

THE NEW DARK CLARITY

by Y York

author's agent: Carl Mulert, The Gersh Agency New York

copyright Y York

May 2001

Characters:

Julia: Forties, female.
Marty: Thirty-three, female.
Harold: Forties, male.
Joe: Forties, male.

The mid 90s, in and around Manhattan.

Notes: The characters watch video tape, but the audience doesn't. No blackouts between scenes- where possible, let the next scene begin before the current scene has ended.

Act I, Scene 1. Harold in his office at the tv news studio. Julia and Marty.

Lottery winners.	JULIA
No.	HAROLD
Horse doping.	JULIA
Noooo.	HAROLD
How honest is your dentist?	JULIA
I can see the numbers now.	HAROLD
Come on. "Did you really need that new crown, or are you paying for his new boat?"	JULIA
We need something audacious.	HAROLD
Pig genes in tomatoes.	JULIA

HAROLD

And human...remember when Taylor Paine came out on the air?

JULIA

That was disgusting.

HAROLD

It was dignified.

JULIA

Slobbering on the anchor desk?

HAROLD

Artfully controlled sobs.

JULIA

Invasion of privacy.

HAROLD

People love invasion of privacy. Maybe you have some little secret you'd like to reveal on the air for sweeps week.

JULIA

I have to get started, Harold--

HAROLD

Something we could dole out over five nights. People love a beautiful woman with an imperfection--

JULIA

You go the air, you tell everybody all about your three-hundred-dollar-an-hour psychiatrist.

HAROLD

I don't have a psychiatrist.

JULIA

Tax fraud.

HAROLD

Who said I have a psychiatrist?

JULIA

Insurance scams driving up our rates.

HAROLD

Because I don't have one. (Exits) Never did, never will.

JULIA
Where are you going?

HAROLD
...Tums.

JULIA
I have to start promos-

HAROLD
You have to find a story.

JULIA
Don't walk out on me!

HAROLD
Jesus, calm down, I'll be right back. (Gone)

JULIA
I'm calm, I'm calm. (Breathes)
(Brief pause)

MARTY
You could tell a secret--

JULIA
Lay off, Marty. (Breathes to calm down).

MARTY
You could tell about my chin--

JULIA
No-

MARTY
I don't want to be an unemployed person.

JULIA
You won't be.

MARTY
(Idea) Street people.

JULIA
We won't be street people.

A street-people angle.
MARTY

Let me think--
JULIA

You wear rags and a wire- I secretly tape you in the middle of
the homeless people. Sharing their suffering.
MARTY

Ha. ... You are kidding.
JULIA

It's really a good idea.
MARTY

(Harold reenters drinking a glass of water.)

We got it.
MARTY

What?
HAROLD

(same time) Marty....
JULIA

She dresses in rags- I secretly tape her with the homeless
people.
MARTY

(derisive) You thought that up?
HAROLD

Good idea, huh?
MARTY

Twenty years ago.
HAROLD
(Brief pause)

Marty, take a break. Get a coffee.
JULIA

I don't drink coffee anymore.
MARTY

JULIA
Get a soda.

MARTY
It hopped me. I'm not hopped anymore. (Exits)

HAROLD
Alone at last.

JULIA
She'll be back.

HAROLD
I'm sure she will. We could get you a cameraman playing with a full deck.

JULIA
She's fine.

HAROLD
Someone less...distracting.

JULIA
I'm not distracted.

HAROLD
So you can keep your mind on your job. What do you see in her, anyway?

JULIA
...What's your point, Harold?

HAROLD
You're stale.

JULIA
I am not--

HAROLD
You're repeating yourself-

JULIA
I'm why people tune in-

HAROLD
Giving me re-runs.

JULIA

Nobody says that. Who says that?

HAROLD

Maybe you need a vacation.

JULIA

And who's going to get you a story?

MARTY

(re enters) Diet Doctor Pepper. No sugar, no caffeine. It don't hop me.

Scene 2. Same room, later that day. Harold and Joe.

HAROLD

Oh, come on, Joe, it was no picnic keeping track of you.

JOE

You could have called The Alliance.

HAROLD

How was I supposed to know you were at The Alliance?

JOE

Don't you read newspapers?

HAROLD

Not that one. (Sarcasm) I always forget to subscribe.

JOE

You and the rest of the country.

HAROLD

What is their circulation, anyway?

JOE

Guess.

HAROLD

Two million.

JOE

Don't guess in the millions.

HAROLD

Less than a million?

JOE
Harold.... Less.

HAROLD
How can it be less than a million?

JOE
Eighty-seven thousand seven hundred and eighty two.

HAROLD
That's can't be--

JOE
Yeah, you're right- I think one guy died. (Brief pause) I'm kidding.

HAROLD
How do they exist on that circulation?

JOE
Idealism.

HAROLD
You can't eat idealism.

JOE
Three meals a day.

HAROLD
I had no idea--

JOE
Don't look at me like that.

HAROLD
No, really, I had no idea the numbers were so pathetic.

JOE
What they lack in quantity, they make up for in quality.

HAROLD
What do you mean?

JOE
High quality readership- I'm kidding.

HAROLD
I just didn't know...

JOE

See, that's the point, I can't have an effect. I can't have an impact reaching eighty-seven thousand people.

HAROLD

How long were you there?

JOE

Since the Gulf.

HAROLD

Gulf story-- gooooooood.

JOE

... Where did you see it?

HAROLD

Where did I see what?

JOE

My Gulf series-- if you don't read The Alliance?

HAROLD

I don't...remember- boy, you must have really pissed off the State Department.

JOE

Yeah, I got audited.

HAROLD

That isn't legal.

JOE

(sarcasm) Must have been a coincidence.

HAROLD

We don't do that here.

JOE

Don't do what?

HAROLD

That pissing off the State Department. We have advertisers.

JOE

To piss off?

HAROLD

To please! Oh, you were-

JOE

Kidding, yeah, but I'm gonna stop.

HAROLD

We please our advertisers. It is our great joy to please them.
(He takes a pill)

JOE

What's that?

HAROLD

Vitamins. (Drinks) This is the real world. You have to be ready to please them. It's the price we pay.

JOE

For what?

HAROLD

For reaching people....all of New York City, the surrounding metropolitan area, and occasionally the network picks you up- if you have something really good.

JOE

Yeah, that's what I want.

HAROLD

So you will have to...tailor ...your message-- tv audiences don't want to hear about global warming or the environmental hazards of war. Doom and gloom.

JOE

You got gloom on your show.

HAROLD

We don't ...call it a show. A soap opera is a show. A nighttime drama is a show. Cartoons is a show. The news is a program, not a show.

JOE

Okay. You got gloom on your program, your program is often gloomy.

HAROLD

But it's a very specific kind of gloom. It's not a gloom that anyone is expected to do anything about. It's an out-of-their-hands kind-of-gloom. Not a take-action kind of gloom. Ha! (Brief pause) Can you do that?

