Studio. Hi, yes. Yes, we photograph cats.

(ASHLEY WALKS IN.)

DAVID

*(continuing into phone)* How frisky? Mmmm, hmmm Cats are tricky...I just pop them into a plastic bag, tie off the top and let em chill for about a half hour, after that they'll pretty much do whatever I want.

ASHLEY

You can't make jokes like that, it's terrible.

(ASHLEY IS SHAKING HER HEAD AT HIM. SHE GOES TO THE BOOKSHELF WHERE PILES OF SCRIPTS LAY WAITING.)

DAVID

Yep. Monday through Saturday. Thanks for calling. *(He hangs up)*

(ASHLEY FINDS THE SCRIPT SHE IS LOOKING FOR.)

ASHLEY

My mother's threatening to visit next week.

DAVID

No problem, I'll just pop her into a plastic bag, tie off the top...

(ASHLEY GIVES HIM A LOOK.)

DAVID

Fine all right. But don't leave us alone. Whenever you leave the room, she starts in on how she's the only one in her yoga class without a grandchild.

ASHLEY

It's hard for her. She just wants me to be...

DAVID

*(starting to gather up his equipment.)* "Happily married with a bun in the oven", yeah I know. Just tell her I need to have all my ducks lined up. We've got to sell a script, get into the union, financial security. She wouldn't want you to marry a loser.

ASHLEY

You're not a loser. If you're a loser, I'm a loser for loving a loser.

(A BEAT.)

DAVID

Ash, we're about to have this place sold out from under us, probably to that infant who just sold his first screenplay. Little son of a bitch. We're barely getting by. We got to get into the game before we take the next step.

(PHONE RINGS.)

DAVID

Hello, studio.

(LIGHT COMES UP ON VANESSA, WEARING MICKEY MOUSE EARS, SITTING IN THE BEDROOM AREA. SOUNDS OF VOICES SINGING "IT'S A SMALL WORLD" CAN BE HEARD.)

VANESSA

*(on her blackberry, humming "It's a Small World")* David?

DAVID

Yes, it's hard to hear you, Vanessa.

VANESSA

I'm still with the kids. Just needed to tell you the Miramax meeting is postponed to six. They love the script, love it, but they're thinking of making Sally blind, add a little more obstacle to having her fall in love with Mark. Minor change. You could do it in a week.

(MORE)

VANESSA (cont'd)

*(to the unseen kids)* Kids, hands inside. *(to David)* Hourglass passed, don't want any fantasy. Tindrum passed, they're going out of business, going into fast-food. Again, not to worry, Marty and Laura love it at Miramax, love it. Good luck at the 10 o'clock. Why haven't you left yet?

DAVID

We're going. We're going.

VANESSA

*(voice fading away as she appears to be going into a tunnel)* Got to go.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT ON VANESSA. THEN LIGHTS OPEN ON ASHLEY AND DAVID STAGE LEFT SITTING IN A SMALL OFFICE SET. NIKKI, THE SECRETARY, IS ON THE PHONE. TO THE RIGHT OF NIKKI SEPARATED BY A SCREEN IS THE PRODUCER'S OFFICE.)

NIKKI

*(snooty and bored)* I need a reservation for Mr. Wagner and Mr. Sandler at 1. Mr. Wagner prefers table 8. No, that will not be all right. He doesn't like that corner. Yes, I can hold. *(glancing through the Vogue on her desk.)* I'm so glad. I'll tell him.

(DAVID GIVES ASHLEY A LOOK. ASHLEY GLANCES AT HER WATCH.

MR. WAGNER'S VOICE BOOMS OUT FROM THE INNER OFFICE.)

WAGNER

D'ya get that reservation?

NIKKI

Done.

WAGNER

Call Marty and see if he can make golf Sunday at 9 with Goldberg.

NIKKI

All right. David and Ashley are here.

DAVID

*(whispering to Ashley)* We've been here for an hour.

ASHLEY

Shhhh.

NIKKI

And your wife called.

WAGNER

What else is new? Send them in.

(ASHLEY AND DAVID MOVE TO WAGNER'S OFFICE WHERE HE IS STANDING PRACTICING WITH A GOLF CLUB.)

DAVID AND ASHLEY ARE SITTING ACROSS FROM HIM.)

WAGNER

The script's interesting. I like it, but it's not for me. Demographics don't work. What else you got?

ASHLEY

But you like it. So if you like it...

DAVID

Well, I know this sounds weird, but I have this idea..

(WAGNER POINTS TO THE VARIETY ON HIS DESK.)

WAGNER

D'ya see that new French film - LA SOUPE? Grossed twenty million. Bullshit. Piece of crap. I hate the French. Ever been? Overrated. Bunch of sauce headed, snooty, anti-American...

(ASHLEY CLOSES HER EYES IN FRUSTRATION.)

NIKKI (V.O.)

I've got Leo Goldberg on two.

(WAGNER PRESSES LINE TWO.)

WAGNER

Leo, you finally going to break 80. All right, we'll see. Tee off's at nine, right?

ASHLEY GLANCES AT HER WATCH, GETTING MORE AND MORE NERVOUS. WAGNER HANGS UP.)

WAGNER

Look, I love your writing. Really funny. Great characters. The scene when he realizes he loves her, I cried. It's just... romantic comedies...not the right time.

DAVID

You said it was the right time last week.

WAGNER

Last week. Last week was the "right time." This week... Something fresh. Westerns. A musical western. That's really what I'm looking for. Couple of guys out on the prairie, beans and horses... Can you do a musical? But, edgy, an edgy western musical, dark...and transgenderish?

(LIGHTS FADE OUT AS DAVID AND ASHLEY MOVE FROM HIS OFFICE.)

DAVID

Western musicals? Asshole. They're all assholes.

ASHLEY

He liked our script. He said it made him cry. Fresh? They're making, Shrek Four and another parent and child switching bodies crap script. Why can't we sell a script?

DAVID

I shoulda hit him with his golf club.

ASHLEY

I better hurry. I'm going to be late. (*kissing him*) Bye. Take good pictures. Love you.

DAVID

Ditto. Have fun today. Don't be mad.

ASHLEY

Serving food to a bunch of producers talking about other people's scripts. It will be miserable.

DAVID

I hate this business.

ASHLEY

Me too.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

LIGHTS OPEN ON DAVID SETTING UP FOR A SHOOT IN HIS OFFICE. AT THE SAME TIME, ASHLEY, WEARING AN APRON, CARRIES A TRAY OF FOOD DOWNSTAGE INTO A PARTY WHICH IS NOW IN PROGRESS. ACTION WILL GO BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN DAVID AND ASHLEY.

LIGHTS OPEN ON DAVID WHO COMES FORWARD TO TALK TO THE AUDIENCE.)

DAVID

I got to sell a script. Please God, son of bitch I got to sell a script.. I mean, yeah, I know what the odds are...all right, the lottery and all that shit and I would have stopped trying years ago except for the damn donkey and the carrot thing. Most people don't know this, but donkeys are very clever and they're smart too. Yet donkeys will walk miles and miles in a little circle, blinders on their eyes, if you dangle a carrot in front of their nose. Going nowhere, stumbling on hour after hour, day after day... what a moron. What a loser! What for? The carrot. The mother effing carrot. (BRAYING) haw, hee haw! Yeah, that's me.. the jackass that keeps on writing spec scripts, that keeps following the carrot, because...because our stuff is good. Nobody's ever told us our writing sucks., "kid, keep your day job." No, they like, believe in it, promises, promises. So here I am, barely making it, a hanging by my teeth pet photographer, slash wanna be screen writer with a girlfriend slash writing partner whose bio-clock is ticking and she's pissed off because I've put our future life together on hold until I have all my ducks lined up in a row. i.e. Selling a script, making some real money, etcetera etcetera. (considers) Ducks, donkeys, pet photography. Shit, what is it with me and animals? What a jackass!

(SOUNDS OF PARTY. BURKE AND WAGNER ENTER FROM DOWNSTAGE RIGHT. JESSICA AND HER SYCOPHANTS COME THROUGH THE SLIDING DOORS TO DOWNSTAGE CENTER. LEO GOLDBERG COMES IN FROM STAGE LEFT.

ASHLEY NOW HAS HER APRON ON AND BEGINS SERVING HORS D'OEUVRES, FIRST TO BURKE AND WAGNER.

WAGNER

So, Burke, we have a deal?

BURKE

Yeah if nobody does anything stupid we got a deal. We'll finalize tomorrow at noon. At Le Dome.

WAGNER

Ohhhhhhhh, I got golf with Goldberg at 9:00....

BURKE

Goldberg? You shopping this project to that SOB.? Scott, no one's giving you 5% of the gross. So don't bother showing up if you're not willing to budge.

WAGNER

You're not the only store in town, Burke.

(WAGNER spots JESSICA)

Oh, Jessica Vane...think I'll go say hello to your "X".

(WAGNER MOVES TO JESSICA'S GROUP AND IS JOINED BY LEO GOLDBERG, A BEARDED PRODUCER IN HIS LATE FIFTIES, WEARING GOLF SLACKS AND A HAWAIIAN SHIRT)

(BURKE TAKES SOME FOOD FROM ASHLEY'S TRAY.)

BURKE

Asshole. (to ASHLEY) Are you an actress?

(ASHLEY SMILES AND WALKS OFF. BURKE CHECKS HER OUT, AS HE DOES ALL THE WOMEN.

LIGHTS FADE ON THE PARTY. LIGHTS UP IN DAVID'S OFFICE.

NOW SITTING IN THE TREEHOUSE.)

SINGING VOICES

Yo ho yo ho...a pirate's life for me.

DAVID

(*on phone*) Vanessa? Did someone else pass?

VANESSA

Davey, don't be so pessimistic.

(SOUNDS OF SCREAMING, RANTING FROM THE  
PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN RIDE AT  
DISNEYLAND.)

DAVID

(*on phone*) Can I call you back, Vanessa?

VANESSA

Just wanted to tell you not to read Variety today.

DAVID

Oh, no.

VANESSA

You know that great idea you had, *DNA DAD*? Well Paramount is doing it.

DAVID

We pitched it to Paramount.

VANESSA

I know, I know. But what can you do. Sue them? Sue Paramount? I believe in you. Deep breath. It's the business. Oh, your meeting is changed back to five. (loud, to kids far away) Kids, don't follow Mickey into the bathroom.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT ON DAVID AND VANESSA.  
LIGHTS GO UP ON ASHLEY AND PARTY-GOERS.)

WAGNER

Jessica, you look wonderful...

JESSICA

It's been shopped to death, Scotti...I'm not interested.

(SCOTT LOOKS TO LEO GOLDBERG.)

GOLDBERG

Dreck! Dreck is what your pedaling. I'm not looking at anything you've run past Burke...it's tainted...he's finished. I'm getting another drink. Tainted, right Jessica? You want a drink.



JESSICA  
No thanks.

(LEO STARTS MOVING OFF. WAGNER IS RIGHT ON HIS HEALS.)

WAGNER  
So Leo, golf or what?

JESSICA  
(looking at Burke, coming down stage)

(ASHLEY OFFERS A CANAPE TO JESSICA.)

JESSICA  
These look tasty. I hope they're good. There's nothing worse than soggy bruschetta.

FIRST SYCOPHANT  
You're so right, Jessica.

(ASHLEY HOLDS THE PLATTER FOR THE OTHERS.)

SECOND SYCOPHANT  
I love your shoes, Jessica. Jimmy Choo?

JESSICA  
The new fall collection.

FIRST SYCOPHANT  
Prada Trunk Show tomorrow at Noon. You could fit it in before your meeting at 1:30 with Tarentino.

JESSICA  
I have Botox at 12:15.

FIRST SYCOPHANT  
I forgot. Not that you need it.

JESSICA  
What do you know about needing? You're ten. But, when you grow up, Steinway Clinic is the best. They pick you up and drop you off by limousine. I'll have them get me at 1:15 and take me straight to the meeting. Make sure I have concealer and powder in my bag. Sometimes I bruise.

(ASHLEY'S CELL PHONE GOES OFF. JESSICA GIVES HER A LOOK THAT COULD KILL.)

ASHLEY

I'll be right back with the lobster popovers. You'll love them.

(ASHLEY SCURRIES OFF TO ANSWER HER CELLPHONE.)

JESSICA

I can't believe they keep their cellphones on. How rude.

