

A TRIBUTE TO ELI

A Comedy in Two Acts

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“Cast Of Characters”

ELI BIRNBAUM Twenty-nine, bespectacled, book wormish though better looking than he knows

AMBERLYN LIGHTY Twenty-six, a beautiful sylph, the one who makes business suits sexy

MARTIN ECKHARDT Fifty-two, bon vivant, suave in every act and manner

KEVIN NOAKES Thirty, tall, athletic, almost as handsome as he thinks

HAMILL FORRESTER Forty-nine, an archetypal movie star; the handsome, outdoor type that is always tanned, elegant and insecure.

ROSLYN PATTERDON Sixty, still attractive, her face reveals its age, yet retains enough youthfulness to keep alive the eternal male question, "Would ya?"

NEIL REDDING Forty, the gay, zaftig, loquacious roommate

JAMES JOHNSON, a slick-haired, too-handsome television anchor is the host of "The Entertainment Beat,"

LARRY PHELPS, a menacing, mustachioed linebacker of private detective

A Rabbi, a John, a Waiter,

SCENE 1

GREEN ROOM : Lights out. We hear the clamor of people frantically talking, operating and rushing. Many scattered voices bark out instructions, questions, commands.

“Camera three, move to place.”

“Get him. I want him now!”

“Standby tape. Cut to video.”

“Rolling one. Rolling one.”

“Rita, footage. Where’s the footage?!”

“Close up, closer. Move in on him.”

“Yeah that’s it there. Right there.”

(Lights come up on ELI facing out, holding a smoothie)

ELI

You can do this. You can. Be strong. Be strong, stay focused.

(a deep breath, then he places down the smoothie)

They always had a dream. It’s a dream shared by many, but realized by so few. Now their dream is my dream. My dream for them. So their souls can be at rest, and their time here will’ve had some meaning, some transcendence. That something beautiful and fine can come from this senseless act, whose sole aim was to stifle new and different voices from bringing beauty to the world. And the madness that brought about these terrible circumstances will not win the day. And the goodness in these people will be like a clarion call to others in need and others without hope, to come together and say we can overcome. We shall overcome.

(he stares out a long questioning moment)

They always had a dream. It’s a dream shared by many, but realized by so few. And now their dream is my dream. My dream for—

(AMBERLYN flies in)

AMBERLYN

All right, everything's set. We're go in ten minutes.

(she sits on the counter next to him. ELI quickly grabs the smoothie so it doesn't spill)

We have five and a half minutes for the segment. That includes the intro, my summation and the bullshit banter between me and the anchor. I'll ask you the questions we discussed, in the order we discussed them. Look directly at me, not into the camera.

That looks too orchestrated, too Ross Perot. It's just you and I having a conversation. If you're looking into the camera, I'll signal you like this...

(a cut sign above her knee)

Turn to me slowly. Don't jerk.

(ELI nods, looks at her, petrified. She smiles hearteningly)

You'll be fine. Stick to the script and try to relax.

ELI

I will. I am.

(with a wink and a fortifying touch on the shoulder, AMBERLYN leaves. ELI stares out solemnly)

ELI

That this senseless act whose sole aim was to stifle new and different voices from bringing beauty to the world will not win the day.

(ELI pauses then reaches for the smoothie. Just before bringing it to his lips, he hesitates, staring out)

SCENE 2

*MARTIN ECKHARDT'S PRODUCTION OFFICES:
THREE YEARS EARLIER : MARTIN is holding a script as
if trying to guess its weight. KEVIN and ELI sit across his
desk.*

MARTIN

Gentlemen, your script says all “*life*” to me. Right on the face of it, right on its surface. A silly, happy, Disney life. Where’s the angst, where’s the anguish?! The unremitting, unrelenting torment that says this, *this!*—this is a superior film.

ELI

(pause)

Is that because it’s called “A Life in the Mountains?” ‘Cause, cause it’s, it’s chock full of death.

KEVIN

It sure is. Death in the suburbs, death on the farm, death in the mountains. We could even change the title to that if you want. Right?

ELI

Not a problem. Change the title.

(pause; MARTIN muses)

KEVIN

Yeah we’ll change the title. I always hated the title.

ELI

You came up with the title.

KEVIN

That’s how I know it sucks. It repulses me. It repugnates my very soul.

ELI

Repugnates?

(KEVIN waves him off harshly)

MARTIN

I have to think....

KEVIN

Of course you do.

ELI

He's an intelligent man.

KEVIN

Very intelligent. *Extremely*. He needs to think about it. Who wouldn't?

ELI

Who? Me. It's perfect. I wouldn't change a word.

KEVIN

Take your time. Take a *week*. Take as long as you—

MARTIN

Nope. Can't get the "life" from my mind. Pasha?

(MARTIN closes the folder on the script, picks up an Emery board and uses it. ELI and KEVIN stare at him dumbfounded)

ELI

(heartbroken)

It's done.

KEVIN

What's done?

ELI

It is.

KEVIN

It's not done. It can't be done.

ELI

This is it. This is the last chance, the last stop—

KEVIN

I said it's not done!

MARTIN

Pasha! How many times do I have to tell her to keep a supply in her desk. *Maxipads!*
What a silly name.

ELI

(pause)

He hasn't read the script.

KEVIN

He's read the script. He's read the script! You read the script, right?....Haven't you?

MARTIN

(pause; looking up)

I read the title.

KEVIN

You only read the title?

ELI

Was it that taxing?

MARTIN

I don't follow. *Pasha!*

KEVIN

What he means is—

ELI

Easy boy.

KEVIN

(pause)

What my chum is trying to glean, is after having read the five words of the title, were you so fatigued, so utterly bereft of the capacity to carry on, you couldn't glance at the other hundred and twenty pages we have painstakingly dedicated the last two *years* of our lives to. The sole purpose for which we've alienated family and friends, indebted ourselves to the last centime of our life's earning potential. Abstained from love and companionship and *sex!* Him! Not me! Resisting cravings for Ronco products and Slim Jims, Pay Per View porn, Angus beef and this embarrassing Jennifer Love Hewitt fixation.

PASHA

(barely coming in)

Yes Mr. Eckhardt.

MARTIN

Tell Suki I'm ready for my sponge bath....Good day gentlemen.

SCENE 3

*ELI'S ROOM / SET OF THE ENTERTAINMENT BEAT:
Eli's room has a distinct fraternity house feel. ELI and
KEVIN enter and KEVIN has a vicious grand mal)*

KEVIN

Fuck! Fuck fucking fuckin' fuck!

(he pauses momentarily to catch his breath, then again)

Cock sucking, fuck fucking fuck! Fuckfuck!

*(ELI turns on the television, throws the remote onto the
couch and heads to the kitchen)*

ELI

I'm making a smoothie

KEVIN

Mother fucking mother fucker!

*(exhausted, KEVIN turns to the t.v. It's the Entertainment
Beat with JAMES JOHNSON interviewing HAMILL)*

JAMES JOHNSON

And I think "Cold Blooded Bear Four" was a *very* interesting movie. You have some
very interesting moments in it.

(the audience applauds; HAMILL nods acknowledgement)

HAMILL

Thank you. That's my favorite of the six in the "Bear" series.

JAMES JOHNSON

Being from the hardened streets of Red Hook, Brooklyn, how do you get to the *raison
d'être* of Chuck Bear, a Mississippi Rabbit tracker turned crime fighter?

HAMILL

It's very difficult Jim. You have to search for the character's inner soul. His impulses, his motivations. Find the rabbit tracker in all of us.

JAMES JOHNSON

Man's struggle against nature and the immorality of the wilderness.

HAMILL

Yes sure, there's that, too.

KEVIN

When I walk up to the Pearly Gates I want St. Peter to say that that bearded, arrogant fuckwad IS NOT IN HERE!

(ELI enters, carrying two smoothies, taking a taster sip of one on the way over to KEVIN)

KEVIN

Why do you always taste mine?

ELI

To make sure it tastes right. I don't want you to be disappointed. Strawberry.

KEVIN

Get away from me.

(ELI holds it out. KEVIN reluctantly takes the glass)

You're really beginning to freak me out with these smoothies.

ELI

They ease my tension.

KEVIN

Well jerk off like the rest of us and stop palming these off on people.

(KEVIN tastes, nods favorably. ELI moves to the couch)

That's not bad. What's in it?

ELI

Some of the severance package from the pharmacy job.

KEVIN

Stealing a lifetime supply of vitamins and valium on the way out the door, nice move. Do you even know what half of what you stole does?

ELI

I also stole a book to tell me.

(ELI picks up the remote. In a faux announcer tone)

"The handsome, outdoorsy Hamill Forrester."

KEVIN

What's that?

ELI

Every time they mention him on one of these Entertainment shows, they always say "Hamill Forrester, the handsome, outdoorsy actor." Like he's Daniel Boone Redford.

JAMES JOHNSON

Next! Adam Automaton!

(the audience claps)

HAMILL

Yes. Thank you. Kindly.

JAMES JOHNSON

A real statement on America's social well-being in the modern world. There you play a 24th century robot turned crime fighter.

KEVIN

I hate this town.

ELI

(changing the channels)

What's it this time?

KEVIN

Whole fucking city of dilettantes with no thoughts beyond opening grosses and back-end deals. Actors who think they're intelligent because they saw *Medea* and know what Henry V said to the troops.

ELI

Once more unto the breach dear friends on this Crispins day.

KEVIN

Producer cock-suckers who give you Jason's *Police Academy 9* instead of a real film.

ELI

A hockey-masked murderer kills Steve Guttenberg.—I'd pay to see it.

KEVIN

Back East there are museums and galleries and theater! Well not really any theatre, except *this* year's revival of "Death of Virginia Wolf on a Tin Roof." But ask someone here for a place to go for something cultural, something cerebral, what do they tell you?

ELI

The tar pits.

KEVIN

The Lebrea Tar Pits! If that's museum worthy, New Jersey's a masterpiece.

ELI

"The Turnpike"—by Rodin. It has a certain—

KEVIN

They'll never get our script! It's too subtle, it's too jejune for their bleeding hearts.

ELI

Jejune?—Woody? “Love and Death?”

KEVIN

Of course.

ELI

Know what it means?

KEVIN

Not a clue.

(ELI smiles, turns to the t.v.)

Which episode is it?

ELI

Homer buys Bart the “Mr. Microphone” and then Bart falls into a well. All of Hollywood comes out in a show of support with an all-night vigil around the well.

KEVIN

Who’s that?

ELI

Sting. He sings on the benefit song, then joins in on “*the good old fashion well diggin’*.”

KEVIN

Fucking hypocritical bleeding hearts. *Give some real cash to charity?! You’ve made ten mil for the same stupid laugh and the same stupid stuttering delivery. How about giving 200K to PETA instead of just showing your tits!*

ELI

Frankly, if the truth be told, I’d rather see their—

KEVIN

They’re fucking locusts! Locusts in the valley, locusts pecking out little Suzie’s eyes. All they’re doing is hiding their locustness with this pseudo-*feeling* crap. Waiting for their chance, once they’ve given their—little—share....I’ve got it.

ELI

Yes you do. Their *locustness!* That's a winner.

KEVIN

I know how we're gonna get our script made.

ELI

We're gonna change the title to "*The Locustness.*"

KEVIN

*Would you shut up about that?...*We'll make it a tribute film.

ELI

Good. Sting can write a benefit song to finance it. Mr. Quayle, *it's television!*

KEVIN

Listen!—We invent someone who died, and we use his life—which we make up.

ELI

I've seen it. It's called "Weekend at Bernie's." *And it sucked!*

KEVIN

No wait, *listen to me!*—We create his life, and we get some unknown actress to play his grieving, anguished mother. She goes on t.v. and does one of those humiliating human interest appeals like you always saw on Mannix or Quincy. "My son's a good boy, a good boy." An impassioned plea for the backing for her dead son's film. A tribute to his enduring memory. And she pitches *our* script, *our* "A Life in the Mountains." "*See that this gets made Mummy, so I live on.*" A testament to his too-short-a-time on this ruthless, ephemeral orb. Man prevailing, man transcending, all that useless bullshit.

ELI

(pause)

Did he die of AIDS?

KEVIN

Of course he died of AIDS.

ELI

Struck down in the prime of life.

KEVIN

Smote down by the scourge of our times.

ELI

(pause)

He was a social worker.

KEVIN

Specializing in teaching handicapped children. OCD, ADD, MTV you name it.

ELI

And the hair-lipped.

(KEVIN points at ELI excited; long pause)

He was hemophilic.