JOE

To reach people I can do anything. (Brief pause) What's the salary again?

Scene 3. Harold on the couch. Two days later.

HAROLD

Kind of a love-hate thing- I love it when he fails, I hate it when he succeeds. Those terrific pieces in The Alliance-- thank God nobody reads The Alliance or I would have had to kill myself. He's always been so smug, so self-righteous, I mean, we're in the same business, he has no right flaunting his self-sacrifice at me, risking his life, making me look bad, I mean, Christ, my job is hard too you know- he's not looking at an eleven-thousand-dollar-a-month nut-- Joe lived out of a suitcase and it wasn't ideology, he didn't have that. It was just to piss off his father. His father knew it, too, we talked about it. Joe's Dad and I we were peas in a pod- We'd spend hours- on my dime- talking about Joe. His Dad knew, his Dad made it clear, if Joe wasn't going to knuckle down and play the game, make some money, Dad wasn't going to leave him any. And he didn't. He left it to Conservatives for a Better America, like they need it. He remembered me, though. Enough for Mindy to get that car...got that off my back. It made me nervous being cutoff from Joe, I need to keep track of what he's up to. So I called him with the job offer, it was safe, I knew he'd turn me down- surprise! But really it's good, it's good- I can't lose- if he succeeds, then Julia will have to come around um... shape up, and if he falls on his face, he falls on his face, which is a good thing, it's all good, ...but when he walks into my office, my heart starts to race, and I'm not sharp, no I'd say, I'm actually dull-- you wouldn't believe the story I approved-- he frazzles me. I need that wickedly sharp sarcastic edge, so I thought you could prescribe something else.... something to keep me relaxed and sharp when Joe comes in.

Scene 4. A bar. The next night. Joe and Julia. Joe is flirting. Julia isn't.

JOE

I wasn't criticizing--

JULIA

Lowest common denominator?

JOE

An observation. I was observing, not criticizing. And I recognize that it isn't easy. How do you make yourself as stupid as the stupidest person in the land? A real challenge.

JULIA

Then what are you doing here? Slumming?

JOE

I wouldn't call it that- well, yeah, I guess I would.

JULIA

What's your story on?

JOE

Just a little thing, nothing...

JULIA

It has to be about something.

JOE

It's so weird to see myself on tape.

JULIA

They fix it in editing.

JOE

I twitch. There's all this twitching and nose-rubbing and glancing about.

JULIA

They cut away. ...How long is it?

JOE

It's interminable!

JULIA

One segment-? five segments-? Two minutes- five minutes- what?

JOE

One two-minute segment that feels like five hours.

JULIA

(relieved) One segment, two minutes. Cheers.

JOE

I would say I am definitely not a natural. But I'm sure I'll get better.

JULIA

Why should you get better?

JOE

I should get better so that I'm better.

JULIA

Your piece is done. All two minutes of it.

JOE

This one is done. (Brief pause) I'm on staff. Your new comrade. Hired to raise the level of discourse.

JULIA

We've tried that, no one watches. You hate tv.

JOE

I want to reach people.

JULIA

What about The Alliance?

JOE

I quit. I thought you knew.

JULIA

No. I didn't know. (she does deep breathing)

JOE

You okay?

JULIA

I'm fine, fine. You're not going to like it.

JOE

(flirting) I already like it. The comradery. Bonhomie.

JULIA

Dog eat dog.

JOE

I like dogs.

JULIA

(brief pause) What? What are you looking at?

JOE

(gestures to his own lip) That little tiny white scar.

JULIA

(brief pause) A fall. I had a fall. They fixed it.

JOE

I was worried some big bad bully slugged you.

JULIA

Nobody slugs me.

JOE

It's actually kind of nice, now that I know nobody slugged you, sort of a magnet, pulls the focus right there--

JULIA

Stop looking at it.

JOE

The imperfection that makes the perfection stand out that much better.

JULIA

Stop looking at it, or I'll slug you.

JOE

Well there's incentive.

JULIA

You won't get to do politics. There are no politics on tv.

JOE

There's no politics anywhere.

JULIA

The Alliance. That's politics.

JOE

Not like it used to be.

JULIA

In the "good old days?" Don't give me that- you're not that old.

JOE

Nineteen eighty, my first job, covering the election for a little weekly in Chicago, which of course, no longer exists. It was great. (Brief pause) What were you doing in 1980?

JULIA

Finishing college.

JOE

Where?

JULIA

...Dartmouth-

JOE

Oh, did you know--

JULIA

I hate that game- did you cover Reagan or Carter?

JOE

...Reagan, of course. With Reagan I didn't have to pull my punches.

JULIA

I liked Reagan.

JOE

Let's see...trickle-down, dismantling subsidized housing, putting the mentally ill out on the streets, Iran Contra, Star Wars?

JULIA

The sixties flopped; the seventies were about recapitalization--

JOE

Some of us--

JULIA

-take the money and run.

JOE

Some people were still fighting.

JULIA

The deaf dumb and blind.

JOE

It was fight them or become them. I didn't want to turn into my father. You can understand that.

JULIA

I don't know your father.

JOE

But you didn't want to turn into your father.

JULIA

...Why do you say that?

JOE

It's my way of making chit chat- I mean clearly you aren't going to ask me anything about me. (Brief pause) Where'd you grow up?

JULIA

...Philadelphia.

JOE

You don't have the accent.

JULIA

Of course I don't have the accent. I'm on tv.

(Marty enters.)

MARTY

The bartender got me Doctor Pepper.

JULIA

Great.

MARTY

She ordered it special on tap. I think she likes me.

JULIA

Jesus-

JOE

Don't drink too many of those.

MARTY

One at a time or you're an attic.

JOE

An attic? Like bats in the belfry? The upstairs loony bin? Where we keep mad Aunt Sylvia?

JULIA

Addict, she said addict. She didn't say attic. (To Marty) You said addict.

JOE

I was just kidding.

JULIA

Marty knows. Marty knows the difference.

MARTY

Words that sound alike but spelled different. And mean different.

JOE

Actually, I think it's more like words that are different.

MARTY

What do you call those?

JOE

(playing) You call them...words.

MARTY

(Marty laughs heartily)

JULIA

(Quietly) Lay off, Joe.

(Brief pause.)

MARTY

I saw your piece.

JULIA

What's it about? He won't tell me.

MARTY

Weather.

JOE

Was it on?

JULIA

Don't you watch our program?

JOE
Of course I watch our program.

JULIA
Then you know it wasn't on.

MARTY
I saw it in editing.

JOE
You like it?

MARTY
Nice talking.

JOE
When's it going to run?

MARTY
No.

JOE
What no?

MARTY
No.

JOE
Why not?

MARTY
It's too boring. Harold killed it.