(JESSICA'S CELLPHONE RINGS. HER SYCOPHANT, THE PHONE HOLDER, ANSWERS IMMEDIATELY AND HANDS THE PHONE TO JESSICA.)

JESSICA

*(into phone)* Hello, Gracie, No, it's fine. What do mean the writers won't change the ending! That is not OK. ( to Sycophant) Get me new writers.

(ASHLEY ANSWERS HER PHONE.)

ASHLEY (INTO PHONE)

*(softly)* Hello.

(LIGHTS UP ON DAVID ON THE PHONE.)

DAVID (INTO PHONE)

Hello.

ASHLEY

*(whispering)* I can't talk now.

(ANOTHER WAITRESS HURRIES OVER TO ASHLEY.)

WAITRESS (actress playing Carol)

We're fired!

ASHLEY

Who's fired?

DAVID

Who's fired?

WAITRESS

I'm fired. We're fired. You're fired. Hannah's closing up shop, moving to Oregon.

ASHLEY

Great.

DAVID

What's great?

ASHLEY (INTO PHONE)

I lost my job.

DAVID (INTO PHONE)

That's not great.

ASHLEY

What's the problem?

(ALL THE CHARACTERS ON STAGE FREEZE EXCEPT FOR DAVID, ASHLEY, BURKE, JESSICA AND GOLDBERG.)

THE TRIO OF PRODUCERS TURN AND SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THE AUDIENCE.)

DAVID (INTO PHONE)

The problem?

ASHLEY

The problem?

JESSICA

The problem?

GOLDBERG

The problem?

BURKE

The problem...I've lost my nose! I can't smell it any more. You know, a hit. The bang!

JESSICA

The problem? Do you know how hard it is for a woman in this town? They tear your heart out and eat it for lunch. You have to be tough. But, If you act tough, they call you a bitch. But, unless you act like a bitch, they won't listen to you, unless you're Oprah!

GOLDBERG

The problem... Cerebrovascular disease. Hypertension. Do I look like that to you?

BURKE

Why couldn't I be like the rest of the sad sacks in this town and lose my looks first? No, I had to be cursed with eternal youth and a rock hard body.

GOLDBERG

All right, it wouldn't hurt for me to cut down on some of the booze and saucy foods I put away.

JESSICA

Danny Burke, never look that good 15 years ago. Spends his life now at Sportsclub LA. He was my first, husband, not lover. I've only had three, husbands not lovers, Lovers, well, I don't want to go into that.

BURKE

I'm hanging on by my fingernails. Jesus, Burke! It used to be so easy for me. I was young. I was cocky. The big fish, he heavy hitter, the go-to guy.

JESSICA

We were writers, a team. We'd stay up all night when we were really excited about an idea. Eat ice cream, laugh. Mocha almond fudge. We were going to have it all, a career, a family. Then, we sold a script and started producing. I brought up having a baby. He didn't want it, didn't want me spending my time on anyone else. He needed me. And he needed to sleep with every young thing who walked into his office. I didn't need that.

GOLDBERG

And maybe I could lighten up on the cigars. Maybe, but I'm not going to let a bunch of mashuganah doctors at Cedars rob me of the only real joy I've got left in life!

BURKE

You don't know what's it like, walking through the studio with a fresh hit in your pocket. Every body smiles, the big hellos, the pats on the back..."Say, Burke, can you squeeze me in for lunch', 'dinner', 'golf'? "Hey, Burke, the wife just popped out an eight pound baby boy, er, gonna name him after you "little Burke!"

GOLDBERG

I live large. I'm an "On and Off" kind of guy. The 'Dealmaker', the "Heartbreaker." Studio heads fight over my projects like junk yard dogs over a bone.

JESSICA

Now they're all circling around me. I make films happen. I know what works.

(MORE)

GOLDBERG (cont'd)

I like being in control, not having to depend on anyone else. Don't get me wrong. I still eat mocha almond fudge. I just control the spoon.

BURKE

Up there...that's where I was...that's where I belong...not with the **others**...clutching, clawing their way up over your back.

GOLDBERG

No middle...no grey area. That's how I play it in this cockamamy business and it's worked out golden for me. Women? No problem in that department. I got the "S" and "P" success and power, the ultimate chick magnets.

JESSICA

The key to happiness? Sex, fabulous sex. Finding the right doctor. And a couple of megahits a year.

GOLDBERG

Friends? Please... in my line of work, the only ones sitting around in a circle singing 'Kumbay'a are the losers and fastookanah jerkoffs who are busy kissing my ass everyday looking for a seat on my coattails.

JESSICA

Now, look at me. I'm almost fif...ty. I can't even say it. I put my make up on in the dark. Can't bear to see the newest line. Sometimes they just appear over night. How does that happen?

BURKE

(looks at Jessica) Jessie. She's so hot. Great nose. Best in the business. What a mess I made of our lives together. Oh, Burke, just couldn't keep the pee pee in the teepee.

GOLDBERG

Don't get me wrong. I can schmooze and lather up a butt with the best of them. But, it's all show. I don't negotiate. I dictate. It's my way or the highway.

JESSICA

I can't complain. I'm doing what I want. I just find it best to stay out of really bright lights.

GOLDBERG

When I go home, I go home alone and I like it that way. But, sometimes, Mr. Johnny walker isn't enough.

BURKE

Coproduct? There's no shame in that. Every body needs a little help now and then.

(MORE)

GOLDBERG (cont'd)

I can still work the strings. I can get anybody in this town on the God Damn phone. Christ, I want my nose back!

(LIGHTS COME UP ON DAVID AND ASHLEY,  
STILL ON THE PHONE.)

ASHLEY (ON PHONE)

David? Did someone else pass?

DAVID (ON PHONE)

So negative, just changed the time.

ASHLEY, DAVID, JESSICA, GOLDBERG and BURKE (together)

I hate this business.

(LIGHTS OUT ON DAVID, ASHLEY AND THE  
PARTY)

(LAURA, THE ASSISTANT, PUSHES AN  
EXECUTIVE CHAIR ON WHEELS HOLDING  
MARTY, A PRODUCER, TO STAGE RIGHT.

ASHLEY AND DAVID WALK INTO THE SCENE.)

MARTY

I think we really have something here. And we're ready to move. I figure if we start preproduction after the New Year, we're good to go for next Christmas release.

(DAVID SMILES AT ASHLEY. ASHLEY SMILES  
AT DAVID).

LAURA

You guys did a fabulous job with the rewrite. It is sooo funny.

MARTY

Let's talk directors. This script has Ronnie Howard written all over it. We're going to hammer out the details with your agent...uh...

ASHLEY

Vanessa.

MARTY

Vanessa, right...get Ronnie on board, he'll have his own changes...give it a polish and we're rolling.

DAVID

So you're going to call Vanessa?

MARTY

Absolutely.

MARTY

We just have to wait for Ed to read it.

(DAVID AND ASHLEY FREEZE.)

DAVID

Ed?

ASHLEY

Ed?

LAURA

Ed, Ed, Ed. Ed's our other partner.

ASHLEY

We never met Ed. We never knew there was an Ed.

DAVID

No one has ever mentioned 'Ed'.

MARTY

It's just Ed. Don't worry, kids. Ed always likes what we like. That's why we have such a successful partnership.

ED

(From OFF STAGE, a BLAST of belly laughter) This is hysterical! I love it!

DAVID

Ed?

MARTY (CONT'D)

Yep. That's our Ed.

LAURA

Tell your agent to expect a call. Go celebrate.

(HALLOWEEN MUSIC COMES UP. LAURA  
WHEELS MARTY BACK OFF STAGE RIGHT.)

ASHLEY AND DAVID PICK UP HALLOWEEN HATS, A HALO AND HORNS, FROM COUNTER AND CONTAINER OF BROWNIES.

THEY MOVE TO THE CENTER DOORS WHERE THE HALLOWEEN PARTY IS TAKING PLACE.)

ASHLEY

It's never good when someone else has to read it. It's never good.

DAVID

They said to celebrate.

ASHLEY

It's not good.

(THE CENTER DOORS OPEN. A BEAMING, VERY PREGNANT TINA, OPENS THE DOOR.)

TINA

Oh, you're so cute.

DAVID

Trick or treat.

TINA

*(calling inside to the others)* Ashley and David are here.

ASHLEY

How are you feeling?

TINA

Pregnant. I am so ready for this to be done. You can't imagine what it's like to carry this load. Thanks for the brownies. Hmmm. I've been craving these. I'll get you guys something to drink. It's beer, right David.

TINA LEADS DAVID OFFSTAGE TO JOIN THE OTHERS. ASHLEY MOVES DOWNSTAGE TO TALK TO THE AUDIENCE.)

ASHLEY

I hate her. No, I don't hate her. I hate her for being pregnant. That's what I want. To be fat and uncomfortable and not be able to fit into any of my clothes. I want a baby.

(MORE)



ASHLEY (cont'd)

I hate my career. Our career. It's not fair. We're doing everything right. Why can't we just get that break? We get that break. We'll feel good. We'll have some money. We can say we sold a script. My parents can say their daughter sold a script. We can get married. I can have a baby. I will not be disappointed again.

(THE CENTER DOORS OPEN AND THE PARTY PEOPLE COME IN. THEY MOVE DOWNSTAGE, THEIR ARMS AROUND THEIR ADDITIONAL LIFE-SIZE CARD BOARD PARTY FRIENDS. THE CARD BOARD FIGURES ALSO WEAR HALLOWEEN MASKS.)

JACKSON, THE LIMO DRIVER, STILL SPORTING HIS BLACK CAP, WALKS OVER TO DAVID AND ASHLEY).

JACKSON

Hey, how you doing?

DAVID

Where's your costume?

JACKSON

I'm on call. (noticing horns) That's a good look for you. (turning to Ashley) You are adorable. How'd the meeting go?

DAVID

They loved it.

JACKSON

About time. I'll keep my fingers crossed.

(TREVOR RAISES HIS GLASS OF WINE AND PUTS HIS ARM AROUND TINA.)

TREVOR

I'd like to propose a toast.

(All EYES TURN TO TREVOR AS TINA WALKS TO HIM.)

TREVOR

To Tina, her pilot got picked up today, 13 episodes and they're going to work around the baby.

(TREVOR KISSES HER.)

ALL PARTY GOERS

(assorted congratulations) That's great. Congratulations.

ASHLEY SMILES SO MUCH IT HURTS.)

DAVID

(whispering to her.) We're next.

(DAVID'S CELLPHONE RINGS. HE PICKS IT UP.

LIGHTS GO UP ON VANESSA DRESSED AS THE QUEEN MOTHER, WEARING HER PHONE HEADPIECE.

DAVID

(into phone) Hello.

VANESSA

(into Blackberry) Davey.

DAVID

(into phone) Vanessa.

VANESSA

(into Blackberry) Well, good news and bad news.

DAVID

(into phone) Give me the bad news.

ASHLEY

Ed passed.

VANESSA

(into Blackberry) Ed passed.

DAVID

(to the others) Ed passed.

(ASHLEY LOOKS LIKE SHE'S GOING TO CRY. JACKSON LISTENS INTO CELLPHONE AND TALKS INTO PHONE TO VANESSA.)

JACKSON

I thought they loved it.

VANESSA

*(into Blackberry)* Who was that? Well, they loved it, but Ed passed. He didn't like the concept. It was a gut thing.

DAVID

*(into phone)* He didn't read it.

VANESSA

*(into Blackberry)* He read ten pages. He loved it, but then it was a gut thing.

DAVID

*(into phone)* What's the good news?

VANESSA

*(into Blackberry)* I'm making more copies. Going to get it to Vane, Goldberg and Burke. They all liked the concept. Deep breath.. We'll talk tomorrow.

(VANESSA HANGS UP.)

EVERYONE LOOKS AT DAVID AND ASHLEY, IN SYMPATHY. DAVID TRIES TO BE POSITIVE.)

DAVID

She's going to take it to Vane, Goldberg and Burke.

(GROUP FEELS MORE OPTIMISTIC. THEY MOVE OFF. DAVID EXITS, LEAVING JACKSON AND ASHLEY CENTER STAGE.)

JACKSON

Son of a bitch. They'll never read it. I drive those jerks around all day in the limo. I hear their bullshit conversations. They never read because then they have to say yes or no. They'll never say 'yes' because if the film bombs, it's their ass on the line. All they can say is "no" and play it safe. But, they're scared to even do that. I lost my shirt on a project I was set to direct because some new exec was scared to say, "yes", didn't even read it. You want to know the truth.