KEVIN

(pause, nodding slowly)

And lactose intolerant.

ELI

Wow....That *is* pathetic. That's *exceedingly* pathetic. That's *bathetic*.

KEVIN

Nothing but the best for our boy. I feel sorry for him myself.

ELI

And you're a heartless prick.

KEVIN

It's all I ever wanted to be.

ELI

(pause)

The mother's the key.

KEVIN

We cast it ourselves.

ELI

She's got to be a sharp, intelligent.

KEVIN

Limits the casting pool.

ELI

Able to adjust, improvise.

KEVIN

Let's not eliminate all of them.

ELI

Sweet, loving. Not too maudlin.

KEVIN

She's over the initial pain.

ELI

Earnest. Sincere. Yet innocent, pure. Unaccustomed to Hollywood's evil ways.

KEVIN

(pause, nodding slowly)

Dorothy's Kansas.

(their look at each other is a mixture of thrill and fear)

SCENE 4

HOTEL ROOM : ROSLYN, dressed in a teddy, lies on her stomach on the bed, listens without emotion. JOHN, speaks incensed as he is dressing.

JOHN

And she never let me play with the older kids! Never! She was always afraid something would happen. What could happen?!

(JOHN pulls on his pants with great force.)

And I was always afraid. Always. I never felt secure. How could she do that to a child?

(ROSLYN turns over desultory as he puts on his silk shirt, wrenching it around him)

I was stunted! I was abused! I've never been able to deal with authority, I've never felt in control. Adults scare me! Fortunately film directors aren't adults, I can't take them seriously. Anyway, now that I'm running the studio, there isn't much they can say. I should sue her for what she's done to me.

(JOHN thrusts on his suit jacket, pulls a pocket recorder out and talks into it)

Call lawyer, have him talk to father about his third ex-wife....Hey listen.

(he sits down on the bed besides her, stroking her back)

The room's paid for, so stay if you want. I can't thank you enough for taking me on such short notice. It's been quite a while, huh?—I just....you know.

(he lifts her hand, kisses it once and rises to leave)

ROSLYN

You fuckin putz. You goddamn little baby. Your mother didn't let you play with other kids, that's her big crime. That's the justification you hang all your insecurities on. Not your small penis, not your back acne or getting cut from high school basketball. For godsakes be a man! Instead of this whinny little infant who needs his nose blown and his ass wiped!...Real men are jewels, real men are a dreamt thing. They care for women, they nurture and support and love. They nurse their mothers. They back their sisters young and old. They're a blessing!—Something to look to, to be counted on. A promise made to all little girls in their sleep in the warm comfort of their childhood beds....Get

ROSLYN - cont'd

out of here, you make me sick. You disgust me. Get out of here. *Get out of here! Get out of my sight!*

JOHN

(pause)

God, you're the best! You're the best hooker in all of Hollywood! I tell everybody who'll listen. Screw the young chicks, forget the hot ass. Mama is still the best in my book. Here's a little something extra for you. Okay? Take care of yourself.

(JOHN leaves. Slowly ROSLYN turns over on the bed and stares up at the ceiling)

SCENE 5

THE TRINITY THEATRE : ELI talks on his cell angrily while pacing in the lobby.

ELI

I told you what I wanted, didn't I? Didn't I? Didn't I tell you *exactly* what I wanted!....I expect you to follow through. I expect you to....*Yes*, exactly. I don't give care! I don't, I don't care, just get it done! Do you understand me?

(pause, especially whinny)

But Mom!

(he hangs ups and moves to KEVIN. In voice-over, we hear a gaggle of sixty-year old women practice their monologues, all doing Tennessee Williams' characters. Brief snatches Blanche, Amanda and Violet are overheard)

"I have always relied on the kindness of strangers."

"Your mother received seventeen gentleman callers."

"State Asylum! Cut this hideous story out her brain!"

"I was told to take a street car named Desire."

(ELI starts to speak, gets overwhelmed say nothing)

ELI

What's it like out there?

KEVIN

If a bomb went off, hundreds of young men would live happier, healthier lives.

(ELI smiles, but it fades as he gauges KEVIN's sincerity. They walk upstage center. The blather becomes louder, more unrestrained. They stand, no one stops talking)

KEVIN

All right ladies....ladies we need to....Uh please ladies, we really have to get start....

(no one quiets. KEVIN walks to a table with a vase, and smashes the vase against the back wall. Silence)

KEVIN

We're gonna to take you in the order we set up. Those of you who came *early* figuring "we'd *sneak you in*," we can't! Those of you who need a "*private moment to talk*," we won't! We're not about to change every thing we've planned just because you thought—

ELI

Kevin!....We're not casting for Dr. Mengele.

KEVIN

Are you sure?....Are there any questions?

(pause. Then all the Mothers speak at once, their voices melding into a loud, whining drone. KEVIN and ELI sit in their chairs, defeated. The women speak in voice-over)

KEVIN

Please take the seat there. We'd like you to read the monologue marked "Mother" on the sides in front of you. Take a moment to settle yourself. Begin anytime you're ready.

(the next is a series of different voices overheard. There are different accents, inflections and tones that distinguish them)

WOMAN 1

What?

WOMAN 2

Vas?

WOMAN 3

I'm sorry I couldn't hear you?

WOMAN 4

Da the fuck you say?

ELI

(pause)

Okay? Hello?

WOMAN 1

(pause)

This type is very small.

WOMAN 2

I canta see dis.

WOMAN 3

If we moved that light over there to here, and this one over here to over there—

WOMAN 4

I need my fucking reading glasses. Goddamn it!

ELI

(pause)

Ma'am hello? Hel-loooo?

WOMAN 1

(pause)

And his dream is now my dream. A dream realized by so few.

WOMAN 2

My—drreem—for—eem.

WOMAN 3

I really shouldn't be reading in this light. It's not good for eyes. "Read light, read right!"

WOMAN 4

He took my fucking glasses! That cock sucker. I told 'im.

KEVIN

(pause)

Is she breathing?

ELI

I can't tell.

KEVIN

She was breathing when she sat down right, she had to be? Hello?

WOMAN 1

His soul can be at rest and his time will've had some meaning.

WOMAN 2

Some tran—tran—scend—tran—scend—some—transcend—I'll a move on.

WOMAN 3

Is it hot in here or is it me? It is, isn't it? Hot. You can tell me. Is it me?

WOMAN 4

Gonna cut that mother fucker's balls off. Cut 'em off and feed 'em to 'im.

ELI

(pause)

Should we get a mirror to check if she's breathing?

KEVIN

I can see her blinking.

WOMAN 1

(pause)

That something beautiful and fine can come from this madness.

WOMAN 2

Re-al-ize-ed. Re-aliz-ed. Realized. Realized!

WOMAN 3

It's not just me. It is hot. That's not good. It dries the skin and that's bad for pores.

WOMAN 4

I told 'im not to touch my things. Now I gotta cut 'im. Gotta cut 'im good and deep.

ELI

(pause)

Maybe it's a brain fever?

KEVIN

It's not a brain fever

ELI

I've read it. Spontaneous and complete paralysis. One minute, they're fine and—

KEVIN

It's not a—

(a woman wakes from a trance with a scream and a shiver)

WOMAN 5

Blaaaahhh!—Woah. I'm sorry. Were you talking to me? Let me turn up my hearing aid. Okay, ready. I'm sorry....Is it hot in here? You know the light isn't very good.

WOMAN 1

Is this a paying job? I'm union. I can't take it otherwise.

SCENE 7

SING A SONG DINNER : KEVIN and ELI sit in a booth with uncomprehending, distraught faces. Both are silent for a long moment.

KEVIN

Why would anyone subject themselves to that?

ELI

I. Don't. Know. I only know I never want it to happen again.

KEVIN

(pause)

It would've worked. The plan, it was...

ELI

A social working, hemophiliac who died of AIDS.

KEVIN

Lactose intolerant, and teaching the hair-lipped....It was perfect.

(ROSLYN comes to their table. They rouse to the menus)

ROSLYN

What can I get you?

ELI

I'll have a Pizza Burger, but I want the sauce on the side. Does that come with fries?

ROSLYN

(writing on a pad)

Do you know anything in a diner that doesn't?

ELI

Then I'd like a cup of gravy for the fries. So that's one cup of beef gravy—

ROSLYN

Sunshine, it wasn't difficult. You?

KEVIN

Mmmm...how's the veal piccata?

ELI

Please don't do this.

KEVIN

Not too stringy, not too many veins.

ROSLYN

You have to be over eighty to order anything off the last six pages of a diner menu.

KEVIN

Is the cod fresh? I'm very fussy about my cod.

ELI

I beg of you, not now.

KEVIN

Lobster Neuberg!

ROSLYN

This passes for humor in your family.

KEVIN

My parents died recently. It's the little things that get me through. Lady, our family Schitsu, mauled them freakin' off a bad batch of Eukanuba. Wasn't much left but gristle and cartilage. I thought it best to put her down.

ROSLYN

We get our meat pretty cheap. I don't ask the details.

KEVIN

Ah ha ha! Good one.

ROSLYN

Grilled cheese with bacon?

KEVIN

Tomato.

ROSLYN

Pansy.

KEVIN

Cole Slaw?

ROSLYN

You should be so lucky.

(ROSLYN swipes the menus and leaves)

KEVIN

She's perfect.

ELI

Yes she's very Flo. A real godsend to the service industry.

KEVIN

No, I mean she's perfect! Dorothy's Kansas. Quick on her feet. Improvisational.

ELI

Innocent? Pure?

KEVIN

Who in this world is really innocent and pure?

(ROSLYN brings Cole slaw as KEVIN eyes her name tag)

KEVIN

You know Roz, can I call you Roz?

ROSLYN

Shut up.

KEVIN

Unh huh. You look familiar. An actress by any chance? Soap opera, failed pilot, clapping wildly in an infomercial. Something insignificant yet inconsequential.

ROSLYN

Over with that dream a long time ago.

ELI

But you've still got the bug, the old juices.

KEVIN

Like herpes, acting is the gift that keeps on giving.

(both look at KEVIN with incredulity)

ROSLYN

If I had a dime for every pair of hotshot screenwriters who looked me in the eyes and told me I was perfect for a part—I wouldn't be second knuckle deep in your Cole slaw.

KEVIN

Mmn tasty. We do happen to be a pair of hotshot screenwriters, bravo. And we just so happen to have a part in a production we're producing.

ELI

A production we're producing?

KEVIN

What? It's not a double negative or nothing.

ELI

It's not particularly gifted.

KEVIN

Well you know what Eli, why don't you blow me with your particularly gifted.

ELI

Why don't *you* blow *me* with your—

ROSLYN

Boys, I'd love to watch you two pitch a hissy fit, but I've got tables of geriatrics who've ordered fried food to speed their path to the Kingdom of God, so if you don't mind...

KEVIN

We have a project—

ELI

An endeavor.

KEVIN

That we think you'd be great for. We'd love for you to come and audition for us.

ROSLYN

(pause; mistrustful)

You recognize me from somewhere—and now you have an endeavor I'm perfect for.

(KEVIN grabs the pad and pen from her breast pocket and begins writing)

KEVIN

Why don't you come see us tomorrow. We'll discuss the project and see what flies...Say around 5:30?

*(KEVIN tears away the sheet and hands her the bill.
ROSLYN takes the pad first, then the check, warily)*

ROSLYN

Two conditions. One, nothing kinky.

ELI

Of course not.

ROSLYN

And two—I'm gonna overcharge you to make up for a tray I dumped earlier. I still want a 20 percent tip.

KEVIN

We wouldn't have it any other way.

(ROSLYN looks at the address a moment and leaves)

ELI

Two produces in one sentence.

KEVIN

It works!

ELI

For a *state-school* graduate.

KEVIN

Just because I didn't go through some hoity-toity Actor's Studio playwrighting program....

SCENE 8

*ELI'S LIVING ROOM / SET OF LOCAL NEWS: KEVIN
opens the door for ROSLYN.*

KEVIN

Hi, c'mon in. I'm Kevin. Thanks for coming.

ROSLYN

Nice place.

KEVIN

It's not mine, it's Eli's, the other guy. You want something to drink?

ROSLYN

No thanks....Should we get started?

KEVIN

In a minute. Eli!

(ROSLYN takes off her jacket and peruses the room)

ROSLYN

Where's it going to be? Here?

KEVIN

Yeah, there's fine.

(ROSLYN kicks the couch, checks the cushion's firmness)

ROSLYN

With both of you?....Whatever you want.