(Julia laughs, and Joe becomes a little mad and defensive.)

JOE
It isn't boring.

MARTY
No tape is boring for people.

JULIA
No tape?

JOE
It's not that kind of story.

JULIA

The editor can't cut away from your twitches if there's no tape.

JOE

It's an editorial.

JULIA

It's tv. Visual, tape, eyes, watching.

JOE

I just started--

JULIA

Do you even have a tv? (Brief pause) You don't. You don't have a tv. Jesus.

JOE

I have a tv. I forget to plug it in.

JULIA

Perfect. You hate tv, you don't watch tv; you're working for tv.

JOE

They want something different.

JULIA

(exiting) The new guy does a weather piece.

MARTY

Where you going?

JULIA

Home. You want to share a taxi?

MARTY

I'm not finished my Doctor Pepper.

JULIA

(brief pause) Okay. Don't stay too late. We start early tomorrow.

(Julia exits. Joe toasts Marty with his drink.)

Scene 5. A lavatory the next afternoon. Julia disfigures her face. Marty enters.

MARTY

What-?

JULIA

Lock the door. I don't want anybody to see this.

MARTY

What if somebody has to pee?

JULIA

They can go downstairs.

MARTY

What are you doing to your face?

JULIA

I want to see if this works-

MARTY

Looks bad.

JULIA

It's supposed to look bad.

MARTY

I don't like it.

JULIA

You're not supposed to like it.

MARTY

It scares me.

JULIA

He wants audacious, we'll give him audacious.

MARTY

It looks like me.

JULIA

We'll give him a story he has to approve.

MARTY

Change it.

JULIA

(losing patience) Marty, I just want to see what it looks like, and then I'll take it off. Do you think you could stop talking?

MARTY

(accusing) You're getting mad.

I'm not-

JULIA

Red in the face.

MARTY

Okay, okay. (Takes a breath, then) We're going undercover. We are going to reveal how the less fortunate are treated in this society.

JULIA

Why are we doing that?

MARTY

So the fortunate can gloat. So Harold gets rid of Joe.

JULIA

I like Joe.

MARTY

You don't like Joe. You like his name, you don't like him.

JULIA

He bought me a pop.

MARTY

(beat) After I left?

JULIA

You weren't even there. He stayed to talk to me.

MARTY

I thought you were going home.

JULIA

I went home later. He likes me.

MARTY

...You can't stay alone at the bar.

JULIA.

I wasn't alone.

MARTY

What did he say to you?

JULIA

MARTY
I don't know.

JULIA
Did he ask you anything?

MARTY
"Another Doctor Pepper or what?"

JULIA
Did he ask you anything about me?

MARTY
Not a single word.

JULIA
Did he ask you anything about us?

MARTY
"You must never talk about us." (Big smile, got it right)

JULIA
Come on, Marty, honey, this is important. Did he ask you anything about.... anything?

MARTY
I know not to talk

JULIA
Particularly to Joe.

MARTY
(correcting her) Particularly to Harold.

JULIA
It used to be Harold. Now it's Joe. You have to be careful.

MARTY
More careful than I already am?!

JULIA
Just for a little while, until they send him away.

MARTY
Where?

JULIA
Away. He's hot now, but he will turn cold.

MARTY

Hot sexy?!

JULIA

No...hot new. A few weeks of no-tape editorials should cool him off. And while Mister Joe is hitting the wall, we will be crossing the finish line and winning the race.

MARTY

What do we win?

JULIA

Network.

MARTY

They're still watching?

JULIA

They're still watching.

MARTY

When are they going to decide?

JULIA

Any minute now. Marty...you didn't tell anybody did you?

MARTY

Zip.

JULIA

Good girl. This is our future here. You with me?

MARTY

(grudgingly) If it's for our future.

Scene 6. A screening room later that day. Marty watches a tv monitor. Joe enters.

JOE

What are you watching?

MARTY

A story.

JOE

Where's the sound?

MARTY

I turn it off.

(They watch. He gets into it and learns things.)

JOE

It's good without sound.

MARTY

Yep.

JOE

Talking is boring.

MARTY

Yep.

JOE

But tape without talking is okay.

MARTY

Yep.

JOE

Yep. Why do you think that is?

MARTY

Because I am very good at my job.

JOE

Yep.

(Marty snaps off tv; starts to leave.)

JOE

Hey, hey wait a minute--

MARTY

No- zip!

JOE

...Uh... Don't run off. I got more to say here.

MARTY

(She stalls in the doorway.) Say it.

JOE

Um...what was this story on?

Daycare. MARTY

I liked it. JOE

It's mine. MARTY

Is it also Julia's? JOE

Yeah. MARTY

You really have a way with a camera. JOE

I know. MARTY

How did you get the nostril shot? JOE

I got on the floor. MARTY

(a compliment) Well, it was creepy. JOE

Yes. MARTY

Did Julia tell you to get on the floor? JOE

(defensive) No. MARTY

You thought that up yourself? JOE

I think stuff up-- MARTY

No, I know. Did you know it would creep people out? JOE

MARTY

I wanted to see what he looks like to the kids. Two big nose holes.

JOE

You're right. It made me remember being a kid. (Beat) The coffee's fresh. You want some?

MARTY

I don't drink it.

JOE

There's pop.

MARTY

...Okay.

(He gets her a pop, she comes back into the room.)

JOE

You want to go out with me sometime?

MARTY

Go out?! Go out with you?

JOE

I like your camera work.

MARTY

But...out?

JOE

...On assignment.

MARTY

Oh.... I go out with Julia.

JOE

You go out with Julia?

MARTY

Yes.

JOE

(playing) On dates?

MARTY

(laughs heartily) On assignments.

JOE
What are you two working on? (Brief pause) Hey, I work here, too,
you know.

MARTY
Zip.

JOE
Zip? That's my answer?

MARTY
Yeah.

JOE
Oh. How's your soda?

MARTY
Good. Do you have a wife?

JOE
Who'd marry me? I'm never there.

MARTY
Somebody would.

JOE
I had a girlfriend. I lost her.

MARTY
Dead?

JOE
Not quite. She left. (Pause) For another guy.

MARTY
(sympathetic) Were you too boring?

JOE
No, I wasn't- well maybe I was.

MARTY
A younger guy?

JOE
No, he wasn't younger! (Brief pause) He had a lot of money.

MARTY

(pointedly) I don't need money. I make a lot already. (Brief pause, flirts) I like movies.

JOE

Oh yeah? Do you want to make a movie?

MARTY

I want to go to a movie.

JOE

(confused) You want to go to a movie?

MARTY

(as if he's asking) Yes. Now?

JOE

Oh- okay, okay.

Scene 7. A street the next afternoon. Marty and Julia on assignment. Julia disguised as a deformed person. Very hunchback of Notre Dame. Marty films with a disguised purse-camera. Julia whispers a commentary.