(HE PAUSES, LOOKING DIRECTLY AT ASHLEY.)

JACKSON

You want to know the truth...

(ASHLEY LISTENS AS IF THE WORDS COMING FROM JACKSON'S MOUTH ARE GOSPEL. THEY SEEM TO HANG IN THE AIR.)

JACKSON

The only way to get those people to read a damn script is to put a gun to their heads, throw em in a cage, lock em up and make em read it. Shove it down their throats.

(THE WORDS HAVE BEEN SPOKEN. AND ASHLEY HAS HEARD THEM.)

JACKSON

Lock 'em up...make 'em read it.

(LIGHTS FADE TO HALF ASHLEY AND JACKSON EXIT.

MUSIC SIMILAR TO MISSION IMPOSSIBLE BEGINS.

STAGE HANDS, IN BLACK CLOTHING, BRING IN THE CHAIN LINK TYPE CAGE ONTO THE SET.

IN TWO MINUTES, A CHOREOGRAPHED CAGE BUILD IS COMPLETED.

ASHLEY AND JACKSON ENTER, WIELDING GUNS, FORCIBLY ESCORTING THE TRIO OF PRODUCERS NOW BLINDFOLDED AND GAGGED INTO THE CAGE. THEY ARE PLACED ONTO CHAIRS SET UP IN THE CAGE.

ASHLEY AND JACKSON PROCEED TO BIND THE PRODUCER'S FEET.)

MUFFLED SCREAMS FOR "HELP" AND ANGRILY SHOUTED EXPLETIVES ARE HEARD.)

(LIGHTS GO UP.)

ASHLEY IS AT THE COUNTER MAKING THE LAST MINUTE PREPARATIONS, ARRANGING TRAYS, ETC.)

SOUND OF VAN PULLING UP. ASHLEY RUSHES TO MEET DAVID BEFORE HE ENTERS THE LIVING ROOM.)

DAVID

Ashley, I'm really starved. Do you have any of the...

ASHLEY

Do you believe in our script?

DAVID

Absolutely.

ASHLEY

*(cutting him off, intense)* Really, really, really believe in it...believe in it and more, believe in us as writers.

DAVID ATTEMPTS TO SQUEEZE PAST HER.

DAVID

Yeah, of course...

ASHLEY

Our script, our child. Like in "Hedda Gabler." Would you do anything for our child?

DAVID

Probably. What ...is this another one of those stupid Dr. Phil tests?

ASHLEY

Would you bet our life savings on it?

DAVID

What life savings?

ASHLEY

Do you love our script?

DAVID

Yes...I do. I love our script. But,...

Really, really,...

ASHLEY

Ash!

DAVID

(DAVID MANAGES TO GET AROUND ASHLEY AND STARTS TO THE OFFICE. HE FREEZES WHEN HE SEES THE CAGE ERECTED IN THE LIVING ROOM.)

ASHLEY WAITS.

A BEAT.

DAVID POINTS TO THE CAGE. HE MOVES AROUND THE BACK OF THE CAGE IN SHOCK. THE PRODUCERS, MOVE THEIR HEADS IN THE DIRECTION OF HIS VOICE TO THE LEFT. DAVID CONTINUES AROUND THE FRONT OF THE CAGE, STILL STARING IN HORROR. THE PRODUCERS FOLLOW HIM WITH THEIR HEADS).

Weird, huh?

ASHLEY

(DAVID PULLS ASHLEY ACROSS THE STAGE IN BACK OF THE CAGE TO THEIR OFFICE.)

ASHLEY

I feel so good about this honey, I really, really do. Last night at the party, listening to Jackson...something just clicked into place... an epiphany David. I had an epiphany!

An epiphany?

DAVID

Yes!

ASHLEY

I don't understand.

DAVID

ASHLEY

It was easy. (*She taps the gun in her belt.*) I knew where they all would be, Vane was having Botox, Burke at Le Dome, Goldberg golf.  
(MORE)

ASHLEY (cont'd)

It's amazing what you can do with a gun and a mask. And a limo. I promised Jackson manicotti for life. David, relax, have a pot sticker.

DAVID

Crazy... this is crazy! You'll never get away with it!

ASHLEY

That's right, David, think positive. I hope no one in there has a problem with pork.

(SHE TASTES A POT STICKER.)

ASHLEY

These are really good. Let's see, a little rosemary for garnish.

DAVID

You've kidnapped three of Hollywood's hottest producers. We're going to jail for...for a long time... and you're worried about dietary restrictions and garnish?

ASHLEY

Shh. Presentation is everything and keep your voice down, they'll hear you.

DAVID

Presentation. They're not going to eat... They're not going to listen to us read. This is, this is frigging nuts!

ASHLEY

*(fierce, but quietly)* Get a grip David. This can work. It has to work. They'll eat. They're stressed. That makes people hungry and they'll listen to the script because it's brilliant. They're used to people doing crazy things. This is Hollywood. We're just taking it to a new level. Just keep it together. We'll probably get a book deal out of this. What are they doing?

DAVID

How the hell should I know?

ASHLEY

Peek.

(DAVID STARTS TO POKE HIS HEAD OUT, BUT ASHLEY CATCHES HIM, PUTS A HALLOWEEN MASK ON HIM. SHE LOWERS HIS MASK AND SNAPS IT BACK INTO PLACE WITH A LOUD... THWACK.)

(*in pain*) Oooowww.

DAVID

Sorry.

ASHLEY

(DAVID TAKES A LITTLE PEAK INTO THE LIVING ROOM.)

THE PRODUCERS HAVE SETTLED DOWN SOMEWHAT. THEY COCK THEIR HEADS FROM SIDE TO SIDE.)

They're just sitting there.

DAVID

(ASHLEY ROLLS HER EYES AT HIM.)

Duuuuhh.

ASHLEY

(SHE GRABS HER MASK FROM THE DESK, PUTS IT ON, TAKES A DEEP BREATH.)

Okay, it's show time.

ASHLEY

THE PRODUCERS IMMEDIATELY ERUPT INTO A GARBLED ROUND OF SHOUTS AND MUFFLED RANTING.

DAVID TURNS AND STARTS BACK INTO THE OFFICE, BUT ASHLEY STOPS HIM.)

(*whispering*) Go on!

ASHLEY

(*whispering*) And what?

DAVID

(SHE TAKES DAVID ASIDE.)



THE PRODUCERS FALL QUIET, THEIR FACES TURN IN UNISON, TRYING TO FOLLOW THE CAPTORS' MOVEMENTS.)

ASHLEY

Lay it out for them, the whole thing, why they're here, do as we say...or we'll blow your f'ing brains out... etcetera, etcetera.

(HE TAKES A BREATH AND SQUARES HIS SHOULDERS, MOVES CLOSER TO THE CAGE AND SPEAKS TO THE PRODUCERS.)

DAVID

*(to the producers)* How you doing?

JESSICA, BURKE, GOLDBERG

*(muffled, reactions)* Is this guy for real, let me out, etc.

ASHLEY MOVES A LITTLE CLOSER TO DAVID.)

DAVID

I'm not doing this, I'm not.

(ASHLEY POKES DAVID TO PROCEED. DAVID TURNS BACK TO THE PRODUCERS.)

DAVID

Uhh, the first thing, I want to assure you that you have nothing to be afraid of.

(ASHLEY CLEARS HER THROAT. DAVID GLANCES AT HER. SHE GIVES HER HEAD A LITTLE SHAKE "NO".)

DAVID

*(correcting himself)* Actually, you have...a...little bit...

(ASHLEY NODS HER HEAD "YES".)

DAVID

...to be afraid of, but we're not going to hurt...

ASHLEY

*(whispering)* We will, we will hurt you.

DAVID

Well, we will hurt you, so just do as you're told, no heroes. And, we'll get along just fine. UH, any questions so far?

JESSICA, BURKE, GOLDBERG

*(louder, still muffled)* Let me out of here, you can't do this, (etc.\_

DAVID

Now, I'd like to take gags off, but you've got to promise to behave yourselves, okay? No screaming, okay? Ladies first.

(THE PRODUCERS LOOK TOWARD HIM AND NOD THEIR HEADS, "YES".

DAVID MOVES INTO THE CAGE, GOES OVER AND STARTS TAKING OFF THE MASKS, STARTING WITH JESSICA. THEN HE TAKES OFF THE GAGS, STARTING WITH BURKE.)

JESSICA, BURKE, GOLDBERG

*(seeing each other for the first time)* You! Burke! Oh, Goldberg *(etc.)*

DAVID

That's better.

BURKE

We've been punked, right? Where's that homo, Kutcher...? Come on out Kutcher, you son of a bitch!

JESSICA

Zip it, Burke, can't you see this is real?

GOLDBERG

*(yelling and bullying)* What do you people want with us?

BURKE

Money, of course. How much? *(nods at Jessica)* She's loaded.

JESSICA

Burke!

BURKE

I oughta know, I helped you get it. Our divorce just about killed me..

JESSICA

Oh, shut up!

GOLDBERG

Ain't love grand?

BURKE

Look who's talking, Goldberg. Your ball breaking divorce settlements are legendary. \*

(A FRENZY OF BICKERING ERUPTS BETWEEN THE PRODUCERS, ALL OF THEM SHOUTING AT ONCE.) \*

GOLDBERG \*

Putz...I'll give you legendary. Legendary is how you snap up top directors with bullshit promises and take them out of the marketplace! \*

JESSICA \*

(to Burke) I had Peter Jackson to direct, project greenlighted, I lost him to Mousehouse on one call from you! \*

BURKE \*

He pulled out because it stank. A Chopsocky rescued from that Australian indie company... \*

(DAVID TRIES TO QUIET THEM DOWN AND TAKE CONTROL.)

DAVID

Right...Quiet down... That's enough. Please, please, quiet...

(THE PRODUCERS CONTINUE CARRYING ON AS IF DAVID WEREN'T THERE.)

JESSICA \*

It was an inked deal Shithead! You wouldn't know a hot property if it bit you in the ass. \*

GOLDBERG \*

Vampire Vixens! That's all I have to say! \*

JESSICA \*

Still beating that dead horse! \*

GOLDBERG

We had Harrison.... we were in talks with several mini-majors...

\*

\*

BURKE

Rotting in DEVELOPMENT HELL.

\*

\*

JESSICA

May it rest in peace.

\*

\*

GOLDBERG

That project had franchise written all over it...

\*

\*

JESSICA

Bo hoo hoo!

\*

\*

ASHLEY

SHUT THE HELL UP!

(ALL EYES TURN TO SEE ASHLEY OUTSIDE THE CAGE DOOR, BRANDISHING A LARGE CARVING KNIFE.

STARTLED, DAVID MOVES QUICKLY OUT OF HER WAY.

THE ROOM GOES COMPLETELY QUIET.

THE PRODUCERS, WIDE-EYED AND SILENT FOCUS ALL THEIR ATTENTION ON ASHLEY AND HER VERY LARGE KNIFE.)

ASHLEY

You self-centered, egotistical, pompous, talentless jerks. You cruel, rude, heartless, shallow excuses for human beings. I loathe you. I loathe how you control everything and won't give anyone a chance no matter how talented they are or how hard they work. I loathe that you keep us waiting, waiting and we can't get on with our lives.

(ASHLEY MOVES INSIDE THE CAGE, WIELDING HER KNIFE. THE PRODUCERS ARE HORRIFIED. JESSICA CRIES OUT EVERY TIME ASHLEY WIELDS THE KNIFE CLOSE TO HER)

ASHLEY - CONTINUING  
(MORE)

ASHLEY (cont'd)

But that all ends here and now. For once, we're in control. We call the shots. You will hear our goddamn script because it's good and worth hearing. And you will not, you will NOT put us on HOLD.

(DAVID, CAUGHT UP IN THE MOMENT, SPONTANEOUSLY THROWS OFF HIS HALLOWEEN MASK AND BREAKS INTO APPLAUSE. ASHLEY MOTIONS FOR HIM TO PUT THE MASK BACK ON.)

JESSICA

*(quietly, with dread)* Oh my God, they're writers.

(ASHLEY GESTURES FRANTICALLY ABOUT DAVID'S MASK BEING OFF.)

ASHLEY

David!

GOLDBERG

Writers?

\*  
\*

BURKE

Writers? You are so screwed.

\*

(ASHLEY, FRUSTRATED PULLS OFF HER MASK, TOO.)