(ELI comes in carrying a smoothie)

ELI

Hi, I'm Eli. It's great to have you here. Can I interest you in a smoothie?

ROSLYN

That's why I'm here.

(ELI and KEVIN share a bewildered look as ROSLYN begins to remove her overcoat)

ELI

Okay, great. I'll be right back.

(ELI heads off as ROSLYN stops undressing)

ROSLYN

Where's he going?

KEVIN

He'll be back in a second. Have you done this recently? Walk the boards, ply the trade?

ROSLYN

More or less to pay bills. There's always some boys with Mother issues. And there are only certain ways to get back at those demons. Where there's a fetish, there's always someone to gratify it in LA.

KEVIN

Good for you. Everybody says—huh? I'm not sure I foll—

ELI

Here we go.

(ELI enters, hands a drink to ROSLYN who looks confused)

KEVIN

Why don't we get started. Please take a seat.

ROSLYN

You want me seated?

ELI

Has Kevin explained...

KEVIN

No, I was waiting for you. Roz, can I call you—we, Eli and I, we're producing a prod—an *indictment* of the fatuousness and froth ingrained in current Hollywood system.

ELI

An exposé of the caprices inherent in the screen writing industry. We're going—

KEVIN

Can I finish?

ELI

Of course....Well go ahead!

KEVIN

Alright! We're setting loose a symbolic time-bomb—and we want you to be our Mother.

(AMBERLYN, with a mic in hand speaks to the audience)

AMBERLYN

Thank you Bob. Tonight, my report tells the story of an outcast hero, hopelessly forlorn, tragically alone, and forced to remain apart. Please stay with me as we unfold the heart-wrenching saga of....*The Kitty Who Couldn't Climb!*

ROSLYN

You mean this is an acting job?

ELI

Yes of course. What'd you think it was?

(ROSLYN laughs as KEVIN and ELI watch on, perplexed)

ROSLYN

I'm sorry, I thought—never mind. An acting job. Can I get my SAG card renewed?

ELI

Ummm....

KEVIN

Mmmn, no. Not quite.

ROSLYN

I don't get it, why not? This *is* an acting job?

(KEVIN and ELI hesitate to answer)

AMBERLYN

Snickers was a lovely, stray Siamese. Gray of coat, paws of white, heart of lion. Our odyssey begins in the park behind Richard M. Nixon Middle School in East La Jolla.

ROSLYN

That's a gift.

KEVIN

This is an ugly word.

ELI

And not at all representative of our intentions.

KEVIN

We view this as an opportunity.

ELI

A competitive response.

ROSLYN

It's a con!

ELI

But an ingenious one.

KEVIN

Indeed. And we still need a Mother to play the role.

ROSLYN

Do you think you can get away with it?

KEVIN

As much as anyone can.

ROSLYN

(pause)

Beats taking your clothes off.

KEVIN

Well said. Excellent. Now all we need is a name for our boy. Something pathetic, some pitiful loser name, where you feel sorry him carrying it around his whole life.

ROSLYN

Who's gonna do the interview?

(ELI looks at KEVIN, stumped. KEVIN grabs the remote and turns to the television screen)

KEVIN

We'll go to where L.A. gets the news it really cares about. Tabloid television and Los Angeles's "There you have it" reporter.

AMBERLYN

The story of the courageous Kitty who Couldn't Climb. And the little girl, whose love, it didn't make any difference to....There you have it Los Angeles. I'm Amberlyn Lighty.

SCENE 9

AMBERLYN'S APARTMENT: AMBERLYN comes in, throws purse on a flower stand and falls onto a chair despondently. NEIL enters from the bedroom and heads for the sideboard where he begins making Margaritas.

NEIL

I saw the show.

AMBERLYN

Did you see it?

NEIL

Fine work.

AMBERLYN

Neil, the stupid Cat who Couldn't Climb!

NEIL

But matching the star blue chiffon with the black cardigan—inspired. Margarita?

AMBERLYN:

I've gotta do something better than that. I want to do hard news.

NEIL

You're too pretty to do hard news.

AMBERLYN

That's ridiculous.

NEIL

That doesn't make something untrue. Listen honey, no one is going to care about the war in Bosnia or Chechnya or any other "uh" if they want to "unh unh unh" the reporter. Salt?

AMBERLYN

What about Diane Sawyer?

NEIL

Look what she does. Not hard news. Good Boring America. Sweetheart, it's the world God created. We can't have what we most want in life. That which we dream of and work everyday for is kept just beyond our reach. Existence is an equal and opposite force that offsets your talents and demeans your life. Hallelujah.

AMBERLYN

I don't believe that.

NEIL

Look at Connie Chung, too pretty. That face starring at with the one camera straight on, nope. Plus, no peripheral vision. Asian, Polynesian women, heteros respond to it in a certain Pavlovian way. They can't resist it. It says fellatio like Courtney Love never could. And where is she?—*Hard*—not hard news.

AMBERLYN

How've you lived so long?

NEIL

Telling the truth darling others are ashamed to admit.

(NEIL brings a drink to her outlandishly)

A little too fruity?—The drink!

AMBERLYN

I'm gonna do some hard stories and the producer can just turn them down if he wants.

(NEIL imitates a blow job with his tongue and cheek)

Please, would you?

NEIL

Suit yourself. But the closest thing you'll get to a real story is that pussy.

AMBERLYN

Neil?!

NEIL

What? The cat who couldn't crap or whatever! Oh no honey, no no, not my style. Female parts, anatomical, private, the undiscovered country.

(AMBERLYN's phone rings. She moves to it languidly)

AMBERLYN

Some crack house or meth clinic story. Street whores! That's always a winner.

(answering the phone)

Amberlyn Lighty....This is she....Yes, uh huh....mmn, I'm sorry....uff, really, that's terrible....I'm so very sorry.

(a long pause)

And lactose intolerant!

SCENE 10

INTERVIEW SET / ELI'S ROOM / MARTIN'S OFFICE :
ROSLYN sits opposite AMBERLYN on the news set.

AMBERLYN

Mrs. Kaufman, tell me about Eli.

ROSLYN

(pause)

Eli, my son, he was a good boy, a good boy and a gifted writer. And he had a dream. It's dream shared by many, but realized by so few. And now his dream is my dream. My dream for him.

AMBERLYN

What do you hope to accomplish by this, shall I say, crusade?

ROSLYN

I'm only hoping to complete what he began. So his soul can be at rest and his time here will've had some meaning. That something wonderful and fine can come from this terrible thing, which has stifled one voice from bringing beauty to the world.

(ELI and KEVIN watch the interview)

KEVIN

That's a good add. Bringing beauty to the world.

ELI

I don't want her deviating too much from my script.

AMBERLYN

What would your wish be?

ROSLYN

That the disease that brought this about will not win the day. And the goodness in Eli will be like a clarion call to others in need and others without hope to come together and say we can overcome, we shall overcome.

(MARTIN watches in his office, slouched behind his desk)

MARTIN

Look at this outpouring. Human frailty, human tragedy. Mmmn....Grief, despondency. Bearing witness, carrying its solemn burden. *God I love it!*....All the best films, they're all here. Strip away the pretense and the veneer. Indignity, degradation. Mmmn, yes.

AMBERLYN

Mrs. Kaufman, do you have any final thoughts on AIDS?

ELI

Shit! I didn't foresee that.

ROSLYN

Well....

KEVIN

Stay true to the character. Stay true to the character.

ROSLYN

It's just that....it's an awful thing that's happened to my boy and the thousands like him.

ELI

Yes, good.

MARTIN

Mmmph, yes. Good.

AMBERLYN

And....

ROSLYN

(pause)

And it's awful we live in a world where something can destroy so many happy lives....That's why I'm donating all the proceeds to an AIDS research fund set up in Eli's memory.

KEVIN

What did she say?

ELI

Oh god.

KEVIN

What the fuck did she say?!

AMBERLYN

A dream too beautiful to die. Solving the world's problem with just a movie. For more information, please contact us at the station....There you have it Los Angeles. I'm Amberlyn Lighty.

MARTIN

Tragic, bittersweet, a bleak sentiment.—And a great PR campaign. The screenplay, the mother. Open in selected cities, get the reviews then go wide to 7,000 scenes. Twenty mil opening weekend, worldwide distrib rights. I have to help this woman. Wait, hold it, I gotta write this down. Come out here.

(PASHA crawls out from under the desk. MARTIN grabs a pen and a slip of paper, writing the note on her back)

SCENE 11

ELI'S ROOM / MARTIN'S OFFICE :

KEVIN

I don't believe it!

ROSLYN

I didn't know what to say!

ELI

Let's calm down. It's different from what we planned, but it might help get a response.

KEVIN

I don't fucking believe it! We can't get anything out of it!

ELI

It's not the first script we sell, but the second one.

KEVIN

There can't *be* a second one, the first's not carrying our names!

(the phone rings. ELI moves to answer it)

ELI

It's okay, we'll think of something.—Hello....uh yes.

(waving frantically)

Yes she is. Hold please.

(he covers the receiver with his hand)

It's Martin Eckhardt for Mrs. Kaufman.

(ROSLYN hesitates a moment, then moves to the phone with great composure. She pauses briefly to set herself)

ROSLYN

This is Mrs. Kaufman.

MARTIN

Mrs. Kaufman, Martin Eckhardt here. I'm a movie industry mog—oh, oh. I'm huge!
I'm huge—I'm—OOOOHHH!

ROSLYN

(she looks at them baffled)

Hello? Are you all right?

MARTIN

Oh I'm—I'm great. I am, I'm so—whew....Okay stop that. You can go.

(PASHA gets out from under the desk)

Mrs. Kaufman, have your son's script sent to my office by 11 AM tomorrow morning.
I'll let you know by noon.

ROSLYN

All right.

MARTIN

(pause)

He couldn't eat any dairy whatsoever? Brie, camembert? Edam?

ROSLYN

No he couldn't.

MARTIN

Truly tragic.

ROSLYN

(she hangs up, looking blankly at the boys)

He wants the script in his office by 11 AM.

ELI

(pause)

Do you think we should change the title?

SCENE 12

MARTIN'S OFFICE / HAMILL'S CLASSROOM / ELI'S ROOM : MARTIN, smoking a cigar, pulls the script from the envelope.

MARTIN

“A Death in the Mountains.” By Eli Kaufman.

(MARTIN nods pleased, thinks a moment)

Pasha, get me Hamill Forrester. Try him at his Kabbalah lesson.

PASHA

Won't he be upset?

MARTIN

It's Bikram Yoga he asked not to be disturbed in. He's only researching Kabbalah for the next Faralley Brothers movie.

(HAMILL, in dark sunglasses, sits dozing in a chair. His cell phone goes off and it wakes him)

HAMILL

Mine. Mine, sorry.—Yeah.

MARTIN

Ham, Marty here. How's the lesson?

HAMILL

Great, great. Opening new worlds of thought and understanding. Though there's a lot of Hebrew, I didn't expect that.

MARTIN

Why would you Ham, it's Kabbalah. Listen Ham, lunch with me Thursday. I have a project you might want to be attached to.

HAMILL

Can't. I have my Joyce class. This week it's "Ulysses: Great Book, Great Door Stop?"
How's Tuesday?

MARTIN

Perfect.

(he clicks off Hamill)

Pasha get me Mrs. Kaufman.

PASHA

At her Kabbalah class?

(the phone rings. ELI answers it)

ELI

Hello.

MARTIN

Martin Eckhardt calling.

(ELI hands ROSLYN the phone)

ROSLYN

Yes.

MARTIN

I read your son's script—and I have to say, it moved me.

ROSLYN

It moved you.

KEVIN

Yes! Yes!

(ROSLYN waves at them to be quiet)

MARTIN

Who's that?

ROSLYN

Oh I'm sorry, I have some friends here who are comforting me.

MARTIN

Friends are great for that. I had one once.—Yes, the piece reached a core in me, something unknown. The death—in the mountains—very moving. Listen, I've set up a lunch for Tuesday with an actor I believe'll be very interested.

ROSLYN

Lunch on Tuesday?

KEVIN

It's gonna be a Puck.

ELI

It's not a Puck.

ROSLYN

I know of it, yes.

KEVIN

I swear to God, I know it, it's gonna be a Puck!

ROSLYN

I'll see you on Tuesday then.

(she hangs up and turns to them non-plussed)

We're meeting at Spago.

KEVIN

Oh man!

ELI

It's a Puck.

KEVIN

Man oh man!

ELI

You're having a power meal with a producer at a Wolfgang Puck restaurant.