JULIA

Good evening. From inside my disguise I watch the horror-filled faces of this rush hour crowd turn away in fear and disgust. I know at the end of my journey, I can take off this face and return to the nameless crowd. But what of she who lives this horror for real? She who doesn't have the luxury of removing her face? What does she feel at the end of the day? Where is her joy? Not one of the hundreds of people who have seen me today have so much as smiled. Even the simple pleasure of a human smile is denied to her-

MARTY

I filmed some smiles.

JULIA

I'm taping, Marty!

MARTY

I turned it off before speaking. I know to turn it off before speaking. I just want you to know that there were smiles. There were kindly greetings.

JULIA

Did you get that guy who gagged?

MARTY
Yes, but I also got some smiles.

JULIA
How's your focus?

MARTY
Don't-

JULIA
No, I wasn't.

MARTY
You were. It was only that one time.

JULIA
No, I know. But hidden cameras are tricky, that's all.

MARTY
Everything is in focus.

JULIA
The lens isn't covered up?

MARTY
Stop it--

JULIA
No, okay. (Beat) Let's get something to eat.

MARTY
You gonna take your face in a restaurant?

JULIA
A diner.

(Julia sees someone coming.)

JULIA
Get ready.

(Julia is particularly pitiful as the person passes. Very Charles Laughton as Hunchback.)

JULIA
Did you get that? He turned green.

MARTY

You didn't have to look like that.

JULIA

Did you get his face?

MARTY

You didn't have to look so pitiful at him. You looked pitiful at him. It isn't so pitiful.

JULIA

...It is pitiful. You know it's pitiful.

MARTY

I don't want to remember. I'm beautiful now- I don't have to remember.

JULIA

(Exasperated sigh, beat) What's that smell?

MARTY

I don't smell it.

JULIA

What are you wearing?

MARTY

...Chanel.

JULIA

(confused) My Chanel?

MARTY

It's a different number.

JULIA

Where did you get a different number?

MARTY

Sax's.

JULIA

You went shopping?

MARTY

Yes.

JULIA
By yourself?

MARTY
Yes.

JULIA
You're scared of shopping.

MARTY
It was okay.

JULIA
So you're wearing Chanel for what? The subway crowd?

MARTY
"A nice light fragrance for the work place."

JULIA
...How much?

MARTY
Eighty-one fifty-four.

JULIA
You can borrow mine.

MARTY
I need one at my own apartment..

JULIA
You don't even like perfume.

MARTY
I like it.

JULIA
All of a sudden you like perfume. All of a sudden you're not scared to go shopping alone.

MARTY
It smells nice.

JULIA
He's just using you.

MARTY
He's not.

JULIA
To find out about me.

MARTY
We didn't even talk about you.

JULIA
... When? When "didn't you talk about me?"

MARTY
Last night.

JULIA
What last night?

MARTY
Movie.

JULIA
You went to a movie?

MARTY
He asked me out.

JULIA
And you said yes? You went on a date?

MARTY
We had fun.

JULIA
Did you fuck? Did you fuck him?

MARTY
It was a movie. They don't let you.

JULIA
Nobody at the station-- we agreed--

MARTY
"Nobody from work, nobody from the bar"-- I don't go any place else-

JULIA
Marty, you can't. You get involved with somebody at work, they get nosy, they start asking questions. He'll say, "tell me about yourself, Marty." And what are you going to say?

MARTY

I'll be silent. Zip.

JULIA

He's a reporter. They don't take zip for an answer.

MARTY

Yes, they do! He did.

JULIA

I'm not going to be a laughing stock.

MARTY

Why are you a laughing stock? I don't see how you can be a laughing stock.

(Pause)

JULIA

(Scuffle) ...Nepotism, remember? When you get somebody you know a job, that's nepotism. And that's against the law.

MARTY

(confused) But why is that a laughing stock?

JULIA

Because if somebody finds out, I get fired. I would be a laughing stock because I would get fired.

Scene 8. Harold's office. The same afternoon. Joe and Harold.

JOE

You could have run it.

HAROLD

There wasn't a slot.

JOE

Run it another night.

HAROLD

We'll see.

JOE

What? We'll see what? (Brief pause) What?

HAROLD

It was your first try.

JOE

A try? It wasn't a try. It was a piece. It wasn't a try.

HAROLD

A little short on content.

JOE

I had four sources.

HAROLD

(derisive) World Watch, Greenpeace-

JOE

What? Those aren't sources?

HAROLD

You had press releases.

JOE

I had last year's weather. That should be proof enough for the skeptics.

HAROLD

There was no tape.

JOE

I could have had tape.

HAROLD

Of what?

JOE

I could have showed tape of storms.

HAROLD

That's not tape. That's file footage. Joe, if you want to do weather you have to wait until there is weather. Weather isn't news unless it's happening. It's okay, you just started. It can take a little while to find something really hot. Take a look at Julia's old pieces.

JOE

What? You want me to-- what?

HAROLD

No, I don't want you to duplicate Julia. Just to get an idea. Style, content, pacing. Take your time. I don't want to rush you. I want true you. There's no hurry. Take your time.

JOE

(brief pause) How long do I have?

HAROLD

A couple weeks.

JOE

A couple--

HAROLD

Two. Yeah. I can carry you for about two more weeks.

JOE

Carry me?

HAROLD

Yes. Then I have to justify the extra salary.

JOE

You're carrying me?

HAROLD

For a little while I can carry you.

JOE

...What about my contract?

HAROLD

We have to see something before we can issue you a contract.

JOE

I quit my job!

HAROLD

Joe. Joe Joe Joe. You want me to issue you a contract for a job that maybe you can't perform?

JOE

Jesus. (brief pause) Where am I? You sounded just like my Dad. Well, good thing I haven't signed a lease.

(Brief pause)

HAROLD

I was sorry about your Dad.

JOE

How do you know about my Dad?

HAROLD
We stayed in touch.

JOE
With my Dad you stayed in touch?

HAROLD
I did.

JOE
He never said.

HAROLD
Huh.

JOE
Why did you stay in touch with my Dad?

HAROLD
I always liked your Dad.

JOE
I guess you did, if you "stayed in touch."

HAROLD
Come on, Joe. We had a lot in common.

JOE
That's for damn sure.

HAROLD
And he always knew where you were.

JOE
Which is how you kept track of me.

HAROLD
Yes- what? What do you mean?

JOE
You said I was hard to keep track of- not that hard if you could just call up my Dad-

HAROLD
I didn't- uh.

JOE

Boy, I wish I could have heard the conversations. All about how Joe can't cut it. If Joe could cut it in the real world he wouldn't be hanging out on the fringes.

HAROLD

I didn't want you to be mad. I thought you might be mad... that I called your Dad- you are mad.

JOE

That you called my Dad, yeah, I'm mad.