ASHLEY

We're not the ones in the cage. Shit.

JESSICA

And you're that waitress from that party with the cellphone.

BURKE

Yeah, I remember you.

GOLDBERG

Have you sold anything?

DAVID

No, but we've had things optioned.

(ASHLEY ROLLS HER EYES AT DAVID.)

Oh, Christ!

BURKE

\*

\*

This isn't how it's done, Bubbala.

GOLDBERG

\*

Look, we've gone the proper route. It gets all the way to the top and then you bastards pass without even reading it. Not anymore. David untie them.

ASHLEY

(SHE QUICKLY TAKES A PINK PLASTIC GLOVE FILLED WITH ICE FROM HER APRON AND HANDS IT TO JESSICA.)

\*

\*

(*softly to Jessica*) Here, it's not too late. Ice cubes inside to help reduce the swelling. Just don't press too hard. And don't bend down. It could move the Botox around.

(*cheerful tone, to everyone*) Anybody hungry? I'll get dinner.

ASHLEY

(SHE TAKES THE GUN OUT AND HANDS IT TO DAVID.)

If they move, shoot them.

ASHLEY

ASHLEY GOES INTO THE KITCHEN TO GET FOOD.

THE PRODUCERS, SILENT, STARE AT DAVID. HE IS GETTING MORE AND MORE UNCOMFORTABLE. )

Be right back.

DAVID

(DAVID GOES OUT OF THE CAGE, LOCKS IT. HE GOES THROUGH THE KITCHEN DOOR AFTER ASHLEY.

THE PRODUCERS HUDDLE CONSPIRATORIALLY AND WHISPER.)

There's two of them and three of us. Come on.

BURKE

JESSICA

They have a gun, darling. And seem quite insane.

BURKE

They're writers.

GOLDBERG

Look, let's just play it out. Sheep-like. Face value sort of thing. They read their script, we listen. End of script, we leave. Take them at their word sort of thing, for now anyway.

JESSICA

Agreed.

BURKE

Bullshit...I'm no sheep, and I have a very important meeting at 7 PM.

\*

JESSICA

Yeah. (*sarcastically*) Business. What is she this time, 16?

\*

BURKE

I'm closing a very sweet deal.

JESSICA

Yeah, you and your deals.

GOLDBERG

Do you smell rosemary?

(DAVID OPENS THE DOOR TO THE KITCHEN AND ASHLEY WHEELS OUT THE DINNER CART, FILLED WITH DELICIOUS-LOOKING FOOD. THE PRODUCERS ARE IN SHOCK.)

DAVID THEN OPENS THE CAGE DOOR FOR ASHLEY.)

ASHLEY

For appetizers, we have double cream brie cheese in a golden, crispy phyllo dough purse, and pork pot stickers with a ginger soy dipping sauce. For dinner, crispy thyme marinated chicken served with haricots verts and roasted shitake mushrooms.

\*

\*

\*

(THE PRODUCERS SIMPLY STARE AS ASHLEY STARTS PASSING AROUND LITTLE PLATES OF APPETIZERS.)

ASHLEY

Ms. Vane, I believe you prefer vegetarian, so we zucchini lasagna with a bechamel cream sauce.

\*

JESSICA

That's very thoughtful.

(GOLDBERG TAKES A BITE.)

BURKE

What if they poisoned it?

JESSICA

No one poisons brie in a phyllo dough purse. I'll have one, please.

GOLDBERG

This is delicious.

ASHLEY

And a salad, of course, a mesclun of baby green with Gorgonzola cheese, candied walnuts, flamed grapes and a fruity balsamic dressing.

\*

(SHE HANDS BURKE AND JESSICA THEIR DISHES.)

ASHLEY

We are civilized people, despite how it may appear. We want you to be comfortable. We want you to give us your full attention. Cell phones have been removed.

(ASHLEY POINTS TO THE PILE OF THREE CELL PHONES ON THE TABLE OUTSIDE THE CAGE).

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

No one more important is going to call and interrupt us. You are not going to cancel or postpone. You will be permitted bathroom breaks, but only one person may leave at a time. You are here and you are going to listen to our script and be open to what you hear. I hope you enjoy the food. Oh, Tarte Tatin and hot molten chocolate cake for dessert. Now, before we begin would you prefer flat or sparkling water?

BURKE

Sparkling.

JESSICA

It gives you gas.



(BURKE GIVES HER A LOOK.)

ASHLEY

Our script is entitled 'From God's Mouth'.

GOLDBERG

Oi...not another fastunkanah God movie?

\*

DAVID

(*to Ashley*) See? What I tell you?

(ASHLEY HANDS DAVID THE SCRIPT.)

ASHLEY

(*to the Producers*) Are you being open?

(ASHLEY NODS TO DAVID, FOR HIM TO START.

DAVID PULLS UP A CHAIR, SITS DOWN AND  
RELUCTANTLY READS FROM THE SCRIPT.) \*\*\*

DAVID

(*quietly*) Exterior. Race track.

ASHLEY

Louder.

(DAVID GIVES HER A LOOK, THEN STARTS  
AGAIN.)

DAVID

Exterior. Race track...

GOLDBERG

Louder.

DAVID

(*irritated*) Exterior. Race track.

(ASHLEY SMILES, TAKING IN THE SCENE.)

ASHLEY

Better.

DAVID

Honey!

ASHLEY

*(Encouraging him)* Go on David. *(Excited)* This is just like masterpiece theatre.

\*

DAVID

Open with the fierce thundering of horses' hooves as the racehorses speed to the finish line. MARK TURNER, 35, ultimate scam artist and conman, attractive in an offbeat way, now dressed in an elegant suit, looks at home in the Owner's Circle. His arm is around a Nebishy-looking man who's writing a check., The Nebishy Man says, "So, how many investors have you got?" Mark smiles, "That's confidential." The Nebishy Man says, "It's a sure thing right?". Mark responds, "Relax, have I ever steered you wrong?" The Nebishy Man says, "Well, the ostrich and buffalo ranch..."

JESSICA

Who do you see for Mark?

(ASHLEY IS POURING SOME COFFEE. BURKE AND GOLDBERG ARE ENJOYING THEIR FOOD.)

ASHLEY

I like Owen Wilson.

JESSICA

Is this a comedy?

DAVID

Comedy - romantic comedy.

GOLDBERG

He's very expensive after Wedding Crashers.

BURKE

*(checking his watch)* Would you just let them read the damn script.

\*

(JESSICA GIVES BURKE A BURNING LOOK.)

BURKE

And your forehead. It's getting all red and blotchy.

(JESSICA, ANGRY, IMMEDIATELY REAPPLIES THE ICE TO HER FOREHEAD.)

DAVID CONTINUES READING.)

DAVID

Mark, now played by Owen Wilson, is approached by two GANGSTER types and ROGER, a scruffy, little but dangerous-looking man. Roger says, "Mark, nice to see you." Mark answers, "Roger, I was going to call you." Roger says, "And I was going to have your legs broken., unless you pay me that twenty-five grand you owe me." Mark says, "Funny, I was just on my way to get it." "You're not going to run out on me, are you Mark?"

(DOORBELL RINGS FOLLOWED BY THE SOUND OF GIGGLING CHILDREN SHOUTING "TRICK OR TREAT!...HAPPY HALLOWEEN!")

JESSICA

(*screaming*) Fire! Fire!

\*

BURKE, GOLDBERG, JESSICA

(*yelling*) Help, rape, in here, call the police.

\*

\*

(ASHLEY MOVES FORWARD WITH THE KNIFE.)

ASHLEY

Quiet! Or I'll put your gags back on. I'll be right back. (to David) Keep reading and (to producers) keep quiet.

(ASHLEY MOVES OFFSTAGE TO THE FRONT DOOR. DAVID CONTINUES READING THE SCRIPT SOTTO VOCE AND ACTING IT OUT.

\*

\*

FROM OFFSTAGE, WE HEAR VOICES CALLING "TRICK OR TREAT.")

ASHLEY (V.O.)

Oh my goodness, look at all of you. Oh, there's Sponge Bob, Snow White and Spiderman.

BOY'S VOICE (V.O.)

I heard someone SCREAMING.

ASHLEY (V.O.)

It's a haunted house.

GIRL (V.O.)

Can we come in?

ASHLEY

No, no, too scary for the little ones.

(WE HEAR THE DOOR SHUT AND ASHLEY REENTERS THE LIVING ROOM.)

ASHLEY

Where'd you leave off?

JESSICA

Your thugs just ran over your con man outside the race track. Do you think that's smart so early in the first act?

DAVID

I'm going on.

JESSICA

*(whispering)* Do you have any candy corn?

BURKE

Jesus!

\*  
\*

GOLDBERG

Snickers for me, please, if you have any.

ASHLEY

I told you I have a delicious dessert. Can't you wait?

JESSICA

This is just a snack. I have low blood sugar.

\*

DAVID

I'm continuing.

(ASHLEY, SHAKES HER HEAD TO HERSELF AS SHE BRINGS AROUND THE BASKET.)

ASHLEY

*(whispering to herself)* I have Tarte Tatin with creme fraiche and you're eating this junk.

DAVID

Continuing. Interior Squash Court. Everything is white, pristine. The POUNDING of a ball hitting the walls of a squash court is heard. Mark, stands alone in the blue-sky filled corridor outside the squash court. He looks through the large key hole where God is playing squash with an angel.

GOLDBERG

It is a God movie.

DAVID

It's just in the beginning. Let me continue.

JESSICA

Who's playing God?

BURKE

Oh, come on.

JESSICA

I like to visualize.

GOLDBERG

Good producers do.

\*  
\*

ASHLEY

We didn't have anyone in mind for that part.

GOLDBERG

Well, Burns is out. Freeman's already done it.

JESSICA

Richard Harris, his Dumbledore was fabulous.

BURKE

He's too old.

JESSICA

God's old.

GOLDBERG

He's dead.

JESSICA

Atheist.

\*

GOLDBERG

Richard Harris is dead.

JESSICA

Oh, that's right.

BURKE

All right. I got it. That uh bearded guy, the big Scottish guy, Connery, Sean Connery?

JESSICA

He's English.

GOLDBERG

He's Jewish.

BURKE

Whatever.

ASHLEY

But, I like him.

DAVID

*(exasperated)* Fine! I'm going on! *(reading from script)* Interior. Squash court - Heaven. GOD, now played by Sean Connery, and his assistant ANGEL, have finished their game. Towels wrapped around their necks, they're drinking Gatorade and studying an enormous leather bound book. The ASSISTANT ANGEL speaks, "Says here the Mets are playing the Yankees in the World Series this year." God answers, "Jose Rojas will hit a grand slam in the 10th to win the series." Mark watches through a large keyhole. He says to himself, "That'll never happen. The Mets beat the Yankees! With Rojas. The Mets will never win! I'm dreaming." God continues, "UCLA finally beats USC in football. Oh, this is a sad one. Sally Lowell, a lovely, young woman, is going to win the mega lottery but then die in a car crash on Xmas day. Sometimes, I hate my job." Mark repeats, "Sally Lowell?" Angel Two hears him. He yells "Hey, you're not supposed to be here," and starts going after him. Mark RUNS in the opposite direction, spots an open door and DASHES inside.

JESSICA

Do you have any diet soda?

BURKE

Awwww...Jess!

\*  
\*

GOLDBERG

Saccharine...that dreck will kill you. My doctor said...

\*

JESSICA

Oh, please. I would bet your martinis against my saccharine intake as the higher mortality factor any day.

GOLDBERG

I've cut way back since that episode last year, though I wouldn't mind some wine if you have it.

BURKE

Tic toc tic toc! (*pointing frantically to his watch*)

\*  
\*

DAVID

Oh for... Enough. Continuing. (*reading from script*) Interior. Hospital Emergency Room. Mark floats weightlessly above an exhausted team of DOCTORS and NURSES WRAPPING up after failing to save a car crash victim. Mark GASPS with the realization that he is the dead patient on the gurney. A NURSE disconnects the monitoring devices. An ASSISTANT gently covers Mark's face. Mark, horrified, screams, "No!" In desperation, he executes a perfect breast stroke kick and PROPELS himself back into his own body on the gurney.

\*  
\*  
\*

Mark sputters "Son of a bitch!" The Nurse FALLS to her knees and CROSSES herself, "Dios Mio! Doctor a miracle!"

ASHLEY

(*softly to Goldberg*) Red or white?