KEVIN

I always dreamed it as a child. Me, Johnny and Ed, tossing back Black label, waving at Ovitz while cursing at him under our breaths. Ignoring Chevy Chase, the whole deal.

ELI

I had the same dream. Except we're drinking single malts, ignoring Michael Keaton. Farging bastige.

KEVIN

Johnny Dangerously. Good choice.

(KEVIN and ELI stare at each other momentarily)

I'm going.

ELI

We can't go.

KEVIN

I'm going! Eels I'm going, I have to go—

ELI

Kevin.

KEVIN

Eels, please!

ELI

Easy boy. Someday.

(ELI pats KEVIN reassuringly)

SCENE 13

SPAGO RESTAURANT / THE PARKING LOT: ROSLYN sits alone at a table. KEVIN and ELI are in the parking lot across the street, one with binoculars, the other a still camera on a tripod with a telephoto lens.

KEVIN

Anthony Hopkins is perfect!

ELI

Though he already did that woodsy, Mamet thing.

KEVIN

With Alec Baldwin? Nobody sees his movies since he moved out of the country.

ELI

Duvall.

KEVIN

Oh yes. Yes! They did that “The Evangelist” together.

ELI

“The Reverend.”

KEVIN

Where the fuck are they? They were supposed to meet here forty-five minutes ago.

ELI

So they’re due any minute.

(MARTIN and HAMILL enter the restaurant together and stand near the entrance)

ELI

There's Martin! Near the pretty boy waiter with the bad hairpiece.

KEVIN

Which? The one near the plants?

ELI

No, the other one in the bad piece near the ice sculpture.

KEVIN

Who's that with him? I can't make him out! It's 80 fucking degrees year-round in this town, who has an ice sculpture?

(he turns to ELI, fawning)

Puck.

(MARTIN and HAMILL move around the ice sculpture and come up to ROSLYN's table)

KEVIN and ELI

(simultaneously)

Hamill Forrester!

MARTIN

Mrs. Kaufman, Marty Eckhardt.

ROSLYN

Hello. Nice to meet you.

MARTIN

And may I present....

ROSLYN

Hamill Forrester.

HAMILL

Yes it is. And a pleasure for you to meet me.

ROSLYN

Oh yes, it is for me. I'm a big fan of yours from *way way* back.

HAMILL

Not *that* way way back, I hope.

ROSLYN

Oh, no. No, of course not.

MARTIN

Ah yes, an auspicious start. Shall we sit?

(a WAITER immediately arrives at their table)

WAITER

May I take your order Mr. Eckhardt?

MARTIN

We'll have three drinks and three lunches.

WAITER

Very good sir.

(the WAITER leaves)

ROSLYN

What're we having?

MARTIN

Who knows. They'll keep bringing things till we're happy.

KEVIN

Are you kidding me?!

ELI

He *is* handsome and outdoorsy.

KEVIN

He's a hack! He couldn't out act a tomato!

ELI

Unless it's a tomato turned crime fighter.

MARTIN

Mrs. Kaufman, Hamill and I have read the script, and we want to make your son's film. We want to make it for Eli.

HAMILL

Mrs. Kaufman, can I call you Roz?

(she doesn't respond)

When Marty told me about your son's plight and your crusade to have him be remembered, the first thing I thought was—well, the first thing was I thought “How much will I get paid?” I mean, c'mon really!

(he laughs excessively)

Woah, yeah. Sorry. But as soon as Marty reassured me it was my usual deal, I said “Marty we've got to help this woman, we've got to fulfill Eli's dream.”

(HAMILL wells up and MARTIN pats his shoulder)

MARTIN

That's all right, big fella. Don't be ashamed to show your feelings. This isn't New York.

ELI

What's the deal with his hair? If we all know he's bald, what's the point?

KEVIN

And that nose? Who needs a lungs when you have a nose like that?

ELI

Who needs a dick?!

HAMILL

Roz, your son's script captures everything I feel. Man's struggle against nature, the immorality of the wilderness.

MARTIN

And it's funny too.

HAMILL

It has great humor!—But more, it has great soul. It has great....soul.

MARTIN

Trust us with Eli's dream Roz.

ROSLYN

Well....This is so overwhelming. I don't quite know what to say.

ELI

Say no. Please please say no. Pretty please with sugar—

KEVIN

(overlapping)

Don't do it! Don't you fucking do it! I will fucking kill—

(HAMILL rises and grabs ROSLYN in a bear hug)

KEVIN

They're hugging!

ELI

No hug! No hug!

MARTIN

Yes, heh-heh. A happy family.

HAMILL

I'm so very happy.

ROSLYN

I need to go to the bathroom. Would you please pardon me?

(ELI still looks through his camera. KEVIN sits distraught besides his)

ELI

She's going. Where's she going?

KEVIN

How the hell should I know? Probably to take a leak.

ELI

In front of Hamill Forrester?

KEVIN

He's not going with her, is he?

ELI

Still. I don't think I'd be able to.

(POLICE OFFICER walks up to them)

POLICE OFFICER

All right fellows, show's over. Let's move on.

(KEVIN, at once, tries to move the POLICE OFFICER out of an imaginary shot with his hand)

KEVIN

Would you plea—Ugh, great. Great! You ruined the shot. Ruined the—would you, to the left of the uh.....thank you much. Where are we? How's your scope on camera two?

POLICE OFFICER

I said let's move.

KEVIN

Maybe you didn't hear—

ELI

Kevin, let's not—

KEVIN

(first to ELI, then to the officer)

Excuse me! Excuse me!....We're doing pre-production producing here, scouting sites for the Scorsese fall project. So if you please, the adults are very busy here and don't have time for this little "protect and serve" moment. Go beat up some innocent black man.

POLICE OFFICER

I'm not gonna tell you again.

ELI

We were just moving.

KEVIN

Do you see these cameras?! Huh? Would your average psychopathic stalkers be using Super 8 Kodochrome Phospherlucent 16 stroke 24s, the only camera capable of handling this location, at this time of day with this distinctly repellent Los Angeles smog-filled light? Huh? *Huh?! I don't think so.* So Officer Krupke, if you don't mind....

POLICE OFFICER

First, that's a 16mm camera, not Super 8. You can tell by the size of the film magazine and the cartridge for the halied crystals. Second, in this light...you'd want a polarizing filter to reduce the glare from the sun. Lastly, as everybody knows, Scorsese's fall project is a remake of "The Wizard of Oz" with Drew Barrymore as Dorothy, Deniro as the Scarecrow and Joe Pesci as the Cowardly Lion. So if you don't mind....

KEVIN

(defeated by his knowledge, pause)

What is wrong with you people? Don't you have *lives?! Don't you have any other interests in your whole goddamned lives!*

POLICE OFFICER

Let's go.

(POLICE OFFICER pushes KEVIN slightly)

KEVIN

Hey! Hands off copper. Maybe your mother likes the rough stuff, not me.

(POLICE OFFICER pushes KEVIN again. They pack up)

ELI

Pre-production producing with our Phospherlucent 16 stroke 24s?

KEVIN

Shut up. Shut your mouth

(they continue off. In SPAGO, ROSLYN comes out of the Ladies Room and starts back.

JOHN

Queen?...Your highness?!

(ROSLYN turns to JOHN, an impeccably dressed male, walking to her furtively)

Is that you? What, what're you doing here? I wouldn't think....

(ROSLYN doesn't register who he is)

John. "John Smith." We met at that Charlie Sheen party—the one where the cops came.

ROSLYN

Which one?

JOHN

Uh, the uh, the one where Robert Downey got arrested afterward.

ROSLYN

Which one?

JOHN

Uh, um....

ROSLYN

Yeah.—I remember you.

JOHN

Hmm yes, I thought you would. Haven't seen you in a while. Still open for business?

(he traces the shoulder of her blouse with a sly finger)

ROSLYN

Get your hand off me!

JOHN

Hey hey, easy your majesty. Ain't we friends no more?

ROSLYN

Yeah, we're friends....I'm just not doing that any more.

JOHN

Oh no! Oh no, it's a real shame. 'Cause a guy can always use his best Mother.

(JOHN stuffs a business card in ROSLYN's jacket pocket)

If you change your mind, you let me know. This Oedipus will always be a Mama's boy.

*(he plants a gentle kiss on her forehead and moves off.
ROSLYN looks around to see if she's been detected then
moves back to the table. MARTIN and HAMILL rise)*

MARTIN

We were beginning to think you got a better offer.

ROSLYN

Let's cut the crap gentlemen. How do we proceed?

(MARTIN pulls a contract from his pocket, hands it to her)

MARTIN

If you sign right here, we'll be on our way.

ROSLYN

You came with the contract all ready.

MARTIN

Be Prepared. A Boy Scout to the end.

ROSLYN

I bet. And that's all?

MARTIN

More or less.

(MARTIN draws out a pen. He holds it aloft as they stare intensely. ROSLYN takes it and begins flipping towards the end of the contract. She signs the contract)

ROSLYN

It better be a whole lot more than less. Screw over an AIDS-related charity and swindle a grieving, heart-broken mother—and this town'll fry your ass.

MARTIN

We wouldn't think of it.

ROSLYN

All the proceeds go into a trust in my name as Eli's executor. Make the check payable to my maiden name, Roslyn Patterdon.

(she hands the contract back to him)

MARTIN

Of course. We're going to want to do some press in the next couple of months, to get the right studio support. TV talk, Regis and Kathy Ripa. We'll have your full cooperation?

ROSLYN

Yeah, sure. Just make sure the check doesn't bounce.

(ROSLYN rises and they stand with her)

HAMILL

Let me say once again....

(nothing comes. Mystified, she rushes off. ELI and KEVIN walk back across the stage carrying their equipment)

ELI

You know what Kev?

KEVIN

What?

ELI

(pause)

I think we're going get our film made.

KEVIN

Yeah....Fuck.

(as they walk off they look at each other, petrified)

ACT II, SCENE 1

INTERVIEW SET / ELI'S ROOM / AMBERLYN'S OFFICE : On the interview set, MARTIN, HAMILL and ROSLYN, sit across from JAMES JOHNSON. The sound of a fake audience cheering fades)

JAMES JOHNSON

Welcome back. Tonight on my "Walking The Beat" segment, a reminder of the heart of Hollywood. Power mogul, Martin Eckhardt and Hamill Forrester, the handsome outdoorsy actor, are coming together to turn a dying wish into reality for one grieving mother. Hamill, how did you get involved with this project?

HAMILL

Marty came to me with Roslyn's story about her son, and my only thought was that we had to do this. And that we had to do it now.

MARTIN

Hamill and I have always talked about finding a way to pay tribute to all the friends we've lost. We wanted to be involved in any way we could.

(KEVIN sits anxiously on the couch as ELI leans back not looking, breathing distressed, looking pallid)

KEVIN

Do you believe the pair of balls on these two?

ELI

This is wrong. This is very wrong.

KEVIN

The dreck he's produced! Would you look at the size of that ribbon? It doesn't mean you care more care asshole!

ELI

I think I'm gonna be sick.

KEVIN

It's all those goddamn smoothies you've been drinking.

ELI

(ELI gags, then runs off)

Oh god!

KEVIN

Lift the toilet seat!

(AMBERLYN is on the phone watching the show)

AMBERLYN

Are you watching "The Entertainment Beat?"....That's my story! My dead gay son and the grieving mother with the script....Who cares after it airs! They're no use to me then!

JAMES JOHNSON

Mrs. Kaufman, how does all this love make you feel?

ROSLYN

Well, I'm a little overwhelmed. I can't say enough about what Mr. Forrester and—

HAMILL

Uh uh uh....

ROSLYN

What Hamill, and Marty have done on Eli's behalf....My son was a good boy. He loved movies. Saturday matinees, double features at the Pantages. Old MGM musicals at Manns.

KEVIN

What's she talking about, we didn't write that. He's from Kansas! Did we write that?!

(the sound of ELI retching)

ROSLYN

I'm proud that all the money is going to a good cause, the Eli Kaufman Memorial AIDS fund, to be distributed to various AIDS-related charities.

JAMES JOHNSON

Amazing. Thank you Mrs. Kaufman. And thank you gentlemen!

HAMILL

Of course.

MARTIN

You're welcome.

(ELI staggers out. KEVIN is shaking his head vigorously)

KEVIN

We've got a problem here. A big fucking problem. I say, come out now, tell everyone about it. Before it gets out of hand.

ELI

She's just doing what we told her to. Let them start shooting first. It'll give us more leverage after they've begun.

(the phone rings. ELI moves towards it feebly, answering)

Yeah.