HAROLD

He called me, too.

JOE

He didn't call you, why would he call you?

HAROLD

When he heard you were up for the prize.

JOE

When I was "up for it." I didn't even know I was "up for it."

HAROLD

I guess somebody called him.

JOE

Why was he calling you?

HAROLD

To see if I knew anybody.

JOE

If you knew anybody who what? What?!

HAROLD

If I knew anybody on the committee.

JOE

(brief pause, pointedly) But you didn't.

HAROLD

I didn't.

JOE

Is that why you offered me a job? You're looking out for me because my dad died?

HAROLD

I didn't call you for you. I called you for me. I need something fresh.

JOE

I'm fresh?

HAROLD

A breath of fresh air. It's good for everybody. Good for Julia to see a fresh face. A prize-winning face.

JOE

To light a fire under her? Get her competitive juices flowing?

HAROLD

We could use some competitive juices around here.

JOE

And then you get to what? Pick the winner?

HAROLD

...Well. Historically this station has had only one investigative reporter.

JOE

(brief pause) I need my own camera- if I'm supposed to have "tape" every time- if I'm competing for my job-

HAROLD

Pull somebody.

JOE

I should have a partner. Somebody who learns my moves. Somebody I don't have to tell things to. Julia has a partner.

HAROLD

That's different.

JOE

I don't see any difference.

HAROLD

It's complex.

JOE

(sarcasm) Why, did you know her dad, too?.

HAROLD

Of course not- Oh, you were kidding- oh. ...Three years ago, she was hot. She could have anything she wanted. She wanted us to hire Marty.

JOE

Marty's good.

HAROLD

Now she's good. I don't think she'd ever held a camera, or a job.

JOE

I don't get it.

HAROLD

Marty showed up at reception. Demanding Julia. Not going away without seeing Julia. A hick with an IQ of 90, and no chin.

JOE

No what?

HAROLD

Chin. Chinless. It's a genetic chin. You get it when your parents are too closely related.

JOE

I'm not familiar with this chin.

HAROLD

Your parents weren't too closely related.

JOE

She has a chin now.

HAROLD

Plastic surgery. Julia arranged it.

JOE

So, the chinless one arrives at the door, and Miss Heart-of-Gold takes her in.

HAROLD

That's pretty much it.

JOE

Why?

HAROLD

I guess it was love at first sight.

JOE

(brief pause) No. They're- no.

HAROLD

Don't get me wrong, it's hardly a turnoff. Girls like that can always go both ways. They just need a little persuading.

JOE

...You're married.

HAROLD

I didn't ask her to marry me.

JOE

You just hit on her.

HAROLD

A little hit, a minor league hit. There are laws now.

JOE

They're not gay.

HAROLD

Then why did she turn me down?

JOE

I can think of reasons.

HAROLD

What?

JOE

You're married- you're her boss- and you're just not that hot, Harold.

HAROLD

Not-! That is patently ridiculous. Look at me. I sit behind a three thousand dollar mahogany desk, I wear fifteen-hundred-dollar sportswear, I can get anybody in the most important town in the world to take my call-- this is hot to women. Hot hot hot.

JOE

...Yeah, okay..

HAROLD

You're in a different world now, Joe.

JOE

I said okay, damn it!

HAROLD

The world where the radical guy is the sexy guy is gone. You had your day, your moment- the glory that was Rome- I always figured that's what attracted you anyway. To all that politics.

JOE

What attracted me?

HAROLD

The girls. All the sexy girls were lefties. Sorority girls were not sexy. They were too clean- they didn't want to mess up their hair. It was those other girls trying to be hippies ten years too late, that's where the sex was happening.

JOE

You thought it was for the sex?

HAROLD

That's why I took a dip, stuck in my big toe. I tried it on, Joe, and the radical thing just didn't fit. I never thought it fit you, either. I always thought you were dabbling.

JOE

You thought I couldn't cut it.

HAROLD

(patronizing) I thought you were trapped. I know how it is. You get caught-- suddenly there are expectations. Suddenly you're no longer talking just because you want to hear how something sounds. Suddenly, people are listening. It gets harder and harder to change without seeming like a fool or a hypocrite.

JOE

Which am I?

HAROLD

I know you're not a fool, and I don't really care if you're a hypocrite.

Scene 9. A street, later that night. Julia, still in her ugly makeup, and Marty. Under a street light.

MARTY

There isn't enough light.

JULIA

Hurry up-- Gimme.

(Julia takes the purse camera, replaces tape, and checks around for a light source.)

MARTY

What are you doing?

JULIA

I don't want anything to happen to this.

MARTY

I take care of tape.

JULIA

Not this time. (Stands under light, returns purse/camera to Marty.) Shoot me here. (Tv talk) Good evening. We began tonight with a plan. To examine how the rest of you behave when confronted with the city's deformed family of man. But the tables turned when we met one of life's true unfortunates. My camera person and I were eating dinner in a Brooklyn diner, where to our surprise, the waitress didn't respond to my face. In a little while, we found out why when one of her regulars came in for dinner. A huge man, the man you are about to meet on the tape, truly one of God's discarded creatures, grossly deformed, yet speaking to us in musical rhymes. Our homeless, nameless, night wanderer--

MARTY

Robert...his name is Robert.

JULIA

Marty, what? What is wrong with you?

MARTY

His name is Robert.

JULIA

Who cares what his name is?

MARTY

If a person has a name then a person isn't nameless. Robert.

JULIA

Don't you mean Wobut?

He can't say R. MARTY

Weally? JULIA

He isn't homeless, either. He has a home. MARTY

An SRO is not a home. JULIA

Nicely decorated. MARTY

Like a bordello. JULIA

He's a poet. MARTY

So we'll make him famous- JULIA

(mad) I don't like this story. MARTY

This is a great story. JULIA

We should keep it secret. We should throw away the tapes. No one should see. MARTY

We can't throw away the tapes. JULIA

You threw up. You don't want people to see how you threw up when you saw him. MARTY

You taped that? Why did you tape that? JULIA

He keeps a prince inside. Inside hisself he hides a prince. MARTY

JULIA

Marty...

MARTY

"He's young and he's trim and except for a heart-shaped mole, no blemish on his skin." The hidden prince. (Marty touches the mole on her lip.)

JULIA

He said that bit about the mole because you have a mole.

MARTY

But it was nice.

JULIA

So he's nice. We're not hurting him.

MARTY

"Inside you're a beauty, Marty."

JULIA

We're helping--

MARTY

"Stay beautiful inside and everybody will love you." You said that.

JULIA

We made you beautiful outside, too.

MARTY

It's fake.

JULIA

We'll help him. We'll help him out. After we do the story, everybody will want to help him.

MARTY

Maybe he doesn't want any help. Maybe he's fine.

JULIA

Like you were fine? Like how fine it was for you?