DAVID

If we keep stopping... I don't want to be reading to a bunch of drunks.

JESSICA

A little wine isn't going to affect his concentration. You should see him hit his negotiating stride after three double martinis.

GOLDBERG

(*smiling*) Jessica, I believe I will take that as a compliment.

BURKE

When'd you get so chummy with Goldberg?

\*

JESSICA

You're just jealous he's a better negotiator. Still pissed that he had the brains to actually realize he had a hit movie when he saw it? Imagine saying no to *Titantic*.

\*

GOLDBERG \*

Schmuck. \*

BURKE \*

I...they...we...(pointing at Goldberg) "HOWARD THE DUCK"!!! \*

JESSICA \*

Ouch. \*

GOLDBERG \*

(shooting back at Burke) "GIGLI"!!! \*

JESSICA \*

Ooooooo! \*

DAVID \*

Stop it! \*

BURKE \*

She started it. \*

JESSICA \*

Did not. \*

BURKE \*

Did too! \*

JESSICA \*

Did not! \*

GOLDBERG \*

Did too! \*

DAVID \*

Shut up, all of you! We're killing the flow here. Continuing. Mark is now back from the hospital, at home. He lives in a seedy little apartment. He's eating dinner, cold cereal, listening to the radio. He glances at his newspaper. He drops his spoon and looks closer at the picture. The headline reads. UCLA beats USC. Mark is stunned. \*

GOLDBERG \*

Make it a television. The guy would have the television on.

BURKE \*

What?



GOLDBERG

The guy would have a television.

DAVID

*(giving Goldberg a look, then continuing)* The radio is now off, television on -- The World Series - final game; Mets against Yankees. Mets down 5-2 going into sixth inning. Mark stares at the television, then picks up the phone, dials. He says "Charlie, put me down for a grand on the Mets to win in the tenth. Grand slam by Rojas. No, I'm not drunk. My head's fine. Just do it. It's my money."

JESSICA

John Cusack.

(DAVID LOOKS UP FROM THE SCRIPT, VERY FRUSTRATED.)

\*

DAVID

What?

JESSICA

I see John Cusack as Mark.

BURKE

Not after *Must Like Dogs*.

JESSICA

Slammed the foreign market.

GOLDBERG

And video.

BURKE

This is ridiculous. Just let them get on with the damn script. John Cusack, for Christ sake..

(GOLDBERG STARTS MASSAGING HIS CHEST.)

GOLDBERG

Do you have any pepto bismo? Shouldn't have had the lasagna. The acid.

ASHLEY

I'll get some. Cusack's sexy.

(SHE LEAVES TO GET THE MEDICINE.)

JESSICA

And hung like a...so I've heard.

(BURKE GIVES JESSICA DAGGER EYES AS  
DAVID PICKS UP THE SCRIPT.)

DAVID

Continuing. The ball game is almost over..*(reading from the script)*  
Mark is standing absolutely still, staring at the television.

JESSICA

So it's John Cusack now, right?

BURKE

Would you pleasssssssse.....!

\*

JESSICA

I like to visualize.

DAVID

\*

Mark, now played by John Cusack, listens as the announcer says...  
“...Rojas... hard hit ball to left field. It's going, going... home run! Home run! Mets win the series!” Mark, John Cusack, jumps up, dancing around. He yells to the Heavens “Yes! Yes! Suddenly, he stops. Mark stares off into space, eyes gleaming. He's got it, the perfect scam. He YANKS open the cupboard and DIGS frantically for the phone book. He searches for the name. “ S...with an S...uh, Susan, Shelley, Suki..Sally? Sally? Sally what?”

GOLDBERG

So, he's after Suki.

DAVID

Sally. Right now he's after Sally because he thinks it's easy money. He's going to go find her.

(ASHLEY GOES AROUND, GATHERING UP THE  
EMPTY PLATES AND PLACING THEM ON A SIDE  
CART.)

ASHLEY

He knows God's predictions come true. All he has to do is make Sally fall in love with him. She'll win the lottery. She'll be rich. They'll get married. She'll die and he'll be rich.

JESSICA

Bastard. Audiences will hate him.

DAVID

He's a con man, an edgy character, like ah...in *As Good As It Gets*, Nicholson drops a dog down a trash shoot but you love him in the end.

BURKE

Say, Jessie, wasn't that your plan with husbands two and three?

GOLDBERG

I'm thinking ethnic. *White Chicks*, *Momma's House*. You could make a fortune. Eddie Murphy.

ASHLEY

Eddie Murphy?

DAVID

He's black.

GOLDBERG

And your point is?

JESSICA

Been there, done that.

BURKE

Who haven't you done?

JESSICA

Excuse me, did you say something Mr. Olsen Twins?

DAVID

He's black. We wrote this for...

(GOLDBERG EXPLODES.)

\*

GOLDBERG

What are you are a racist?! Writers! Think you know it all. Think you have THE SCRIPT. You know how many scripts we get? Thousands a day from people like you, all thinking they have the next mega hit.

\*

\*

\*

JESSICA

Steinway put one on my lap while injecting my forehead. We have lives too, you know.

\*

\*

BURKE

They don't give a rat's ass.

GOLDBERG

You think we're just a bunch of bottom line bastards..You think it's easy to say "yes"...to pick a hit...(indicates Jessica and Burke) we've all picked hits...it takes smarts, it takes savy, it takes balls! You have to know. Know deep down...down in your gut, that it's a hit! And how...how do you know? If I came to you with Warren Beatty, Dustin Hoffman and Elaine May, you'd say, "yes"! Who wouldn't say "yes"? Dustin Hoffman, Warren Beatty, Elaine May...yes, yes, yes... (in a daze)"Ishtar"... "Ishtar"... "the birds in the desert eat only flesh and there is no wind"... (coming slowly to his senses) A fifty five million dollar camel turd...Listen schemendrick, the writer writes a script, good...bad, risks nothing...the exec, on the other hand...green lights a script, it's life or death! A hit...you're Jesus walking on water...but if it flops, bombs, tanks,...you're out, you're finished, you're dead! Out on a limb...reaching for that golden apple...captain of our ship, master of our fate...then..GERONIMO!!! (out of his mind) Run for your lives. Take Over. Sharks in the water! The stock drops, you're called on the carpet, naked and alone...schmeckle hanging out...you've given heart and soul and now they're HANDING YOU YOUR HEAD ...HEMORRHAGE... HEMORRHAGE... HEMMMMMMM...

(GOLDBERG SUDDENLY FREEZES. HE GRABS HIS CHEST AND WITH ONE ENORMOUS GASP, FALLS BACK INTO HIS CHAIR.)

THE OTHERS STARE AT GOLDBERG'S CRUMPLED BODY, THEIR MOUTHS HANGING OPEN IN DISBELIEF.)

DAVID

I'm not racist. I only...

(ASHLEY LOOKS AROUND, DESPERATE, THEN STRADDLES GOLDBERG, LISTENS FOR A HEARTBEAT. IMMEDIATELY, SHE BEGINS MOUTH TO MOUTH RESUSCITATION.)

ASHLEY

(*between mouth to mouth*) Old McDonald had a farm, ey ay ey aye oh... old McDonald had a farm...

JESSICA

How can you do that?

BURKE

You don't know where it's been.

JESSICA

Everywhere.

DAVID

That's a horrible thing to say.

JESSICA

Leo Goldberg is the most lecherous, back-stabbing, double-dealing son of a bitch that ever lived.

(DAVID FEELS FOR A PULSE.)

DAVID

Was. He's dead.

ASHLEY

Oh, God.

BURKE

*(tauntingly to David)* Screwed.

(THE DOORBELL RINGS.)

DAVID

Shit!

(ASHLEY INDICATES TO JESSICA TO THROW AN AFGHAN FROM JESSICA'S CHAIR OVER GOLDBERG.)

THE DOORBELL RINGS AGAIN.

ASHLEY LEAPS TO HER FEET, GRABS THE GUN OUT OF DAVID'S WAISTBAND AND POINTS IT AT BURKE AND JESSICA.

DAVID RUSHES OFFSTAGE TO THE FRONT DOOR.

WE HEAR THE VOICES FROM OFFSTAGE)

CHILDREN (V.O.)

*(offstage voices)* Trick or treat. Happy Halloween.

DAVID (V.O.)

Take it all! And don't come back!

(SOUND OF SLAMMING DOOR. DAVID RUSHES  
BACK INSIDE.)

DAVID

Now what?

ASHLEY

We finish the script.

DAVID

Are you out of your mind? He's dead.

BURKE

I'm gonna be late!

\*

JESSICA

She'll wait. The bimbos always do.

BURKE

You did.

JESSICA

That was different. I was in love.

(BURKE REACHES TOWARD JESSICA.)

JESSICA

Back off, Burke, that was a long time ago.

BURKE

I can't help it. I get all gooshey when someone dies.

\*

DAVID

We're standing in the room with a dead guy!

(ASHLEY YANKS THE SCRIPT OUT OF DAVID'S  
HANDS.)

ASHLEY

Get a grip.

(SHE SETTLES HERSELF INTO A CHAIR AND  
OPENS THE SCRIPT.)

ASHLEY

Okay, we were at...

BURKE

*(checking his watch)* Yeah, yeah, yeah, with the Suki girl.....

\*

DAVID, ASHLEY AND JESSICA

Sally!

BURKE

Whatever.

CAROL

*(from upstage)* Yooo whoooo! Happy Halloween!

DAVID

It's Carol. She's coming through the kitchen!

CAROL

Helloooo! I've got some lovely people with me. They want to see your lovely, lovely house.

(ASHLEY TAKES OUT THE GUN.)

ASHLEY

I've had it.

DAVID

You wouldn't.

ASHLEY

Really, David. Now get that body out of here.

DAVID

Where?

ASHLEY

Anywhere but here. The bathroom!

(ASHLEY HANDS DAVID THE GUN.)

ASHLEY

Have them help you. I'll head her off.

DAVID

All right, you, two. Come on, pick him up.

(JESSICA AND BURKE EXCHANGE A LOOK OF  
UTTER REVULSION.)

JESSICA

Not on your life.

DAVID

Come on.

BURKE

I can't. I'll vomit.

(DAVID JABS THE GUN AT THEM.)

DAVID

Do it.

(JESSICA TRIES TO MOVE THE CHAIR BUT  
CAN'T BUDGE IT.)

JESSICA

*(to David)* A little help would be nice.

BURKE

The legs, man, pick up the legs.

DAVID

*(through clenched teeth)* Fine.

(DAVID LIFTS UP GOLDBERG'S LEGS,  
FUMBLING WHILE STILL TRYING TO KEEP THE  
GUN ON JESSICA AND BURKE.)

JESSICA AND BURKE START PUSHING THE  
CHAIR HOLDING GOLDBERG OUT THROUGH  
THE CAGE DOOR.)



DAVID

Don't try anything.

(OFFSTAGE, CAROL IS IN THE KITCHEN WITH A YOUNG COUPLE

DAVID LEADS JESSICA AND BURKE PUSHING GOLDBERG IN BACK OF THE CAGE TO THE OFFICE.

WE HEAR CAROL SPEAKING OFFSTAGE.)

CAROL (VO)

Wonderful kitchen, don't you think? Lovely granite counter tops, real walnut cabinets, no particle board, ah here, double sink, trash compactor. Ashley does catering, you know. She doesn't OWN the company. She's an assistant. Microwave with carousel. Four burner gas oven. You can make waffles. Recessed lighting, Ginormous pantry.

(CAROL ENTERS)

CAROL

And, now, through here, is your spacious living room.. high ceilings.

(CAROL LOOKS UP AND DOWN THE CAGE, MOVES TOWARDS ASHLEY)

CAROL

Looks like you had quite a party, Ashley. So naughty. (tastes appetizer) Delicious.

ASHLEY

Ah, yes, they're all gone. I'm exhausted. Time to clean up and go to bed. Thanks for calling ahead, by the way.

CAROL

I figured you'd be here, Halloween and all. And there's a lovely view of the...

(CAROL ALLUDES TO CAGE.)

CAROL

*(by way of explanation)* The renters... they're writers.

COUPLE

(THE COUPLE LOOKS AT EACH OTHER, THEN  
NODDING....)

OH...

\*  
\*  
\*

CAROL

You can do so much here. Paradise. Everything so bright and airy. Let's talk plumbing....copper throughout! Here's the bathroom..