AMBERLYN

Hello. May I speak to Mrs. Kaufman please?

ELI

She's uh, she's not here right now. Can I take a message?

AMBERLYN

This's Amberlyn Lighty. I saw the Entertainment Beat tonight. I was hoping to do a follow-up on her now that the film's going into production.

ELI

(whispered to KEVIN, covering to the receiver)

It's Amberlyn Lighty. She wants to interview Roz again.

KEVIN

No! No way!

ELI

Mrs. Kaufman's not granting any more interviews right now.

AMBERLYN

I can understand, but surely she'd do this for me. Since it *was* my story that—

ELI

No I'm sorry, as I said, she's really not available for any inter—

(KEVIN rushes to take the phone away from ELI)

KEVIN

Mrs. Kaufman's not doing any more interviews. Is that clear or do I need to write it on a tele-prompter for you?!

(KEVIN slams down the phone and stares hard at ELI who moves tentatively to the couch)

KEVIN

She's eating at the Puck, she's on the set, she's setup the fund, what the hell are we doing?!....What're you gonna to do now?

ELI

Get high and watch "Apocalypse Now."

SCENE 2

AMBERLYN'S APARTMENT: AMBERLYN paces the apartment as NEIL muddles limes for Mojitos.

NEIL

No I don't. I don't believe that.

AMBERLYN

Then you explain it to me. I made her! My story made her!

NEIL

Short-term memory. Sugar?

AMBERLYN

I can't believe she'd turn on her press. Didn't she learn anything from Hillary Clinton?

NEIL

Did anyone?

AMBERLYN

What's the point of being a journalist if people aren't afraid of you?! I only do this for the fear, the power to ruin lives and careers. It's the only reason anyone goes into journalism. My sixth sense is ringing off the charts.

NEIL

I always thought I had a sixth sense once. Turns out I was allergic to peanuts and the prickly went away after bathing.

(he shakes the drinks with two big flamboyant thrusts)

So? Do some of that investigative journalism you're always yapping about. The Old School ways of your crusty but benign mentor. Talking out the side of your mouth, "Well schweetart." Tawny trench coats, herring-bone blazers. *Gabardines*.

AMBERLYN

I can't.

NEIL

And the hats! Oh I love the hats. Tam O'Shanters, broughams, fedoras.

AMBERLYN

No I can't.

NEIL

It's very cloak and Lagerfeld. How excit—

AMBERLYN

I said I can't!....I only have a degree in modeling.

NEIL

(pause)

Oh....You can get a degree in that?

AMBERLYN

It was a Florida college.

NEIL

Ahhh....Oh pooh, I've read Barbara Walters' unauthorized biography. Make a couple of phone calls, flirt with a doormen or two. Obfuscate with innuendo. "I know what you know, but you don't know what I know you know."

(as he pours the drinks into glasses)

Threaten with exposure. Sing the praises of incarceration, oink oink little piglet. Follow the money, follow the money and boom, it's elemental. Woodward and Gershwin.

AMBERLYN

Would you be serious?

NEIL

The WASPy one, *Woodwin*, catches some high-rank Nixon flunky leaving a Georgetown sex club in a leather-studded number. Plunging décolletage, "bugger me" pumps, sash—not my taste. He blackmails the stooge, trading favors for facts. This cowboy "ass-ists him" in a deserted parking lot. Bet he liked it too. We know how to do it better.

AMBERLYN

And that's Deep Throat.

(NEIL carries the drinks to her)

NEIL

It's common knowledge sweetheart. Heartburn? Wayward always seemed a little fagella to me.

AMBERLYN

You think every man is gay, ready to be turned to the dark side.

NEIL

Until I'm proved otherwise.—Trust me. A couple of phone calls, a little *ball* playing, and tada....Deborah Norville.

SCENE 3

ELI, on the couch, talks on the telephone, the receiver jammed between his cheek and shoulder. He holds a tennis ball, he's squeezing tightly. Occasionally, he throws it in the air and catches it.

ELI

I want to do something important, something that'll last...There is a canon that'll be here when we're gone. I believe that, that it will last....What they say now about the universe, how it will end with each little bit of matter stretched so far apart from every other little bit of matter that no communication between the bits can occur, I don't believe that. Perhaps because I don't want to, perhaps because I need it not to be, but I don't believe it....There will always be Shakespeare. There will always be Milton and Mozart and Dylan, as long as there are things to communicate and things to communicate to. I need that to be...I write for that. When that last little bit is talking to that other last little bit, and communication is at its end and the sound of another voice is fading far away and there'll be no more....I want that it is talking about something that I wrote. I compete with that, hope to achieve that—someday....Mom, are you listening to me, are you listening to anything I'm saying?!

(pause)

I'm just saying, I want it to last. What I write I want to write something that will be forever.

SCENE 4

MOVIE SET OF "A DEATH IN THE MOUNTAINS": A DIRECTOR walks onto the "apartment" set.

DIRECTOR

Okay, here we go. Breaks over everyone. That was twenty minutes. Paul, stop eating the cous-cous! Tobak?

(HAMILL moves to his mark; DIRECTOR moves to him)

This is it now, the scene of the film. Man's inhumanity to man. The heartache and grief. Okay? Have you got it? Let me see it?

(HAMILL nods, uncertain then he nods more keenly)

Okay focus everyone. Focus! Sound. Camera rolling....And action!

(HAMILL, holding a snow dome, looks down at it forlornly, and then with emotional emphasis, gives it three shakes)

DIRECTOR

And—cut. Print! Yes! Yes Tobak! Okay, let's redo the lights for the diarrhea scene.

(ROSLYN stands watching as HAMILL moves over to her)

HAMILL

Hi.

ROSLYN

Hello.

HAMILL

How do you think it's going?

ROSLYN

Oh really wonderful. Especially the scene when you say goodbye to the girlfriend.

HAMILL

That's my favorite scene! When she gives him the long johns. She doesn't understand his quest, but she supports it. God, I'm so glad you're happy....Do you want something?

ROSLYN

No. I'm alright.

HAMILL

Are you sure? If there's something else....

ROSLYN

No Hamill, thank you.

HAMILL

Call me Ham....My Mother called me Ham, before she passed.

(ROSLYN smiles warmly and nods. HAMILL picks up a square of cheese and eats heartily)

HAMILL

Mmmph, I love cheese. Cheddar, brie. Feta! I just love—

(realizing his solecism)

Playing Tobak is such a thrill. It's beautifully written.

ROSLYN

I'm sorry? Oh! Yes, of course. Tobak.

(HAMILL's PERSONAL ASSISTANT comes up)

Thank you. Eli will, I mean would, would be so pleased to hear you say so.

PERSONAL ASSISTANT

Mr. Forrester, they need you on set.

HAMILL

(ignoring the assistant)

The character has such depth, such—depth. Did Eli ever live in the outdoors for a time?

ROSLYN

Yes he did.

PERSONAL ASSISTANT

Mr. Forrester?

(HAMILL motions to her to continue)

ROSLYN

He uh, he worked as an assistant Ranger in a National Park on his summer vacations.

HAMILL

I knew it! I could tell!

PERSONAL ASSISTANT

Tobak?

HAMILL

Yes.

PERSONAL ASSISTANT

We need you on the set.

HAMILL

Oh, okay. Yes of course. Will you please stay? Please?

(ROSLYN nods and smiles obliquely. HAMILL grins excited in return and leaves with the ASSISTANT)

HAMILL

(as they walk away)

Don't interrupt me when I'm talking to someone. I might say something meaningful. It's so rare, I don't want to miss it. And get me my hair in a can.

SCENE 5

In voice-over, the following phone messages are left on ROSLYN's answering machine.

ELI

Hi Roz, it's Eli.

KEVIN

Tell her about the list.

ELI

Will you give me a chance? Roz can you put us on the list so we can walk on the set.

KEVIN

An All-Access pass.

ELI

They're not giving us total access to anything.

KEVIN

Why not?

ELI

They're not gonna—

(beep)

Eli again, sorry. We'd also like to see any rewrites, if there are any. I don't know, tell them it's for your scrap book.

KEVIN

And we want to see the dailies.

ELI

What're you talking about?

KEVIN

I want to see the dailies.

ELI

Are you high? They're not gonna give her copies of the dailies.

(beep)

Guess who? Can you just get us Hamill's autograph? We really are big fans from way way back.

KEVIN

And his spare hairpiece!

SCENE 6

MOVIE STUDIO BACKLOT ENTRANCE : ELI and KEVIN march up to a velvet rope guarded by a large bald man with a goatee, holding a clipboard and a walkie-talkie. As they try to walk past he stops them.

SECURITY GUARD

Sorry guys, it's a closed set.

KEVIN

We're on the list.

SECURITY GUARD

I'm sorry, but there's no list.

ELI

Eli Birnbaum and Kevin Noakes. We're supposed to be on the list.

SECURITY GUARD

I get that a lot.

ELI

Could you kindly check with someone else?

SECURITY GUARD

There's no one to check with.

KEVIN

Then check your clipboard, I'm sure we're on that paperwork somewhere.

(KEVIN starts to go by and SECURITY GUARD stops him with one gentle giant paw to the chest)

SECURITY GUARD

This paperwork—is just cut up pieces of my daughter’s homework.

KEVIN

Look *Thor*. Roslyn Kaufman, the *mother* of the screenwriter, she’s a good friend of ours. And if you would just *ask* her, I’m sure she would tell you—

(ROSLYN, HAMILL, MARTIN walk across the studio lot)

ELI

Wait there she is. Mrs. Kaufman!

KEVIN

Roz! Hi Roz, over here!

ELI

Mrs. Kaufman, it’s us!

(ROSLYN turns briefly to them, pretends not to recognize them and the three continue on with barely a further look. Shocked expressions develop on ELI and KEVIN’s faces)

SECURITY GUARD

Guys, I really don’t have time—

KEVIN

Roz!

ELI

Kev let’s not push it.

SECURITY GUARD

Back away from the entrance.

KEVIN

We invented her!

ELI

Easy Kevin

SECURITY GUARD

That's it. Officer!

KEVIN

We created her Eli! We created her! She's just a figment of our imagination!

SECURITY GUARD

Officer!

(the same POLICE OFFICER as before comes up to them)

POLICE OFFICER

If it isn't D.A. Pennebaker and Ken Burns. All right boys, you know the routine.

KEVIN

No wait, listen. We know her! We know her, she knows us!

POLICE OFFICER

Doesn't everybody these days.

ELI

She really does know us.

POLICE OFFICER

I feel for her. Now let's move along ladies.

KEVIN

You know what, I really don't like you.

POLICE OFFICER

I'll have to deal with that in therapy. *Move.*

(they begin to move on)

KEVIN

*Goddamn it! We'll be back for you Thor! Don't get comfortable with the clipboard pal.
(the POLICE OFFICER pushes KEVIN)*

What did I tell you about that?

POLICE OFFICER

Right. Sorry.

(he pushes him again)

KEVIN

Oh that's great. That, that's—Attica! Attica! Attica!

HAMILL

Do you know them? They can come in and watch if you want.

ROSLYN

No, I don't know them. Ever since the interview, people keep coming up to me saying they were friends of my son. It's all very overwhelming.

HAMILL

(beaming proudly)

The first blush of fame. You'll learn soon enough, discover all the tricks.

MARTIN

How to back the paparazzi up with your car so they trip on a curb.

HAMILL

Whose camera you can break. Who you can take a swing at.

MARTIN

Who'll sue.

HAMILL

Roz dear, I need to speak to Marty for a second. But when I'm done, I'm gonna have a big surprise for you. Why don't you wait in my trailer?

ROSLYN

All right.

(HAMILL kisses her cheek. They watch her go)

MARTIN

She's a wonderful woman. An inspiration.

HAMILL

I want her in the mountains.

MARTIN

Hamill, we're already running three million over budget. I'm getting pressure from the studio. The backers are sweating bricks. They may not carry the overage.

HAMILL

I need her Marty. I'm connecting through her. When she's not there I can't find my *raison d'être*! This is my best work. This is my "Get Shorty."

MARTIN

How about this? As an act of good faith to the studio, we'll take care of all the arrangements. Get her hotel booked, first class flights, all of it.—You just foot the bill.

(HAMILL smiles mockingly and pats MARTIN on the face. He starts to walk away, turns and stops)

HAMILL

Oh—and she wants a fireplace in her road trailer.

(he walks off)

SCENE 7

ELI'S ROOM : ELI is seated on the couch. KEVIN paces the room, feverishly. ROSLYN rushes through the door.