MARTY

I hadn't figured it out. He's figured it out.

JULIA

Living in a six by ten foot room is not figured out.

MARTY

I don't care. I don't like the story. I don't want you to run it.

JULIA

It isn't up to you.

MARTY

I'll tell...

JULIA

(brief pause) You'll tell what?

MARTY

I'll tell about nepotism. You and me.

JULIA

(brief pause) You will lose your job.

MARTY

You will lose yours, too.

JULIA

(brief pause) Well, what do you think we should do?

MARTY

We should throw away the tapes. We should throw away the memory.

JULIA

Alright.

MARTY

Alright we will?

JULIA

We'll just finish up, and then we'll bury the tapes deep in the archive.

MARTY

We could throw them away now.

JULIA

No, it's for posterity. We have a responsibility to posterity. People in a hundred years from now. They need to know of Robert's plight.

MARTY

(tries out the word) Plight.

JULIA

Yes. It will help them to be kinder if they know of his plight.

MARTY

(likes the idea) Oh.

JULIA

When they see the tape, they will be kinder.

MARTY

...Do they have to know about the doll? To be kinder.

JULIA

Yes. They have to know everything. In a hundred years.

MARTY

...I didn't tape the doll.

JULIA

You didn't get him kissing the doll?!

MARTY

I couldn't-I couldn't.

JULIA

Okay, okay. We'll have to go back.

MARTY

Why, if it's for a hundred years?

JULIA

It's for posterity, Marty. We owe it to posterity.

Scene 10. A screening room, two days later. Joe watching video at the office. Harold enters.

JOE (VO)

As you see, these earth movers... (continues over the dialogue.)

JOE

Oh good. You gotta watch.

HAROLD

Give me the remote.

JOE

Come on! It's my spot.

HAROLD

I saw it already.

JOE

But now we're watching it with the whole town.

HAROLD

Jesus, Joe...

JOE

Shhhh.

JOE (VO)

... have been sabotaged, their gas tanks filled with sugar to freeze the engine. Logging has come to a complete standstill as the loggers bring in new equipment and arrange to airlift the damaged machinery for repairs. The environmentalists say this war has just begun.

(Joe snaps the tv off.)

JOE

More people just saw this than read *The Alliance* in ten years. It was good, it was good. Good camera work, huh?

HAROLD

(terse) Uh huh.

JOE

Marty made the trees look human. "Think of the trees as old nice grandfathers."

HAROLD

That was a good way to word it for her.

JOE

That's how she worded it for me. Copy was good, too, yeah? I mean, could you tell which side of the fence I'm on?

HAROLD

You look good, you sound good, the tape is good. It's good.

JOE

(brief pause) So what's the problem?

HAROLD

The problem is there's a tanker wreck on the BQE. Sixteen cars and forty-foot flames and Channel four (snaps on tv) has it live.

Scene 11. Harold on the couch. Later that day.

HAROLD

It was the middle of the night, I sat straight up in bed—lightning-bolt truth landed in my lap: “Human beings are vile ruthless creatures and anything that hints otherwise is pretense and manipulation by the knowing elite.” I'm not talking about cynicism, this was bigger than cynicism. Something had fallen from my eyes and my vision was, finally, clear. The air was heavy and colors had faded into a dark gray. I knew with complete conviction that this heaviness was the reality, that I was glimpsing a peek at the truth, which is normally hidden from us by some myelin protector that must exist in our psyches to coat our nerve endings and insulate us. And for this moment in the night my myelin protector was gone— and I was rubbing full bore against the darkness. I also knew that I was not alone in the knowledge. Suddenly everything made sense— how my boss can, in the midst of support and enthusiasm for me, go cold when it appears that perhaps I am going to object to a programming request, his cold gaze turning me into quivering jelly. Because there is no human connection— there is an abyss between each and every one of us. Every one of us alone in the dark— my wife, her gestures, her caresses, her care, were all suddenly transparently manipulative, connected to her personal designs— to buy something or to redecorate something or to go some place, a vacation, alone. But why not go alone, because alone is the truth, together is the lie, the big lie that anyone is anything but absolutely alone. (Beat) I think the pills, what they do, they must provide some myelin. The pills help a lot. But even though the pills protect me against this darkness, I still can remember it, how it felt to feel it. I need something that will help me forget. Are there pills for that? Can you get me pills for that, too?

Intermission

Act II, Scene 1. Harold's office. Tuesday. Julia and Harold.
Harold persuading.

JULIA

You can't give him sweeps week.

HAROLD

It's a good time to introduce him.

JULIA

What introduce? He was on already. With his "trees."

HAROLD

Nobody was watching.

JULIA

And we should learn from that.

HAROLD

I want to officially introduce him.

JULIA

If he screws up, you've blown sweeps.

HAROLD

Joe himself is a story. If he screws up, it won't matter. People will tune in- people are curious.

JULIA

Not people the audience. Just people news people.

HAROLD

And news people will publicize his debut. "What's the lefty going to do on tv."

JULIA

What is he going to do?

HAROLD

It doesn't matter, I told you--

JULIA

"He's the story." But what's the story?

HAROLD

He's on Long Island. More trees.

JULIA
Trees for sweeps? Have you lost your mind?

HAROLD
My mind is fine!

JULIA
Did he even take a camera?

HAROLD
Marty.

JULIA
Shit, Harold--

HAROLD
They work well together.

JULIA
You're sabotaging me.

HAROLD
Now why would I do that?

JULIA
So you can replace me with your old fraternity brother.

HAROLD
A prize-winning reporter.

JULIA
Prize hell. This is a blatant act of nepotism.

HAROLD
Like anybody cares about nepotism.

JULIA
Marty's my camera.

HAROLD
Joe likes her. I think she likes him, too. Yes, they're quite the team. Surprising to see her with somebody who isn't you. A man. ...A beautiful sight. (Brief pause) Well now. There's probably nothing you can do without your camera.

JULIA
Yeah, I'm sabotaged.

HAROLD

...You could spend the rest of the day with me...increasing your chances of getting sweeps week.

(Pause)

JULIA

I have a story.

HAROLD

Is that a "no?"

JULIA

An amazing story.

HAROLD

You don't know what you're missing.

JULIA

It'll take sweeps.

HAROLD

What is it, Julia?! ... A little on-air confessional?

JULIA

No confessional, stop it with the confessional.

HAROLD

You want to come out of the closet, the station is always willing to accommodate.

JULIA

Better than a confessional.

HAROLD

So tell me.

JULIA

I can't risk it.

HAROLD

You're bluffing.

JULIA

I'm not bluffing; this can't get out- the walls have ears and you know it. There are people on staff who would flip out if they knew. You can't tell anybody- anybody.

HAROLD
Flip out good or flip out bad?

JULIA
Flip. Out.

HAROLD
You have tape?

JULIA
It'll blow your mind.