(ASHLEY RACES INTO THE ROOM, BOLTS OVER  
TO THE BATHROOM, THROWING HERSELF IN  
FRONT OF THE DOOR.)

ASHLEY

We're fumigating.

(CAROL AND THE OTHERS LOOK PERPLEXED.)

CAROL

*(to the couple)* Well, shall we go back to my office and write up an offer?

YOUNG WOMAN

Fumigating? *(to Ashley)* Do you have termites?

YOUNG HUSBAND

If you have termites, why are you only doing the bathroom?

(ASHLEY STARTS USHERING CAROL AND THE  
COUPLE TO THE BACK DOOR.)

ASHLEY

Well, they're not really termites. It's more of a slithery, slimy bottom feeding sort of bug.

YOUNG WOMAN

Bugs.... I hate bugs.

(THE COUPLE RUNS OUT, FOLLOWED BY  
CAROL)

CAROL

That's OK. You don't have to come to my office. I'll send you a fax or email?

(LIGHTS GO UP IN TREEHOUSE. ASHLEY  
HURRIES OUTSIDE TOWARD THE TREEHOUSE.)

JESSICA AND BURKE ARE NOW SEATED ON A SMALL BENCH IN THE TREEHOUSE WITH DAVID STANDING TO THE SIDE, HOLDING A GUN ON THEM.)

ASHLEY

Good thinking, sweetheart.

(ALL TURN TO SEE ASHLEY AT THE TREEHOUSE ENTRANCE, SCRIPT IN HAND.)

DAVID

She gone?

ASHLEY

Almost. I don't know. I better go back and check. Here, I brought the script, page sixty?

BURKE

Sixty, got it.

ASHLEY

Oh, David, I Love you.

DAVID

Ditto.

BURKE

This is ridiculous.

DAVID

OK, we left off at.

JESSICA

Fabulous treehouse. Great for kids. Are you and your wife planning on having any children? \*

DAVID

Well....

BURKE

(interrupting) Oh, for God sakes, Jessica. \*

JESSICA

(*ignoring him*) Just don't wait too long. That's a big mistake. Take it from me. \*

BURKE  
You're doing it again, I hate when you do that. \*

JESSICA  
What? \*

BURKE  
You try to make a point but you childishly talk around me...or to me, through some body else. \*

JESSICA  
*(looking at like he's crazy)* I don't know what you're talking about. I don't do that.. \*

BURKE  
You do. \*

JESSICA  
I don't. \*

BURKE  
You do... \*

JESSICA  
No, I don't. \*

BURKE  
Yes, you do. \*

DAVID  
*(losing it)* Enough!. \*

JESSICA  
Well, I hate your complaining. I hate your sleeping with underage starlets. I hate that you avoid all meaningful communication and I hate your cologne. \*

BURKE  
Fleur de Conquest. Nobody hates Fleur de Conquest. \*

JESSICA  
Oh, my God! \*

(CUTTING THEM OFF, DAVID THREATENS THEM WITH THE GUN.)

DAVID  
STOP! Okay, Mark has been following Suki. \*

## JESSICA AND BURKE

*(together)* Sally.

## DAVID

Whatever. He knows where she lives. He's following her by car. SALLY, 30s, parks her well-worn Volvo. She wears a wide-brimmed hat, hair tucked inside. Mark watches from his parked car as she gets out. A gust of wind BLOWS Sally's hat to the ground. As she picks the hat up, Mark sees her fully for the first time. She's beautiful in an understated, natural way. Mark is touched by her loveliness. He doesn't move. As Sally puts her hat back on, she catches Mark's eye. She smiles slightly.

(ASTHMATIC WHEEZING SOUND.)

## JESSICA

You're wheezing.

(BURKE REACHES INTO HIS POCKET AND TAKES OUT A SMALL INHALER.)

## DAVID

What's that?

(BURKE STANDS.)

## BURKE

My allergies. Dust, mold spores, pet hair, grass, blue cheese, rye seed...

\*

(BURKE TAKES A COUPLE OF DEEP BREATHS THROUGH THE INHALER, TRIES TO HOLD THE BREATH.)

(JESSICA STANDS TO JOIN HIM.)

## JESSICA

Better?

(BURKE SHAKES THE INHALER.)

## BURKE

*(wheezing)* It's empty. If I don't get a fresh inhaler, you're going to have another dead body on your hands.

## DAVID

*(trying to ignore Burke)* Okay...So they've met, kind of.

JESSICA

Love at first sight?

\*  
\*

DAVID

Kind of, only they don't really know it yet.

(JESSICA GIVES BURKE A QUICK GLANCE.)

BURKE

I'm serious about the inhaler.

DAVID

Okay, Mark gets out of his car, follows Sally into the 7/11. Sally is in the process of buying a ticket from Paco, the cashier. Sally says "Same numbers, Paco." He responds, "You gonna win some day." Sally SMILES as she takes her ticket. She turns to exit the store when she bumps into Mark.

BURKE

She can afford to smile. She doesn't have my allergies.

DAVID

We're never going to finish if you keep interrupting. Continuing. Mark says "Sorry, I didn't mean..." Sally says "It's OK."

JESSICA

I'm thinking Cameron Diaz for Sally.

BURKE

I'm thinking Jessica Alba.

JESSICA

You're thinking bigger boobs. That's what you're thinking.

BURKE

I'm thinking Alba, because I think she could do a breakout comedy.

JESSICA

No, I say Jennifer Anniston. It's safe, plus she has the sympathy factor...losing Brad...and Vince.

\*

DAVID

Okay, she's played by pathetic Jennifer Aniston, for God's sake.

(VISIBLE SHAKING STARTS IN THE TREEHOUSE ALARMING ALL THREE. SOUND OF A LOUD CRACK FOLLOWED BY THE TERRIFIED SCREAMS OF DAVID, JESSICA AND BURKE.

JESSICA, DAVID & BURKE

Earthquake!

LIGHTS FLICKER, AS THE MOVABLE BRANCH FALLS FROM THE TREEHOUSE. BURKE AND JESSICA RUN DOWN THE BACKSTAGE STEPS FROM THE TREEHOUSE. DAVID SWINGS DOWN THE TREEHOUSE ROPE.

EARTHQUAKE SOUNDS FOLLOWED BY COMICAL MUSIC AND A STROBE LIGHT CREATE THE EFFECTS.

JESSICA IS NOW SEEN RUNNING BACK AND FORTH THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR WHILE DAVID AND BURKE ENGAGE IN A COMIC CHOREOGRAPHED FIGHT ON STAGE.)

DAVID

*(groaning)* Oh, my back.

JESSICA

Burke? Burke?

DAVID

My back.

JESSICA

Burke? Oh my God, where is he?

DAVID

Burke?

Run, Jessica! Get help!

BURKE

Owww!

DAVID

Burke!

JESSICA

Go!

BURKE

(JESSICA TURNS TO RUN BUT INSTEAD PICKS UP A HANDY BRANCH AND SWINGS AT DAVID'S HEAD. HER AIM HOWEVER IS TERRIBLE. SHE MISSES HIM COMPLETELY, HITTING BURKE IN THE SHOULDER INSTEAD.

BURKE HOWLS IN PAIN.)

Sorry, sorry, sorry!

JESSICA

Just go, Jess. Please!

BURKE

(JESSICA STARTS RUNNING OFFSTAGE BUT COLLIDES WITH ASHLEY. THEY HAVE A TUG OF WAR WITH THE BRANCH JESSICA HAS BEEN HOLDING. JESSICA ENDS UP ON THE OFFICE CHAIR, ALL THE WHILE THE STROBE HAS BEEN GOING ON.)

THEN LIGHTS GO OFF, COMING ON AGAIN ON ASHLEY NOW STANDING IN FRONT OF THE CENTER DOORS, GUN AND SCRIPT IN HAND.)

Who wants coffee?

ASHLEY

(DAVID GIVES BURKE ONE MORE KICK TO THE GROIN BEFORE DAVID FORCES BURKE BACK INSIDE THE CAGE.



ASHLEY MOVES TOWARD JESSICA POINTING HER GUN. JESSICA RAISES HER ARMS IN DEFEAT AND MOVES AROUND THE FRONT OF THE CAGE TO GET BACK IN. DAVID HANDS HER SOME MEDICINE BEFORE SHE GOES INTO THE CAGE.

LOCKED INSIDE THE CAGE, JESSICA STARTS SPRAYING BURKE'S ELBOW WITH MEDICINE.)

BURKE

Owww, it stings!

JESSICA

Oh get tough. "No More Ouchies" doesn't sting.

(DAVID HOLDS UP HIS FRESHLY BANDAGED THUMB.)

DAVID

Does too. And you fight like a little girl, Burke. Bit my thumb down to the bone.

(BURKE GROWLS AT HIM.)

DAVID

Has he had his shots?

BURKE

*(jumping up)* Shots...I'll give you shots, lose the gun and I'll...

DAVID

I didn't have any gun when I kicked your ass out there little girl.

BURKE

You didn't kick my ass.

ASHLEY

Stop it! Both of you, just shut up!

JESSICA

Men. They're such boys.

(ASHLEY GRABS THE SCRIPT FROM DAVID'S LAP.)

ASHLEY

We're going to finish this script. Now! *(to David)* Where'd you leave off?

DAVID

Uhh...they've met. Mark is doing his thing. And now Sally has invited him to a Christmas Eve party.

(BURKE STARTS COUGHING AND WHEEZING.)

JESSICA

Burke?

(BURKE CAN'T TALK.)

ASHLEY

I'll get him some water.

JESSICA

You have to get his inhaler. It really could be serious.

BURKE

The CV Pharmacy near the studio. They have my prescription. It's all ready for me.

(ASHLEY TAKES HER KEYS AND HEADS FOR THE FRONT DOOR.)

ASHLEY

I'll be back as soon as I can. David, keep going.

DAVID

Right. Okay, so Sally and Mark...

BURKE

*(sighing)* Oh Christ.

\*

JESSICA

Shut up, honey.

BURKE

Honey?

JESSICA

Burke. Honey, shut up.

DAVID

They're at Sally's family's house. It's Christmas Eve. Money pressures have been building up for Mark. Roger's on his back and Mark wants to get Sally's money. But, at the same time, something is going on between them.

BURKE

He's falling in love.

(JESSICA SMILES AT HIM.)

JESSICA

Yes.

(ASHLEY CALLS FROM THE DOOR.)

ASHLEY

Anyone need anything else?

JESSICA

Maybe a toothbrush, some mouthwash.

BURKE

What'd you think this is, a bed and breakfast? A slumber party? We're hostages. \*

JESSICA

I don't like a dirty mouth.

BURKE

I'm not even going to touch that.

DAVID

Interior. Sally's family house. A large, beautifully decorated Christmas Tree dominates the living room. Mark, Sally, her PARENTS and her sister, CHLOE, 25, hot and with attitude are in the process of exchanging PRESENTS. Sally's hair is down. She looks beautiful, happy as she UNWRAPS the huge box Chloe has just given her. It is filled with Lottery Tickets. Mark SCREAMS "No!" All eyes turn to him, startled by his outburst. MARK: Uh, no one ever wins those things, do they? CHLOE: Someone's got to win it. Why not Sally?

(LIGHTS LOWER SLIGHTLY AS DAVID SILENTLY READS THE SCRIPT, PANTOMIMING THE ACTIONS.

SOUND OF CAR DOOR SLAMMING. WE HEAR VOICES OFFSTAGE.)

Now, open it. Open it.

RICK (V.O.)

Please don't hurt us.

ASHLEY

It's up to you. Inside.

RICK

(ASHLEY ENTERS FROM OFFSTAGE, FOLLOWED BY RICK, DARK-HAIRED HUNK IN HIS 30S.)

About time. My inhaler, please.

BURKE

Who's he?

DAVID

(RICK TIGHTENS HIS HOLD ON ASHLEY AS THEY WALK INSIDE.)

I'm Rick, Ashley's friend.

RICK

(DAVID STANDS, FORGETTING ABOUT THE GUN IN HIS WAISTBAND WHICH BECOMES VERY VISIBLE TO RICK.)

You don't know a 'Rick'.

DAVID

(RICK BRINGS HIS GUN UP TO ASHLEY'S HEAD.)

(to David) Hold it.

RICK

What are...Ashley!

DAVID

The gun, lose the gun. On the floor, slowly.

RICK

Oh, my God.

JESSICA



JESSICA

They've kidnapped us and are forcing us to listen to their script.