ROSLYN

Sorry I'm late. Hamill needed a sandwich and all they had was the Smooth and he wanted the Crunchy, so it took longer.

KEVIN

Are you sure you don't want to?

(ELI shakes his head)

Okay....WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT!?

ROSLYN

What?!

KEVIN

That! Yesterday! What the fuck was that!

ROSLYN

I'm doing what you said!

KEVIN

Oh come on! We never talked about that! We never talked about ignoring us!

ROSLYN

What'd you expect?! Hamill's hanging on me like a jealous dog. Martin's wondering why a 60 year old woman's got two boys calling to her like sailors on shore leave.

KEVIN

We could've been friends! We could've been cousins!

ROSLYN

I've come from Kansas to get my son's film made! Distraught and forlorn. Then these meddling kids show up?! Get your fucking heads on straight!

KEVIN

Oh please!

ROSLYN

If you two geniuses don't screw it up, this thing's gonna work and we'll get the back-end money Martin's promised me for my fund.

ELI

Eli's....Eli's fund.

ROSLYN

(pause, evenly)

If you'll just be patient and stick to the plan—

KEVIN

The plan! We created the plan! We created you!

ROSLYN

And I'm playing your part better than you ever dreamed! You just wrote words, described actions. I give it life! I give it dimension!

KEVIN

Don't give me that actor bullshit! You know what an actor is without writers? *A mime!* You know what directors are without writers—*peeping toms!* Ya get the picture Sister?

ROSLYN

And you remember screenwriters without great actors are *unpaid, unproduced* secretaries.

(KEVIN and ROSLYN stare at each other)

ELI

What we're trying to say is that we had a plan. We all agreed to follow the plan. And now, you seem to be changing it.

ROSLYN

I'm improvising to make it work! That's why you wanted me!

(she moves to get her purse)

If you can't handle that, that's too fucking bad. I haven't got time to play nursemaid to your egos, I have to pack.

KEVIN

Pack? What do you mean pack?

ELI

Where're you going?

ROSLYN

(pause)

I'm going to the Pyrenees. Hamill says he needs me there.

KEVIN

Oh great. Great!

ROSLYN

He's doing his best work! He thinks he's channeling Eli and I'm his muse or something!

ELI

He's channeling someone who's never existed. Is that possible?

KEVIN

It's ridiculous!

ROSLYN

He doesn't know that! I keep making up stories, building in facts about his life. His 5th grade birthday party. The time bullies chased him home!

ELI

And he's buying it?

(KEVIN charges menacingly close to ROSLYN)

KEVIN

Tell me something? Where's the script fee? It's been six months, where's the check?

ROSLYN

Marty says it's coming. He said these things take time.

ELI

Have you asked him?

ROSLYN

I asked once. I didn't want to seem too pushy.

KEVIN

Of course you don't. *Marty* says!

ROSLYN

If I'm desperate about the money, he might check into my story. We can't survive that.

KEVIN

How very convenient.

(she pushes KEVIN out of her way, gets her jacket to leave)

ROSLYN

You wanna get someone else, go right ahead. But you can't so deal with it! And get me a copy of the script. Hamill's asking questions and I don't have a clue what he's talking about. I'll let you know about the picture when I get back.

(ROSLYN slams the door as she goes. Barely outside, she stops, exhales heavily as we hear a shutter releasing. As she moves, someone snaps surveillance photographs)

KEVIN

Do you believe that?!

ELI

She's right. If we just lay low—

KEVIN

That's bullshit, she's fucking us! We could be her friends, we could be her nephews!

ELI

But that wasn't in the plan—

KEVIN

DON'T TELL ME ABOUT THE FUCKING PLAN! THIS WASN'T IN THE
FUCKING PLAN!....She's getting all the credit! She's getting all the attention!

ELI

(pause)

I never thought it was about credit and attention. Wasn't it about getting our work done?
Making movies we'd want to see. Welles and Cassavettes. John Huston. Kubrick.

KEVIN

How're we gonna get to do the next thing? Invent some obese daughter who died from
diabetes. An aged black women suffering from Lupus.

(ELI shrugs, answerless)

She's hiding something. You're not some hash-slinging, deep-in-the-weeds wenchstress
at her age without there being something you're running from.

ELI

Be careful Kevin, don't open doors we can't close.

KEVIN

Don't you worry your pretty little head! Leave the character research to me. Just like
always, you do the writing, I'll produce the magic.

SCENE 8

LARRY PHELPS PRIVATE INVESTIGATION OFFICE :
KEVIN walks into the office as LARRY sits behind his desk.

LARRY

Mr. Noakes.

KEVIN

Good morning Mr. Phelps. Sorry. You must get that a lot.—Here, I brought these frosted doughnuts. Three kinds. Dark and milk chocolate and those vanilla cum looking ones. I don't eat those. Can't get past the whole effluvium factor.

LARRY

What's this for?

KEVIN

I'd just thought, you know, *investigators*—doughnuts.

LARRY

Doughnuts are a cops' cliché. And as a former desk sergeant, let me tell you, cops hate smart-ass civilians who think all they do is sit around all day eating doughnuts and drinking coffee. They get so tired of it, every sitcom, every comedy sketch, makes 'em wanna kick the ever-living shit out of every smart-ass civilian that thinks that way.

KEVIN

(pause)

Right. I'll remember that.

LARRY

As we agreed, I followed the subject, a Mrs. Roslyn Kaufman AKA Roslyn Patterdon AKA Queen Iocasta after picking her up outside 8060 Wametka on June 16th.

KEVIN

Queen Iocasta? What is—

LARRY

Don't interrupt me. I like go in my own order.

(KEVIN nods, acquiescent)

I followed the subject to her home on La Calle Street then to LAX where she boarded a flight to Marseilles, France her final destination being Ar-les. *(pronounced phonetically)*

KEVIN

Arles. It's pronounced—fine. Better. Probably should be Arles. What do the French know anyway. Are you gonna open these? You mind?

(LARRY ignores him and KEVIN opens the doughnuts)

LARRY

From her mail, I was able to obtain the subject's real name and began my investigation. Ms. Patterdon was once married for approximately two years. She graduated high school and finished two years at USC, pre-majoring in acting. She became an aspiring actress, performing over the years in several regional and off-off Broadway productions including "Cats," but that was some time ago. Currently she's not in good standing with SAG or Actors Equity. Years later however, she earned some good notices in a performance of "Oedipus Rex Revue," a blue interpretation of the Greek tragedy by Sophocles. Subsequent to this performance, she spent several years in the employ of Classical Callings, a dating service that has since been delisted.

KEVIN

(with a full mouth)

Wait, what?

(swallowing)

That last thing? A dating service that has been....

LARRY

Delisted. Closed by regulators for soliciting prostitution.

KEVIN

It was a cat house? She was a prostitute?

LARRY

Apparently, Ms. Patterdon developed a persona in which for some high priced clientele she would play Queen Iocasta, who I've researched was the mother of Oedipus, yet who later slept—

KEVIN

Yes—I know....Oh that, that's very good. That's, hmm mmm, yes.

(he starts laughing)

Mom! Our mom!

LARRY

She was employed at the Sing A Song diner in Hollywood until February when she quit.

KEVIN

And when did you say she stopped this Oedipus thing?

LARRY

I don't know that she has. I only know the service was delisted five years ago.

KEVIN

(pause)

You know—I think I'm gonna try me one of them vanillees.

SCENE 9

*ROSLYN'S TRAILER : HAMILL knocks and enters.
ROSLYN moves towards the door as he enters.*

ROSLYN

There you are. I was worried.

HAMILL

I'm sorry. I was running lines with Lin Chu, the shirpa.

ROSLYN

I told you I would do that with you.

HAMILL

I know. I didn't want to trouble you so soon after your nap.

ROSLYN

All right. Well, I've put some water to boil. I'll make you hot chocolate.

HAMILL

Oooh, that sounds good. It's so cold.

ROSLYN

Come, sit down by the fireplace.

(HAMILL moves to the couch and ROSLYN gets shawl)

ROSLYN

It's too cold outside, they should wait for a better day. You'll get sick and delay the whole film. And I don't like you in that beard, it's too confining. I can't see your face.

(she puts the shawl around him)

There now, how's that? Better?

(HAMILL nods child-like. ROSLYN smiles, kisses his forehead, and goes to fix the hot chocolate)

HAMILL

I always feel better when you're around....You make me feel special. Worthy.

ROSLYN

You are Hamill, never forget that. I have all this to thank you for.

HAMILL

And Eli.

ROSLYN

(pause)

Yes.

HAMILL

He was very lucky to have you as his Mother....What was he like as a teenager?

(ROSLYN vacantly pours the hot water)

ROSLYN

Oh, same as most kids I guess. Wild. Always getting into one jam after another. Always getting himself out in the end.

HAMILL

Do you have a picture?

ROSLYN

(she stops abruptly)

Uh, no—I didn't bring my folio with me. Usually I take it everywhere I go. But I thought it might get ruined out here in the wilderness.

HAMILL

Always an ounce of prevention. Just like my mother.

(ROSLYN stirs the hot chocolate)

ROSLYN

I never thought of myself much as a mother. I wasn't built that way. Despite what everyone thinks, not every woman has maternal instincts. Some know we're not capable of the commitment, the selflessness motherhood demands.

HAMILL

It's fortunate you were wrong.

ROSLYN

(pause, somber)

I had dreams of being an actress. Innocent, beautiful dreams...I played Juliet in college. You didn't know that, did you?

(she finishes with the hot chocolate)

"Deny thy father and refuse thy name. Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, and I'll no longer a Capulet be."

(she laughs caustically)

Some fine Capulet I'd've made...Life never turns out exactly as planned. Sometimes, not even close..."That which we call a rose—past hope, past care, past help."

*(ROSLYN considers this placidly, then walks over to
HAMILL carrying the hot chocolate)*

Here now. I want you to sip this slowly. It's very hot.

*(HAMILL looks up angelically. ROSLYN smiles down at
him, playing lightly with his hair)*

SCENE 10

ELI's Room: KEVIN and ELI sit playing Nintendo.

ELI

She's been back a month and we haven't heard from her.

KEVIN

She's probably just busy. We'll call her in a week, and get together a week after that.

(ELI stops brusquely)

What?

ELI

You were so gung-ho last time about reigning her in.

KEVIN

I thought about it and you're right. The longer it goes, the more it plays into our hands.

ELI

I'm just getting nervous. We've got no recourse if something happens. Did you find anything out about her?

KEVIN

Nothing useful. Bad actress, no talent, no career. It's a common tale, she'll have a common end.

ELI

I'm going to ask around. See if anybody knows—

KEVIN

No don't!....I'd've turned something up if it was there.

(pause, ingratiating smile)

Calm my brother. Juice up one of those smoothies. I've got a feeling everything's gonna come our way.—You know this shit's really inspiring.

ELI

Speak of which, I'm getting pretty far along on the new script.

KEVIN

What's it about?

ELI

I told you what it's about. I've told you ten times. The successful writer going mad from writer's block goes to Florida to convince his mother to let him write about the family tragedy.

KEVIN

Right right. The "murder-suicide, what price fame, how much is too much" thing. Did I tell you the title I came up with?—"Block Letters"....It's perfect. Two-word title, producers love that. "Forrest Gump, Stir Crazy." Fits easily into graphics. The block letters, all boxed.

(ELI looks at him, annoyed)

You know, I've been busy too, you know. Doing research.

ELI

What research?

KEVIN

The thing....*that* thing, the redheads, the Jessica thing.

SCENE 11

ELI's ROOM / AMBERLYN'S APARTMENT: ELI is typing on his computer. AMBERLYN and NEIL with Cosmopolitans before them on the table.

AMBERLYN

I've got the number.

NEIL

Call it, what are you waiting for?.

AMBERLYN

I don't know if I can. My news director gave us the new assignments today. Chet got "Chernobyl, After the Aftermath," Ellen got "The Babies of Rwanda." James got "Crack whores who take Crystal meth."

NEIL

Ohhhh, you wanted that one. What'd you get?

AMBERLYN

"Crayola: The New Colors. Olive and Coppertone."

NEIL

Dial the number.

(she picks up the phone and dials)

They made an *olive* Crayola? Something for the purple Teletubbie to play with?

ELI

(answering his phone)

Yeah.

AMBERLYN

This is Amberlyn Lighty. Before you hang up you should know I know what's going on here. And you can talk to me or you can talk to Detective Neil of the LAPD. The choice is yours.

NEIL

(whispered)

A detective, oooohh!

ELI

I don't know what you're—

AMBERLYN

Don't cut me that crap! When the authorities find out what went down, there's not gonna be much choice for you then.