HAROLD
Show it to me.

JULIA
I'll show you tape a week from Friday.

HAROLD
Show me now.

JULIA
No.

HAROLD
Then forget it.

JULIA
I'll take it somewhere else.

HAROLD
You're still under contract, Miss.

JULIA
Then I'll take it upstairs, and we'll see how much longer you have a job. (Pause) I'll show you tape a week from tomorrow. And start promos a week from Monday.

HAROLD
You start promos if I like the story.

JULIA
You'll like it.

Scene 2. Harold's office. Tuesday night. Joe and Marty. Marty's camera. Joe mixes drinks.

MARTY
What are we celebrating?

JOE
A successful day of reporting. And fan mail.

MARTY
A fan?

JOE
A couple. We're reaching people. That's the name of the game.

MARTY
Reaching people...

JOE
Yep.

MARTY
...Say...

JOE
What?

MARTY
Do you ever not reach people?

JOE
For ten years at The Alliance.

MARTY
...Do you ever bury a story deep in the archive?

JOE
A true story?

MARTY
Yeah.

JOE
Then why bury it?

MARTY
So it doesn't hurt somebody.

JOE
The truth always hurts somebody.

MARTY

But what if it doesn't help somebody?

JOE

What's it about?

(Marty shakes her head. Joe investigates.)

JOE

...Let me fix you something besides pop.

MARTY

I'm not supposed to.

JOE

You on Meds? (Brief pause) Medication.

MARTY

No.

JOE

You AA- ? Alcoholics Anonymous.

MARTY

No.

JOE

Okay. How about a whiskey sour? It's a beginner's drink. (He fixes it.)

MARTY

I'm not a beginner.

JOE

No?

MARTY

I'm more experienced than a beginner.

JOE

Let me have your expert opinion of this.

(She drinks the whole drink.)

MARTY

Good.

JOE

Let me get you a refill.

MARTY

(She drinks the whole drink.) Still good.

JOE

There's a tradition that you drink the third drink slowly.

MARTY

Oh sure, I know that tradition.

JOE

I figured you did because you're not a beginner or anything. So, what's the story?

MARTY

What?

JOE

That's going to hurt somebody and not going to help somebody.

MARTY

Zip.

JOE

How can I give you an answer if you zip me?

MARTY

Zip.

JOE

I can't give you a professional opinion unless you tell me what the story is. It wouldn't be professional.

MARTY

Can't.

JOE

...You want to stick with whiskey sours or try something else?

MARTY

Stick.

JOE

You ever even seen Harold drink?

MARTY

I don't come in here much.

JOE

Why not? This is command central. This is Houston.

MARTY

I don't like to come in here.

JOE

Harold is a drag.

MARTY

He's hollow and he's dry.

JOE

Do not guzzle. Sip. A fine tradition.

MARTY

Yep.

JOE

He is dry. I'm not dry. I may be hollow, but I'm definitely not dry. This is dry.

MARTY

Looks wet.

JOE

Martini.

MARTY

(Blushes, laughs) Oh...

JOE

What?

MARTY

I'm named for martini.

JOE

You're kidding?

MARTY

Ma was never going to have more kids. Then martinis.

JOE

How many kids did she have?

Three. MARTY

Well, that's not so many. JOE

It wasn't how many was the problem. MARTY

What was the problem? JOE

She and Pa were cousins. MARTY

Ouch. JOE

And Pa's parents were cousins. MARTY

Double ouch. JOE

Ma wanted to quit having babies when my brother had no chin, he was first, but then she had Paddy. MARTY

Patty, short for Patricia? JOE

No. Paddy. Irish. MARTY

Are you Irish? JOE

Just Paddy is Irish. MARTY

How'd that happen? JOE

It's Ma's secret. MARTY

Hey, I can keep a secret. JOE

I hate a secret. MARTY

Let me take it off your hands. JOE

Can't! MARTY

Where's your mother? I'm calling her up. JOE

Dead. MARTY

I'm calling her anyway. JOE

(Marty laughs, drinks)

Hey, if she's dead, you can tell. JOE

I promised. MARTY

Where's Paddy? I'm gonna call Paddy. JOE

(whispers) She doesn't know. MARTY

Oh. Does your brother know? (Marty shakes her head) Where's your brother? JOE

Dead. MARTY

God, bad luck. What happened? JOE

He crashed a car. After Pa shot Ma. MARTY

(Brief pause)

JOE

I think I'll have another drink.

(Joe gets another.)

JOE

So it's just you and Paddy.

MARTY

(puts her hands around her chin) Perfect Paddy.

JOE

Hey, listen, I know about your face. Harold told me. You have a very nice face.

MARTY

Beautiful?

JOE

Nice. Really nice.

MARTY

Paddy used to do this. (Marty takes her scarf and covers her mouth and chin so that only her eyes show.) "You're an Arabian Princess, Marty. A beautiful princess." One Halloween, she took me to a dance. She fixed me up like a harem girl so you couldn't see my chin. A boy fell in love with me. We went in the chinaberry bushes. He pulled off my scarves, but it was so dark he couldn't see my face. Then I grabbed my clothes and Paddy drove us back to Hammer.

JOE

Why did she do that?

MARTY

That's where we lived.

JOE

No...why did she set you up with that guy?

MARTY

I wanted a boyfriend. She fixed it.

JOE

You wanted a boyfriend that lasted one night?

MARTY

It lasted more than one night- I still remember it.

JOE

(brief pause) ...What happened to your father? After he shot your mother?

MARTY

He shot himself. He shot the dog. He shot the truck. He used to get really mad.

JOE

Well, I guess so, if he shot the truck.

(Marty laughs.)

MARTY

He had a temper. So did Joe. Me and Ma were calm.

JOE

Joe who?

MARTY

Joe, my brother Joe.

JOE

Joe! Your brother was a Joe. Let's drink to Joe.

MARTY

To Joe.

JOE

Where did you grow up?

MARTY

...Did I say anything I shouldn't say?

JOE

No. I'll tell you if you do.

MARTY

Tell me if I say anything I shouldn't say.

JOE

I will. Where did you grow up? (Brief pause) That's not anything you shouldn't say.

MARTY

We lived in Virginia. Outside of Hammer.

(Joe gets an Atlas from Harold's book shelf, looks up Hammer.)

JOE

Is this it? (Atlas)

MARTY

Oh yeah, (pointing) there. There's the mountain. There's where Joe died. Right here, over the line, that's where Ma used to go for her parties.

JOE

Your mother had parties?

MARTY

Yep. Pop had parties in Hammer. Ma went to the Irish bar in Cumberland. (Brief pause) That's not anything I shouldn't say?

JOE

No.

MARTY

Will you have a party with me?

JOE

(oops)... This is a kind of a party. We're having a party now.

MARTY

I'm experienced.

JOE

So you said.