RICK

That's bizarre.

BURKE

My inhaler?

DAVID

*(to Burke)* Shut up!

RICK

Okay, hothead, in with the other monkeys.

(DAVID JUST STARES AT HIM IN DISBELIEF.)

RICK

Get in the cage, Cheetah.. You, too, Ashley.

(RICK NODS AT THE CAGE. ASHLEY UNLOCKS IT AND THEN PUTS THE KEYS INTO RICK'S WAITING HAND.)

DAVID

*(to Ashley)* Why does he keep calling you Ashley?

RICK

Move it!

DAVID

*(to Rick)* Look, can't you just tell us what you want.

JESSICA

Shoe's on the other foot, now, isn't it? How do you like it...you, you...writer?

RICK

None of that stuff now, let's all get along.

BURKE

My inhaler?

(ASHLEY HANDS THE PACKAGED INHALER TO BURKE WHO STRUGGLES TO GET THE PACKAGE OPEN.)

JESSICA TAKES THE PACKAGE FROM HIM AND QUICKLY TEARS IT OPEN. SHE HANDS IT BACK. HE TAKES A DEEP, RELIEVED BREATH.)

ASHLEY

*(quietly, to Burke)* There was another prescription waiting for you, too.

(JESSICA REMOVES ANOTHER SMALL PACKAGE.)

JESSICA

Viagra. Since when?

(BURKE GRABS THE BAG FROM HER.)

BURKE

Do you mind?!

\*

RICK

Look, I'm waiting for a ride is all. My partner and I got a little separated and as soon as things cool off, I'll make a call...I'm gone. Till then, keep your mouths shut and nobody gets hurt.

JESSICA

Ummmm....Mr. Rick?

(RICK PUTS HIS FINGER TO HIS LIPS, SILENCING HER.)

RICK

Ashley, where's the little boy's room?

DAVID

*(to Ashley)* Why does he keep calling you 'Ashley'? *(to Rick)* Why do you keep calling her 'Ashley'?

RICK

That's between me and Ashley, right, Ashley?

ASHLEY

First door on the left. But...

RICK

Play nice. I'll be back.

BURKE

This should be interesting.

(ALL LOOK TO THE BATHROOM IN ANTICIPATION OF WHAT RICK WILL FIND.

FROM THE BATHROOM, ONLY THE LOUD SOUND OF RICK'S LONG STREAM HITTING THE TOILET BOWL. IT STOPS FOR A MOMENT, THEN CONTINUES FOR A LITTLE LONGER. FINALLY, IT STOPS.)

DAVID

*(whispering loudly)* You know this guy?

ASHLEY

*(whispering back)* No! What's the matter with you?

JESSICA

Really.

DAVID

*(to Jessica)* Mind your own business.

\*

BURKE

I feel so much better. I think I could eat a little something.

JESSICA

In case you haven't noticed, the kitchen is closed right now.

BURKE

I'm hungry.

(SOUND FROM THE BATHROOM OF THE TOILET FLUSHING. ALL TURN TOWARD BATHROOM. NOISE STOPS.)

ASHLEY

He robbed the liquor store. I came out of the pharmacy, went to my car. I looked up and there he was.

DAVID

And?



ASHLEY

He pointed a gun, David. You don't know what it's like...

JESSICA AND BURKE

We do.

DAVID

Okay. I'm sorry, but why the first name basis and the looks?

JESSICA

Jesus.

\*

(FROM BATHROOM, SOUND OF HAIR DRYER GOING ON AND ON. ALL LOOK TOWARD BATHROOM, WAITING. IT STOPS.)

ASHLEY

He's messing with you. You've snapped. You're unravelling right before my eyes. I didn't want him to shoot me. Do you know what that's like?

JESSICA AND BURKE

We do.

ASHLEY

I had to be friendly, to calm him down. I even told him about the script. He likes God's Mouth, by the way. (glancing at Jessica and Burke) He thinks it's a good story. I was terrified. I thought I was going to die. Do you know what that's like?

JESSICA AND BURKE

We do.

DAVID

Okay, okay. Fine. But the pressure, marriage, the ticking clock...all the rest, that's what this cage is about, isn't it, because I wanted to have all my ducks lined up before...

ASHLEY

Your ducks? This isn't about your ducks. I can't believe you brought up your ducks over this.

JESSICA

Ducks?

DAVID

Christ, you're an annoying woman.

(JESSICA GASPS, insulted.)

ASHLEY

*(to David)* That was rude.

JESSICA

And not true.

BURKE

Well, to tell the truth, Jess...

JESSICA

Oh shut up! I'm assertive that's all. Girly men find that intimidating.

DAVID

*(to Burke)* Ha! Girly.

BURKE

Step in here and say that.

(RICK ENTERS FROM THE BATHROOM, HIS HAIR NOW BLOWN AND SLICKED STRAIGHT UP.)

RICK

Nice place you folks got here. Say, Davey, where'd you leave off in that script of yours?

DAVID

Huh?

(RICK SAUNTERS UP TO THE CAGE. THE OTHERS STUDY HIS FACE LOOKING FOR SOME KIND OF REACTION AFTER HIS BATHROOM VISIT. THERE IS NONE.)

RICK

What's happening in your script? Did she win the lottery yet?

DAVID

Why would I want to tell you?

(RICK POINTS THE GUN DIRECTLY AT HIM.)

RICK

Why wouldn't you want to tell me?

DAVID

Fine. Well, it's Christmas day. Mark has realized he loves Sally, doesn't want her to die. He realizes love is more important than money.

RICK

That's his character arc?

DAVID

What do you know about character arcs?

RICK

I know about arcs. What do you think, I'm a moron?

JESSICA

*(quietly, to Burke)* "Love is more important than money". There's a message for you.

BURKE

I wasn't the one who put career over family.

RICK

*(to Burke)* Stop mumbling. Christ, you're annoying.

(JESSICA SMIRKS AT BURKE.)

RICK

So our Mark character has arced, and realized the importance of love.

DAVID

OUR character?

(RICK GIVES HIM A LOOK, TAKES OUT A CIGARETTE. HE FEELS AROUND HIS POCKETS FOR A MATCH BUT COMES UP EMPTY.)

ALL EYES ARE ON RICK AND HE NONCHALANTLY PICKS UP DAVID'S GUN FROM THE TABLE AND POINTS IT AT THE CIGARETTE.

THINKING THE BULLET WOULD GO STRAIGHT AT THEM, JESSICA DUCKS. BURKE PROTECTS HER.

RICK PULLS THE TRIGGER. THE GUN EMITS A SMALL FLAME. IT'S A LIGHTER.)

BURKE

It wasn't even real.

RICK

But mine is. So, no more interruptions.

(HE WAVES THE GUN AT DAVID TO CONTINUE.)

DAVID

So, Mark's been keeping Sally close to him, won't let her out of the house. He's protecting her from God's prediction. He's checked the paper and looked through all the lottery tickets Chloe gave Sally. The winning number isn't there. He's relieved. That's where I left off.

RICK

Good. It's good. Really good. Say Ashley...

(RICK KEEPS THE GUN ON THE OTHERS WHILE UNLOCKING THE CAGE DOOR.)

RICK

Would it be too much trouble to rattle some pots and pans and maybe put something together for me to eat?

ASHLEY

Uhhh...I could do that.

BURKE

I'm a little hungry, myself.

(RICK GIVES HIM A LOOK AS HE USHERS ASHLEY OUT OF THE CAGE.

DAVID STEPS FORWARD, BUT RICK STOPS HIM.)

RICK

Stay. Just Ashley.

DAVID

But...

RICK

You go on with the script. Nice and loud, so Ashley and I can hear you from the kitchen.

(DAVID OPENS HIS MOUTH TO SPEAK.)

RICK

*(silencing him)* The script, Shakespeare.

(RICK WAVES HIS GUN AT JESSICA AND BURKE.)

RICK

You folks want to hear, don't you?

BURKE

Oh yeah.

(JESSICA NODS HER HEAD "YES.")

RICK

*(to Ashley)* After you.

DAVID

Interior. Sally's home.

RICK

Louder.

DAVID

*(now louder)* Interior. Sally's home. Day. Sally is in the bedroom, putting on her coat. Mark races in. MARK: "You didn't win! You didn't win!" Sally looks at him like he's crazy. MARK: "You didn't win the lottery." SALLY: "Well I'm glad one of us is happy about it. I'm going out. It's Christmas and I still have some presents to deliver." MARK says. "Fine, yes."

(DOORBELL RINGS.)

ASHLEY

*(calling out)* I'll get it.

RICK

*(back to Ashley)* We'll get it.

(RICK, EATING A SANDWICH, MOVES WITH ASHLEY OFFSTAGE TO THE FRONT DOOR. THEY RETURN QUICKLY WITH ZENO, 30S, SCRUFFY-LOOKING.)

RICK

You Okay?

ZENO

Yeah. We can go.

(ZENO LOOKS AROUND, TAKES IN THE GROUP, THE CAGE.)

ZENO

Odd.

RICK

They're in the business.

(ZENO NODS, UNDERSTANDING.)

RICK INDICATES THE DIRECTION OF THE KITCHEN.)

RICK

Grab a nosh and park it. All right Davey, go ahead.

(DAVID SHAKES HIS HEAD TO HIMSELF, CONTINUES.)

DAVID

Go ahead? All right, all right, all right. Continuing. Sally says, "Oh, I forgot the present for Paco. Honey, could you get it?" Mark goes back to the apartment, opens the door, goes into the bedroom closet. He finds a bag of presents. On the floor, is a lottery ticket. He picks it up. He stares at the numbers. He FLIES into the other room, grabs the newspaper. It's **the** winning LOTTERY TICKET. Fifty million dollars. He RACES down the steps. Sally is already outside, about to cross the street. Mark RUNS out the door. He starts YELLING, "Sally! Sally!" But, Sally has already started to cross the street. A car is SPEEDING toward her. There is only one thing for Mark to do. He LEAPS in front of her. He PUSHES her out of the way and takes the IMPACT of the oncoming car. Mark is THROWN to the side. The car SCREECHES to a halt. Sally SCREAMS as she RUSHES over to Mark, lying lifelessly on the ground. "NO! NO!"

BURKE

Are you crying?

JESSICA

I'm not crying. Let him finish.

DAVID

Interior. Heaven - day. God and the Angels STAND in a cafeteria line. ANGEL ONE asks, "What are we going to do? This wasn't the plan."

ZENO

The Angels should be like that Victoria Secret ad. You know?

BURKE

I can see that.

JESSICA

Of course you can.

DAVID

ANGEL TWO answers him. "He already had a second chance." Then GOD speaks. "The boy made the ultimate sacrifice. And he made it for love. I'm a sucker for that kind of stuff." A HARP SOUNDS as God waves his hand. Now, we're back on earth. Sally is crying, holding Mark's head in her lap. We hear SOUNDS of an AMBULANCE approaching. SALLY murmurs, "Hold on darling...please Mark, please don't leave me. I love you Mark, I love you." Slowly, Mark opens his eyes, smiles. His face fills with joy. They kiss.

(RICK AND ZENO START CLAPPING.)

RICK

Two thumbs up.

ZENO

Five stars.

(ASHLEY AND DAVID LOOK TOWARD BURKE AND JESSICA, EXPECTANTLY.)

JESSICA WIPES HER EYES WITH A TISSUE, LOOKS AT THEM. THEN, JESSICA AND BURKE LOOK AT EACH OTHER.

A BEAT. NEITHER OF THEM SAYS ANYTHING.)

RICK

Tough audience. Well, we're off.

(ZENO REALLY ENJOYING THE FOOD, FILLS HIS PLATE WITH FOOD. HE TAKES ALL HE CAN STEAL FROM ASHLEY'S APARTMENT IN HIS ARMS, WINE BOTTLE, DISHES, PLUS ASHLEY'S KNIFE.)

RICK

Ashley, thanks for the hospitality Ashley.

ZENO

Yeah, thanks. Awesome.

(ZENO EXITS)

RICK

Everybody, it's been a slice.

(RICK HANDS ASHLEY THE KEY TO THE CAGE.)

RICK

Just wait 'til I leave.

(RICK STARTS TO LEAVE AND COMES BACK IN, TAKING SOMETHING FROM HIS BAG.)

RICK

I'd like a shot at Mark. Here's my pic and res. I do a little acting between jobs.

BURKE,

Of course you do.