NEIL

Don't cut me that crap?

(she waves at him to shut up)

ELI

Who's spoken to you?

AMBERLYN

You know damn well who's spoken to me. And they're making you the fall guy.

ELI

That bitch.

AMBERLYN

That's right. Now are you gonna talk with me or am I gonna talk with the detective?

ELI

I need to think. I can't talk right now. I'm hanging up.

AMBERLYN

No wait—

ELI

I'm hanging up. Don't call me. Don't call me again.

AMBERLYN

What's your name?! Where can I meet you?!

(ELI hangs up the phone. AMBERLYN, hangs up, smiles)

NEIL

My little Lou Grant.

(they clink glasses. ELI picks up his cell and speed dials)

ELI

Pick up the fucking phone.

KEVIN

(voice-over)

I'm home. You know I'm home. I'm just not answering your call. I'm sitting here on my couch with one hand on my remote, and one hand on my—

(beep)

Uh, leave a message.

ELI

Kevin call me back. Now it's an emergency.

SCENE 12

*HAMILL'S CLASS / ROSLYN'S APARTMENT /
AMBERLYN'S OFFICE / SPAGO: ROSLYN's answering
machine message is playing.*

ROSLYN

I'm not home right now. Please leave a message after the beep.

(beep)

HAMILL

Hi Roz, it's Ham. I thought since it's your first Mother's Day without Eli, you wouldn't want to be alone. So I figured we'd go out to dinner some place quiet. If you get in in the next couple of hours—

(ROSLYN reaches for the phone impulsively)

ROSLYN

Ham, hi. I'm here. That'd be great. I'd love to.

HAMILL

Great. I'll pick you up.

ROSLYN

No that's okay. Tell me where and I'll meet you there.

(AMBERLYN on the phone in her office)

AMBERLYN

Office of Copyrights? Hi, I'm trying to find the author of a screenplay that's been copyrighted. I only have the title, "A Death in the Mountains."...You don't.—Is there a way of checking if there's anything close to that?

(*ROSLYN and HAMILL at a table. He gesticulates excessively as he recounts. ROSLYN listens meekly at first, but her pleasure expands as he goes on*)

HAMILL

And I rip the badge off my chest and throw it on the ground. The next thing I know, I'm bleeding all over the black clothes! And on seeing this—I pass out!

AMBERLYN

“Dead Mounting?” No it's not a taxidermy trade film....“*Live Mounting?*” it's not that kind of film either....Wait, what was that last one? “A Life in the Mountains?” Who's that copyrighted to?....Birnbaum?—Do you have a contact number? I work for DreamWorks, and we're very interested in the project....A New York listing?

HAMILL

I'm supposed to be this Wild West crime fighter—and I pass out from a little blood! Me! A superhero! I'm out cold as soon as I see my own blood.

AMBERLYN

Yes, may I speak to Eli Birnbaum please....What? I can't—Eli no home? Eli no home, great. What?....Mrs. Eli?....Where, yes, *donde esta* Mrs. Eli?

HAMILL

There were ambulances and cardiac care units. They brought out the defibrillators! My publicist was dying.

AMBERLYN

Yes hi, is this Mrs. Birnbaum? Eli Birnbaum, the script writer's wife....His mother? Oh....Is your son lactose intolerant?

HAMILL

Oh hey, Wolfgang! Come. Meet my new mother.

SCENE 13

ELI sits on the couch throwing a tennis ball up while listening on the phone. He catches it one last time with finality, holds the ball, squeezing it tightly.

ELI

(interrupting, troubled)

Mom—I think I'm really getting somewhere. This piece I'm working on, this new script, it says something, it has something. I can't explain it or put it into words. It's like suddenly I saw differently, my eyes just had different colors to them and it feed connections and vibrations that hadn't ever been there before. And it made sense like it never made sense before. It had *never* made *any* sense before, and maybe it wasn't sense, it just felt like sense because I didn't really know what sense was or is or has ever been....But I was thankful. I am so very thankful for it.

(a long pause)

But this project we're working on...I don't know if it's right what we're doing.

(he throws the ball up and misses catching it. It falls, accidentally hitting the speakerphone button on the phone)

MOVIE PHONE VOICE

(off stage)

Press two if you'd like this movie in area closest to you.

(pause)

Press three if you'd like to see a different movie—

(ELI kicks to the speakerphone button off and stares at it)

ELI

(pause, grave)

Mom—I know it's not right.

SCENE 14

*ROSLYN'S APARTMENT: The apartment is dark.
ROSLYN moves in gaily.*

ELI

(voice-over, stern)

Roz it's Eli. We haven't heard from you in weeks. Where are you? Call us please and let us know where everything—

(she stops the machine and walks away. KEVIN sits in a chair, undetected. He flicks on a light)

KEVIN

Miss me.

ROSLYN

*Oh!....*You scared me.

KEVIN

Over shot my mark. I was only hoping for shock and awe 'cause we know how well that works. But nothing seems to go as planned these days.

ROSLYN

Well you've done both, now leave.

KEVIN

Is that any way to talk to your favorite nephew?

ROSLYN

What the hell are you talking about? You know what, I don't give a shit. I'm sick of the whole damn thing. I want out.

KEVIN

Out? No. No out. Not now your highness.

(KEVIN throws a book by her feet)

“Oedipus The King” by Sophocles. Does that make me Creon? No Creon was her brother. That’d make me Haemon, Creon’s son.

(KEVIN gets up from the chair and paces)

Damn fine writer that Sophocles. No bitchin’ car chases or gun fights, but all the sex and murder you could ever want. Tarantino and Oliver Stone could learn a thing or to.

ROSLYN

I don’t need a review.

KEVIN

No, apparently not. Art imitates life imitating art imitating blah blah blah.

ROSLYN

Get to your fucking point Kevin.

KEVIN

Ah, spoken like a true Queen Mother. I want what is mine m’lady. What I’ve earned, what I deserve.

ROSLYN

You want the money? It’s in a trust under my name and you’ll never see a fucking penny of it if you mess with me.

KEVIN

Do you really think this’s about money? Hmph. Eli’s right, I have to watch that. Ach, fuck the money. No pun intended. Keep it. Consider it an acting fee. Probably your first paying gig since, well....But the attention, the credit! *They* are what I’ll have!

ROSLYN

What’d you think you’re gonna do, announce it to the world? That this lonely old woman who they cared for and trusted and invested their faith in, tricked them, took ‘em for saps. Who in Hollywood’s ever gonna admit to that? They don’t even admit flops or profits. And even if they did, you think you’ll ever work in this town again. I have no aspirations Boyo, but you—you need me more now than I’ll ever need you again.

KEVIN

(pause; nodding slowly)

Probably so....So maybe I'll do it out of spite. What the hell, said the scorpion, it's in my nature. Maybe I'll do it for the recognition of coming up with this mad-capped scheme. It *was* a brilliant idea, if I don't say so myself. Maybe they'll name a gift after me, like the Ponzi scheme or American Idol.—I'll write a tell-all book, do the signing circuit and the talk shows, and ease my way into marginal notoriety, the goal of all the truly less talented. They'll talk about my scam for decades to come. *An E True Hollywood Story!*

(KEVIN smiles smugly. ROSLYN shifts into character, eases towards KEVIN seductively. She circles him slowly as she speaks)

ROSLYN

But you don't want to do that. No of course you don't, or you'd've done it already.

KEVIN

No?—And why's that?

ROSLYN

(pause)

I'm still the best remedy. Cure to all your problems, salve to all your wounds. Financial, artistic—psychological.

KEVIN

You don't say.

ROSLYN

It's a common tale. More common in Hollywood perhaps, but true the world over. Where would we be without our Mothers, our first providers and protectors. Our first loves.

(she sweeps a delicate finger across his shoulder)

There'd be no comedy. No Woody Allen or ET. *Certainly* no Godfather or Mean Streets. It's fundamental in every artist. The conflict burning, threatening. Desire, the repulsion from it. You all journey out into the world, scratching and clawing to find your place, and all that time, all you're really doing is longing, yearning to return home. To where it's safe, and it's warm, and everything was good and easy and cared for.

*(in front of him, dangerous inches apart, she temptingly
slow leans in to kiss him)*

Where all your needs were attended to, all your wishes were fulfilled. Where everything was yours and yours alone....

*(KEVIN grabs her and throws her, forcibly, to the ground.
KEVIN stares at her, repulsed yet....)*

KEVIN

The opening's in a month. I'm coming with you. You're not gonna throw away all your fancy new friends to continue living in a shithole like this.—No matter how busy you were playing dear old Mum—what you got now sure beats a good dick in the mouth.

ROSLYN

Are you sure?

(KEVIN shakes his head, marveling at her)

What about Eli?

KEVIN

(pause)

Don't you worry about that?

*(he moves towards the door. As he opens it, ROSLYN
speaks without looking at him)*

I was very busy, you know....Somehow I don't think you doubt it.

(KEVIN pauses briefly, then leaves)

SCENE 15

ELI'S ROOM : ELI is holding his cell phone.

ELI

Kevin I haven't heard from you in a week! Where the fuck are you?! The premiere's Monday and I can't get Roz. Wherever you are, call me. We have to—

(the beep goes off. ELI hangs up the phone, then sits down to type. There is a knock at the door. He goes to open it)

AMBERLYN

Eli Birnbaum?

ELI

I uh—he's not here. But I'll tell him you stopped—

AMBERLYN

No, wait, don't.

(ELI tries to shut the door. AMBERLYN puts her foot in the way. They struggle)

ELI

I'm sure he'll call you back.

AMBERLYN

Eli, I recognize your voice from the phone.

ELI

I don't know what you're talking about.

(ELI gets the door shut and leans back against it, listening. She bangs on it)

AMBERLYN

Eli, you have to talk to me.

ELI

I'm not Eli. I'm Kevin.

AMBERLYN

Eli! Come on! You can't do this. Eli! ELI!

(she stops banging)

Eli the script's copyrighted in your name. Not Mrs. Kaufman's or the name of her son....Eli I have you and Roslyn and everyone else involved. The Screenwriting Guild has never heard of Eli Kaufman, he was never a member. Martin Eckhardt's office has never heard of you....I spoke to your mother in Florida. She wants you to call more often.

(after a pause, he opens the door slightly and they stare)

ELI

She just came right out with that, did she?

AMBERLYN

It was the first thing she said after I mentioned you.

ELI

Of course she did. I'm surprised she didn't mention the bed wetting.

AMBERLYN

Until you were thirteen, she did....How long has it been since you talked to her?

ELI

Four years.—Maybe more.

AMBERLYN

(pause)

Why don't you invite me in? We can talk, and get to know one another a bit.

(ELI thinks a moment, then pushes open the door)

SCENE 16

ELI'S ROOM / MOVIE PREMIERE : ELI holds the phone to his ear and has a smoothie on the table.

ELI

Kevin where the fuck are you?! The premiere's tonight. I've been trying to reach you for a fucking week! I can't get Roz! I can't get you! WHAT THE FUCK'S GOING ON HERE!

(the answering machine beeps)

FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!

(ELI throws down the phone. He grabs the smoothie, turn on the "The Entertainment Beat." JAMES JOHNSON stands on a red carpet)

JAMES JOHNSON

And we are here *live!* Opening night for the premiere of "A Death in the Mountains." It's a star-studded affair for this Martin Eckhardt production starring the handsome, outdoorsy Hamill Forrester. The buzz says it's his finest role, a definite Oscar contender.

(his tone drops)

But this is also a story we've been following for months at the Beat. This premiere is billed as "A Tribute to Eli," the film's screenwriter who tragically died of AIDS and whose mother, Roslyn Kaufman, has shown tremendous courage and dedication in getting this film made. Hamill Forrester is here. Hamill, your thoughts?

(HAMILL moves to JAMES JOHNSON)

HAMILL

I think this film's a real statement on the condition of America's social well-being. Man's struggle against nature and the immorality of the wilderness.

JAMES JOHNSON

Well said thank you. Enjoy the film.

(HAMILL moves on)

Many stars are here tonight. Chevy Chase is here. “*Jack Frost’s*” Michael Keaton is here, always a fan favorite. If I can see, yes it’s Mrs. Kaufman making her way down the—Mrs. Kaufman?! Mrs. Kaufman, James Johnson, The Entertainment Beat. Can we get a moment?

(JAMES JOHNSON and ROSLYN shaking hands)

Nice to see you. The big day! How does it feel to be here?