(AS RICK TURNS TO LEAVE, HE HANDS ASHLEY HIS GUN.)

RICK

If they give you any trouble.. Oh, and don't go lighting any ciggies with it....Ciao.

(RICK LEAVES. SOUND OF CAR TAKING OFF.

ASHLEY NERVOUSLY HOLDS THE REAL GUN.)



DAVID

Well? The script?

BURKE

Can you handle the truth, little girl?

ASHLEY

You hated it?

BURKE

No, no. It's just...just, too soft. T and A? M O W? Do I have to spell it out for you? \*

JESSICA

Oh my God.

BURKE

It needs more skin. For the walking hormones. Fourteen to sixteen year olds, a big market.

ASHLEY

The love scene. You could do whatever you wanted there.

JESSICA

I liked it.

BURKE

What?

(JESSICA IS TRYING TO GAUGE BURKE'S REACTION. HIS FACE IS BLANK.

JESSICA

I liked it. It has heart. I liked it.

ASHLEY

(to Jessica) You liked it?

BURKE

I don't know.

JESSICA

You don't know?

ASHLEY

You don't know? \*

\*

\*

DAVID

What don't you know?

BURKE

You know, like I said. And it's derivative.

DAVID

Derivative? What isn't? This whole damn industry is choking on sequels and regurgitated remakes of violent and exploitative garbage. Our script is....

BURKE

Soft.

ASHLEY

It's a romantic comedy.

BURKE

Small and soft.

DAVID

So's your dick.

(BURKE *GLARES AT HIM.*)

\*

JESSICA

I, I guess I need to agree with Burke.

ASHLEY

You don't need to agree with Burke.

(JESSICA looks to BURKE for his reaction.)

BURKE

I just don't see the potential.

JESSICA

I'll have to agree.

ASHLEY

But you liked it a second ago.

JESSICA

Yes, but Burke's right. I just don't know ultimately if it, if it has the bang.

BURKE

The bang?

JESSICA

I do love your food, however. Do you have a card? I'm having a Christmas party...

DAVID

This script is about love. About realizing what's most important in life. About how far someone will go if they really truly love someone. Even dying for someone else. How can you not love that!

(ASHLEY LOOKS AT DAVID, SMILES.

JESSICA LOOKS AT BURKE, EXPECTANTLY.)

BURKE

Pass.

JESSICA

I pass, too.

DAVID

There's something wrong with you, both of you. You've no heart. Just...stone...dry, crumbly... you just don't get it. I mean, even between the two of you. You're obviously still in love with each other, but you won't even see that. Ashley, open the door.

JESSICA

You're not going to shoot us are you?

(ASHLEY OPENS THE DOOR TO THE CAGE.  
DAVID RUSHES OUT.)

DAVID

We'll see. I've got another script upstairs.

(BURKE GOES TO FOLLOW. ASHLEY SLAMS THE  
DOOR IN HIS FACE.)

BURKE

Oh, crap.

(DAVID RUNS UPSTAIRS. ASHLEY FOLLOWS HIM. JESSICA GOES TO THE CAGE DOOR. BURKE FOLLOWS HIM, BUT WHILE INSIDE THE CAGE.)

BURKE

I'm not going to listen to another one of your stupid scripts.

(DAVID RUSHES TO THE OFFICE.

LIGHTS UP IN THE OFFICE. DAVID IS RUMMAGING MADLY THROUGH THE SCRIPTS,

MEANWHILE, BURKE, FRUSTRATED, PACES BACK AND FORTH WHILE JESSICA MOVES TO THE CAGE DOOR.)

JESSICA PUTS HER HAND THROUGH THE DOOR AND FINDS THE KEY STILL LEFT IN THE LOCK. SHE TURNS THE KEY AND OPENS THE DOOR.)

JESSICA

Burke.

(BURKE DOESN'T ANSWER. JESSICA STARTS MOVING AROUND THE CAGE TOWARD BURKE., WHO REMAINS INSIDE, UNAWARE)

BURKE

What?

JESSICA

Burke.

BURKE

What?

(JESSICA IS NOW RIGHT IN FRONT OF BURKE ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE CAGE.)

JESSICA

You are such an idiot.

(BURKE PUTS HIS HAND THROUGH THE CAGE TO SEE WHERE SHE IS.)

BURKE

How'd you do that, Jess?

(BURKE THEN GOES OUTSIDE THE CAGE AND AROUND THE BACK TO JOIN HER).

JESSICA

Let's go before they come back.

(LIGHTS UP IN THE BEDROOM.

DAVID, IN A SEARCHING FRENZY HAS PULLED APART MOST OF THE ROOM.)

THEN RUNS UPSTAIRS TO THE BEDROOM.)

DAVID

Where the hell is it?

ASHLEY

Honey.

DAVID

They want edgy, we got edgy. Where is it?

(DAVID KEEPS LOOKING THROUGH THE BEDROOM BOXES.)

ASHLEY

David, stop.

DAVID

Did you throw it out? You always hated "Frankendad"...but to throw it out...it's high concept. Someone's going to want it!

ASHLEY

*(taking his hand)* David, please.

(DAVID STOPS SEARCHING, LOOKS AT HER.)

DAVID

Oh...who the hell am I kidding? No one's ever going to want one of our scripts.

ASHLEY

It's okay. It's okay if they don't want it. They heard it. We need to let them go.

DAVID

We failed.

ASHLEY

We didn't fail. We got them to listen. And...you did it for me. You did this for me.

(THE SOUND OF A CAR STARTING UP SENDS  
DAVID RUSHING TO THE WINDOW.)

DAVID

Holy shit...some asshole's stealing the van.

ASHLEY

What!?

(SHE RACES DOWNSTAIRS TO THE FRONT  
DOOR. DAVID IS RIGHT BEHIND HER. THEY  
BOTH LOOK OUTSIDE TO WHERE THE VAN HAD  
BEEN.)

ASHLEY

Burke and Jessica! It's my fault. My fault, the whole thing, right from the start.

(OVERWHELMED, ASHLEY BURSTS INTO TEARS.

DAVID GOES TO COMFORT HER.)

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

*(sobbing)* I've ruined our lives.

DAVID

Probably. Come on, I'm to blame in this, too, you know. I was so set on getting my ducks lined up that I sort of put our lives on terminal hold.

(ASHLEY CROSSES INSIDE THE CAGE AND SITS  
ON ONE OF THE CHAIRS.)

ASHLEY

They'll go straight to the police. We've got to get out of here.

DAVID

No.

ASHLEY

But...

DAVID

We kidnapped three people and left one of them dead on the toilet. We've got to face this thing.

ASHLEY

I love you, David.

DAVID

Ditto. Nothing is more important than you., Ash, us. There's nothing to wait for. I've got it right here. I would do anything for you. I've been an idiot...how's this for timing? I love you, Ashley. Will you marry me?

ASHLEY

*(smiling)* Oh David. Yes!

(THEY KISS.

LIGHTS DOWN.)

(LIGHTS UP ON JESSICA AND BURKE IN THE VAN. THEY STAND NEXT TO EACH OTHER. JESSICA IS DRIVING. SHE HOLDS THE STEERING WHEEL. THE ACTORS MOVE IN UNISON AS IF THEY ARE RIDING IN A CAR.)

BURKE

Pull into that MiniMart. They got a pay phone.

JESSICA

We're ten minutes from the studios.

BURKE

I want to call the police first.

JESSICA

They didn't hurt us, Burke, and I feel bad for them.

BURKE

*(snorts)* You?

(SUDDENLY IT DAWNS ON HIM.)

BURKE (CONT'D)

Cripes Jess, I know what this is about, you liked that script, didn't you? Come on, one to ten on the Jessie scale, what's it rate?

(JESSICA MOTIONS SHE'S PULLING TO A STOP.)

JESSICA

Maybe you're right about the police.

BURKE

You smell a hit, don't you Jess? A sleeper?

JESSICA

Go call, I'll wait.

(He gives her a look then HOPS out of the van and heads for the pay phone.)

SUDDENLY, JESSICA throws the van into gear and runs offstage, making a sound of a VAN, as she runs across the stage exiting stage right.)

JESSICA

RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR.

(BURKE TURNS, SEES HER LEAVING.)

BURKE

*(screaming)* Jessica...wait...wait...stop! We'll co-produce!

(HE LOOKS UP AT THE SKY.)

God, I love that woman!

\*  
\*

(BURKE RUNS OFFSTAGE AFTER HER. LIGHTS GO DOWN.

LIGHTS COME UP ON JESSICA, AS SHE RUNS INTO THE ROOM.

JESSICA

Five hundred thousand and I won't press charges!



What the...

ASHLEY

The police.

DAVID

(JESSICA MOVES INTO THE CAGE)

It's a good offer.

JESSICA

(BURKE RUNS IN)

Don't sign anything. She's cheap. I'll do better.

BURKE

Don't listen to him. He's a shark. He'll put his own writers on it. You'll lose all control.

JESSICA

Don't listen to him. He's a shark. He'll put his own writers on it. You'll lose all control.

BURKE

*(to Jessica, moving into cage.)* I can't believe you left me like that. *(to Ashley and David)* Listen kids, whatever she said, 250 more and I'll guarantee you the first rewrite.

(ASHLEY AND DAVID STARE AT EACH OTHER IN SHOCK.)

JESSICA

One million. I liked it first. I cried. I'm ready to make a deal.

BURKE

I'm also ready.

GOLDBERG

*(calling from offstage)* I'll double the best offer.

(ALL TURN TO SEE GOLDBERG, COMING IN THROUGH THE KITCHEN DOOR, STANDING WITH A PLATE OF FOOD. ALL STARE AT HIM AS IF THEY'VE SEEN A GHOST.)

What?

GOLDBERG

ASHLEY

You said he was dead.

DAVID

I checked his pulse.

(DAVID INDICATES THAT HE TOOK THE PULSE AROUND THE COLLAR BONE.

EXASPERATED, ASHLEY MOVES HIS HAND IN THE CORRECT PLACE ON THE NECK TO FEEL A PULSE.)

JESSICA

We thought you were dead on the toilet.

GOLDBERG

Woke up with a headache, but starving. (to ASHLEY) You really are an excellent cook young lady. I found the pate in the refrigerator. Hope you weren't saving it. What's the bidding at?

JESSICA

Well, you just took it to two million, you idiot.

BURKE

(to *Goldberg*) I liked you better dead.

(CAROL QUICKLY ENTERS THE ROOM WITH A YOUNG COUPLE.)

CAROL

This is the living room. (to *Ashley and David*) Prequalified buyers.

WIFE

Is the cage included?

HUSBAND

We definitely want the cage.

JESSICA

Ashley, woman to woman, you know you can trust me and I'll get you John Cusack.

GOLDBERG

2.5 million. You kids get coproducer credit.

\*

(JACKSON COMES IN, WEARING HIS  
CHAUFFEUR'S OUTFIT. )

JACKSON

Don't forget directing. You want an option direct.

(DAVID STARES AT HIM LIKE HE'S GOING  
CRAZY.)

BURKE

5 % of net, and a development deal at the studio.

JESSICA

Three million, 5% of gross and merchandising.

\*  
\*

(VANESSA APPEARS THROUGH THE UPSTAGE  
MIDDLE DOORS. SHE STANDS IN BACK OF THE  
CAGE.)

VANESSA

(to David and Ashley) Vanessa Tate of Unlimited Talent, I represent David and Ashley.  
The offer I believe, is now at three million, 5 % of gross and merchandising. We want the  
option to direct.

(VANESSA MOVES INTO THE CAGE)

VANESSA

And guaranteed sequel. See David and Ashley, I told you to have faith, all right. Now, do I  
have 3.5?

(ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE AS  
THE PRODUCERS START  
CLAMORING ABOUT THEIR BIDS  
AND WHO DESERVES THE SCRIPT.

(ALL THE CHARACTERS END UP INSIDE THE  
CAGE AS THE BICKERING CONTINUES AND THE  
LIGHTS FADE, EXCEPT FOR ASHLEY AND  
DAVID WHO EXIT THE CAGE AND START  
DANCING.)

(LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK)

THE END

## CURTAIN

(CURTAIN CALL HAPPENS WITHIN THE CAGE,  
EXCEPT FOR ASHLEY AND DAVID WHO COME  
AROUND TO THE FRONT OF THE CAGE FOR  
THEIR BOWS.)

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, [click here to see the \*Desperate Writers\* information page.](#)