(ELI watching impassively, takes a sip of the smoothie)

ROSLYN

As you know James, this was all made possible through the vast talent of my son Eli, and the generous compassion of Martin Eckhardt and Hamill Forrester, who willed it into being. I’m eternally grateful to them for this moment.

JAMES JOHNSON

Who’s escorting you tonight?

(KEVIN comes onstage, dressed in an all black suit, shirt and tie. The only color visible on him is an excessively large red AIDS ribbon. His head is completely shaven. ELI exhibits calm surprise upon seeing KEVIN)

ROSLYN

This is Eli’s cousin Kevin, who was there throughout when Eli was writing the script.

KEVIN

Gosh, it’s wonderful that we’re all here today at this great and momentous occasion.

JAMES JOHNSON

Yes of course.

(JAMES starts away as KEVIN takes hold of his hand holding the microphone. A subtle tug-of-war begins)

KEVIN

I remember lying in my hospital bed. I’m a recent survivor of lymphatic cancer.

JAMES JOHNSON

Are you?

KEVIN

I am Jimbo. And I remember lying in my hospital bed, searching for hope after several severe chemo radiation treatments. And there was Eli, in the hospital bed next to me. We were like two anti-immune warriors valiantly fighting the onslaught of our diseases.

JAMES JOHNSON

Incredible.

KEVIN

I suggested the title “A Death in the Mountains,” as a testament to our courage. If you can imagine dueling IV bottles and electro-cardiograph machines. Reading his screenplay is what saved me. But that was Eli. He was a good man. *A good man!* I can’t thank everyone enough for their love and support.

(finally, KEVIN releases the microphone)

JAMES JOHNSON

Please take our best wishes with you into the film.

(with nods, they move on. ELI downs the rest of the smoothie. He picks up his phone, and dials a number)

ELI

Hello Mom....Mom, it’s Eli....yes, it’s really me....Oh I don’t know, this and that. I’ve been busy....

SCENE 17

MOVIE : On videotape, HAMILL walks to a counter and picks up a snow dome. In the audience, KEVIN sits watching the film. He is enraptured by it as all who finally see their work produced are. You can feel the joy shown on his face.

HAMILL

(voice over)

I'm home now....It seems a strange place to me, after all this time. I'll never forget those days. What I lost, what I gained, and the person I was that I left behind....They are with me. They are with me now. And they have been with me always.

(close-up of the snow dome, recently shaken. The snow falls down. The screen goes dark. Then the words....“For Eli.” KEVIN storms to his feet in appreciation. A roaring crowd rises slowly to a crescendo)

SCENE 18

ELI'S ROOM : ROSLYN and KEVIN enter. KEVIN is dressed in the same black suit sans tie and ribbon. ELI sits on the couch, an empty smoothie lies before him on the table. There is a long silence before anyone speaks.

KEVIN

You aren't right for this scene Eli. It's kill or be killed, dog eat dog and that's not you. You'd hate this. The whiz, the whoosh, the wham.

(ELI doesn't move, pause)

I'm a man of action and I took action! And it paid off. Huh? *Yeah?* Good for me! Maybe that's the lesson here. Maybe if you took the bull by the horns once in a while! The meek don't inherit the earth, only the strong survive....Well say something goddamn it!

ELI

You didn't talk in clichés before you sold me out. Malapropisms yes, but not clichés.

KEVIN

(pause)

Listen Eel, we were talking, Roz and me. We have some caché now, some press value. This script, the new one you've been working on, we can get it into the right hands now.

ELI

Amberlyn Lighty knows I wrote the script.

KEVIN

She doesn't know shit. A *female* tele-journalist, nobody takes her seriously. She hasn't even got her own show yet, and they're giving those away with every new set of Michelins.

ELI

(pause, to ROSLYN)

How do you feel about all this?

KEVIN

She thinks what I think! We'll do what we can for you but that's all. No use crying.

ROSLYN

Man's right, Sunshine. You're an amateur playing with pros. Sorry—but not that much.

ELI

I need more smoothie.

KEVIN

Yeah, you go ahead, get yourself one. Get us all one while you're at it. We'll celebrate our good fortune.

(ELI grabs his glass and gets up to leave)

Because Eels....this's good for all of us, you'll see. A boon for everyone concerned.

(ELI moves into the kitchen)

KEVIN

It'll be all right for him.

ROSLYN

Yeah. Sure it will.

KEVIN

We'll talk to Marty and Ham. *He's* the writer. He wrote almost the whole script. I was to be the force behind getting it produced, the pitchman....We'll find a place for him. He can be another cousin, the one with the substance abuse problem or the one raped by priests as a boy. Oh, that's good. They'll eat that up.

ROSLYN

I thought he was Jewish.

KEVIN

He is! That's makes it even more tragic! Errant soul finds his true faith only to be treated so cruel and heartlessly.

(ELI enters the living room)

KEVIN

Eels, you got to hear this. It's perfect, really up your alley. First, let's toast. Roz, come.

ROSLYN

I'm not thirsty.

KEVIN

C'mon, have one. They're really quite refreshing.

(KEVIN reaches out to get one for her)

ELI

I'm drinking from that one.

KEVIN

Oh, sorry. Heh, don't wanna catch Eel's koodies.

(he replaces that one, grabs another and hands it to her.

She takes it reluctantly. They raise to toast)

To the triad, together again. Look out Hollywood!

(all drink)

Mmmnn! Orange! Damn good!

(ELI nods. ROSLYN moves back to the window, sipping)

Moved on to orange, huh? Excellent choice. Very tangy.

ELI

That's the potassium chloride.

KEVIN

Those vitamin supplements. You have to understand Roz, Eli here's an unique sort of a health freak. He never exercises, god forbid. But into these drinks, he pumps so many vitamins, I don't think I've ever seen him sick. Right? You're never sick.

ELI

That's Centrum.

KEVIN

Whatever. They all taste like shit.

ELI

(pause, moving away)

Remember 10th grade chemistry Kevin. We were kids then. Before we wrote, before we ever thought of coming out here.

(ROSLYN sways a bit, heads towards the door)

KEVIN

No I don't—I, I don't....

(KEVIN sways as ROSLYN grasping desperately for the door knob, falls in a pile)

ELI

Potassium chloride is used in lethal injections. I remember when we first heard about it. You said it'd make a great script poison.

(ELI picks up the remote, turns on the television, muted.

ROSLYN is dead as KEVIN falls to his knees)

“Adam Automaton.” I never liked this film.—Not one of his better efforts.

(he changes the channel to “The Entertainment Beat”)

KEVIN

Eels....Am I dying?

(KEVIN falls into a sitting position, struggling to speak.

ELI sits down on the couch, focused on the television)

Eel....I'm sorry—I'm so sorry.

(KEVIN falls dead as ELI raises the volume. The reflection of the television flickers against his face)

JAMES JOHNSON

Topping this weekend's box office with \$25.4 million is the Eli tribute film, "A Death in the Mountains," starring Hamill Forrester in what many are saying is an Oscar-nominated role for the handsome outdoorsy actor.

SCENE 19

GREEN ROOM : Repeat of Act One, Scene One. ELI stares out a long moment, questioning his nerve.

ELI

They always had a dream. It's a dream shared by many, but realized by so few. And now their dream is my dream. My dream for—

(a knock on the door, AMBERLYN enters)

AMBERLYN

All right, everything's set. We're going in ten minutes.

(she sits on the counter next to him. ELI quickly grabs the smoothie so it doesn't spill)

We have five and a half minutes for the segment. That includes the intro, my summation and the bullshit banter between me and the anchor. I'll ask you the questions we discussed, in the order we discussed them. Look directly at me, not into the camera. That looks too orchestrated, too Ross Perot. It's just you and I having a conversation. If you're looking into the camera, I'll signal you like this....

(a cut sign above her knee)

Turn to me slowly. Don't jerk.

(ELI nods, looks at her, petrified. She smiles hearteningly)

You'll be fine. Stick to the script and try to relax.

ELI

I will. I am.

(with a wink and a fortifying touch on the shoulder, AMBERLYN leaves. ELI stares out solemnly)

That this senseless act whose sole aim was to stifle new and different voices from bringing beauty to the world will not win the day.

(ELI pauses then reaches for the smoothie. Just before bringing it to his lips, he hesitates, staring out dubiously. There is a knock on the door)

NEWS ASSISTANT

(voice-over)

We're ready for you Mr. Birnbaum.

SCENE 20

SET OF THE NEWS PROGRAM : ELI and AMBERLYN sit in chairs.

AMBERLYN

How're you dealing with the loss of your aunt and cousin?

ELI

It's overwhelming at times. After Eli's death, we all had each other. We worked on his script as way of channeling Eli, being a part of his life. With Aunt Roz and Cousin Kevin gone—they were good people, such good people. I'll have to—myself—I'm sorry.

(ELI becomes overwhelmed)

AMBERLYN

That's all right. Take your time....Are there more scripts that Eli wrote?

ELI

Yes. Many more. One better than the next. I'm sure there are many more great films in there.

AMBERLYN

Do the police have any leads?

ELI

Nothing concrete. They have a note sent to them by a Neo-Nazi Group, Aryan America, which said their deaths were a protest against the alien Jewish people controlling Hollywood.—But I'm determined not to let these hooligans, these bullies with their hate-mongering and their fear-inciting silence my family's dream....It's a dream shared by many, but realized by so few. Now their dream is my dream, my dream for them. So their souls can be at rest, and their time....

(his voice fades out)

SCENE 21

GRAVE SITE : The attendees are all men and include MARTIN, HAMILL, JOHN, PERSONAL ASSISTANT. HAMILL sobs inconsolably. ELI walks slowly up to the gathering, but stops behind, somewhat off to the side. A RABBI moves to the podium to address the congregated.

RABBI

Those of us who knew and remember Roz, as a friend, relative, mother, will always recall her smile and her warm giving manner. The way she gave of herself, putting herself out again and again for others in need....Let us rise and silently recite the Mourner's Kaddish.

(AMBERLYN enters, walks to ELI. He nods recognition to her presence. They stand together silently)

Thank you for coming. In lieu of flowers, Roslyn through her cousin Eli, has requested donations to the new Eli-related fund he's set-up. *Shalom aleichem.*

(the mourners stand to leave. HAMILL sobs uncontrollably PERSONAL ASSISTANT consoles him. MARTIN walks up to ELI and AMBERLYN standing near a tree.

MARTIN

Mr. Birnbaum, I'm Martin Eckhardt. A movie industry mog—

ELI

Yes....My aunt spoke of you often.

MARTIN

She was a fine woman. I liked her, and am sorry for your loss.

(ELI nods solemnly)

Ms. Lighty. I'm a great admirer of your work.

AMBERLYN

That means so much to me.

MARTIN

I know this is a bad time for you, but I was wondering....

(HAMILL is helped passed by PERSONAL ASSISTANT, almost carrying him, he is weeping so. They all watch)

The script you all were working on—it was Eli’s originally?

ELI

Yes it was.

MARTIN

(pause, nodding gravely)

I’d like to be a part of its future. Does it have a title?

ELI

“Dark Day Dawning.”

MARTIN

Hmm....Can you get it to me by Monday?

ELI

11 AM.

(MARTIN smiles genially and the men shake hands)

MARTIN

Ms. Lighty, keep up the good work.—“Dark Day Dawning.” I like that.

(MARTIN, with a nod, moves on as they watch)

AMBERLYN

It was a nice service.

ELI

She wasn’t Jewish.—Roslyn, she wasn’t in her real life.

AMBERLYN

(pause)

Everything seemed to go as planned. For you anyway.

(ELI stares at her a moment)

ELI

It's better this way. You'll see that eventually.

AMBERLYN

Would you really have told them I was involved all along?

(ELI doesn't answer)

I gave notice today. I told them I was going into show biz. They asked me where I thought I'd been the last two years.

ELI

What'd you call that *investigative* tool you used?

AMBERLLYN

What?

ELI

The thing with the ice cube and tongue.

AMBERLYN

Oh. That....I call that the deal closer.

ELI

That it did.

AMBERLYN

I had you before that.

ELI

No you didn't.

(she moves to walk off and he follows)

AMBERLYN

I had you when I opened my blouse.

ELI

You had nothing! I've seen breasts before. It's been awhile, but I've seen them.

AMBERLYN

Not fixed like these.

ELI

I didn't cave and agree to give you a quarter of my scriptwriting fee for a view—

AMBERLYN

A third!

ELI

For just a *glimpse* of your breasts, no matter how nice they are. I mean c'mon! What would I tell my Mother?

(she locks him arm in arm as they continue walking off)

END OF PLAY