MARTY

I have my own apartment.

JOE

You don't live with Paddy?

MARTY

Who?

JOE

Paddy, The Irish Setter.

MARTY

I never live with her. I'm on my own.

JOE

What's Paddy like?

MARTY

She's perfect. Except she has a temper. But it's just an Irish temper-- not like Pa. Paddy used to sing me a song when Pa would start up on Ma, a song about the wind.

JOE

So Paddy's a singer.

MARTY

Uh huh. And beautiful. She had a chin all along, only me and Joe didn't. She didn't look like us at all except for this. (Touches mole on lip) She had this, too, like me and Ma. And she had a chin.

(Brief pause, he touches his lip where he touched it regarding Julia's scar.)

JOE

She has a mole?

MARTY

"So God can find us." (Panic) Oh, no. What if he can't find her?

JOE

Hey, he'll find her. Hey, it's alright. He'll find her.

MARTY

Oh. I feel bad.

JOE

What? Is it Paddy?

MARTY

What if he can't find her?

JOE

Come on, Marty, you're okay. Take a deep breath.

MARTY

I don't have to, I don't get mad. Just Patty and Pa get mad.

Scene 3. A screening room. Wednesday. Joe is watching a video without the sound. Harold enters.

HAROLD

I want to talk to you-

Shh.

JOE

(Watches) ...Where's the sound?

HAROLD

I'm looking at the picture.

JOE

What is it?

HAROLD

An old Julia story. A hit-and-run accident.

JOE

What's that?

HAROLD

The dead kid's bedroom.

JOE

God. Depressing.

HAROLD

Just wait. Look at this.

JOE

Who's that?

HAROLD

His baby sister. Playing in his shoes.

JOE

(brief pause) The beat goes on.

HAROLD

Yes.

JOE

That's why she gets the big bucks.

HAROLD

Marty?

JOE

No, not Marty! Julia-

HAROLD

JOE

Oh Harold, I think you have a very mediocre reporter with a great camera person.

HAROLD

(snorts) Am I to bow to this exalted opinion?

JOE

Look at the evidence.

HAROLD

(brief pause, has had it) It's funny about time, Joe. It's real. It passes. I am a mature man.

JOE

...So?

HAROLD

I am not in awe of you.

JOE

What-?

HAROLD

You are not always right. You do not always know the answer. You can be as mistaken as anybody.

JOE

What? What are you talking about?

HAROLD

Julia is gay! Fully irrevocably gay.

JOE

No.

HAROLD

She's pulled one over on you, Joe. She wants something from you and when she wants something it's impending blow jobs in the mail room, but once she gets what she wants you better pull up your pants because there is nothing forthcoming from Julia who is saving it all for her retarded little sex toy.

JOE

Marty isn't a sex toy, she isn't retarded, and Julia isn't gay.

HAROLD

Then who is she fucking?

Eddie.

JOE

(shock) ...Editing Eddie?

HAROLD

Paul.

JOE

Paul the Cameraman?

HAROLD

Steve.

JOE

She can't be fucking all three of them.

HAROLD

She's the queen of the one-night stand.

JOE

Then why isn't she fucking me?

HAROLD

Fuck if I know.

JOE

You're making this up.

HAROLD

No.

JOE

She fucked Eddie and not me? Bitch.

(pause, Harold becomes a little giddy, maniacal.)

HAROLD

How's your tree story? Your tree story for sweeps week?

JOE

It's fabulous.

HAROLD

We can't use it.

JOE

...What?

HAROLD

We simply can't. You see, there's this other story, this Julia story-

JOE

What Julia story?

HAROLD

I really don't want to give her sweeps, Joe- but unfortunately I have no choice.

JOE

You gave me sweeps. I have sweeps.

HAROLD

Ain't life a bitch.

JOE

I got fan mail.

HAROLD

From the fringes.

JOE

Harold- ...speak to me in longer sentences.

HAROLD

Well, it's simple, Joe. She has a story, she says it's sensational, if it is, she gets sweeps week. Unless you can get something that will blow her story out of the water. Can you get something?

JOE

I...I have something.

HAROLD

Is it good, is it human, is it sensational?

JOE

It's human.

HAROLD

Tell me.

JOE

I can't. I need to get some facts.

HAROLD

Get them. Save me, Joe. Don't make me have to give sweeps to that woman.

JOE

... I need to go out of town.

HAROLD

Great, go, verify, fact check. Take a camera- hell, take Marty.

JOE

No. I'll get somebody down there.

Scene 4. Outside of Robert's SRO. Wednesday night. Julia, in her ugly face, and Marty with her purse camera.

MARTY

It isn't funny.

JULIA

Oh come on, Marty. How often do I get to perform a marriage ceremony in rhyme.

MARTY

I don't see how this will help posterity.

JULIA

Well it will, and besides it made him happy. He's no longer living in sin with his sex doll.

MARTY

He looked nice in the tuxedo.

JULIA

See. 'Wobut got to wea' a tuxedo and kiss da bwide.

MARTY

Don't be mean.

JULIA

Give me the tapes.

MARTY

I can put them in the archive.

JULIA
I'll do it.

MARTY
What section?

JULIA
Way deep in the back. You got the kiss this time, yes?

MARTY
I got it. He saw you laughing.

JULIA
...Did you get a full-length shot of the bridal gown?

MARTY
I said I got it.

JULIA
Good.

MARTY
It was a nice gown.

JULIA
(fed up) Yeah, it was just about your size, too. Maybe you want to go back and sneak into Robert's bed. If you're really still, he won't know the difference.

MARTY
Stop it.

JULIA
Marty and Wobut sitting in a tree, K I S S I N G.

MARTY
I don't need Robert. I have Joe. Joe thinks I have a beautiful face.

JULIA
Joe is not interested in you. He's just trying to find out about me.

MARTY
He doesn't want to know anything about you.

JULIA

He wants my job. He'll do what it takes to get it. If it takes humiliating me, he'll do it.

MARTY

How can he humiliate you?

JULIA

If he knows about us.

MARTY

How?

JULIA

(blurts) Because when your sister is a halfwit, it's humiliating!

MARTY

(brief pause, then to get even) Your face is turning red.

JULIA

...Shit.

MARTY

Why don't you just shoot me, Paddy.

JULIA

Shut up shut up--

MARTY

Maybe I didn't have a chin, but at least I didn't shoot anybody.

JULIA

(trying to contain her temper, deep breaths) I didn't shoot anybody, I never shot anybody.

MARTY

But you will. You're just like Pa. Maybe you don't look like him, but you're crazy angry, just like he was.

JULIA

I'm telling you--

MARTY

You better take some breaths before you explode.

JULIA

(breathes) I am not like him. I was never like him. I am not...

Scene 5. Harold on the couch. Thursday.

HAROLD

(giggles) It's a recurring dream. More of a short subject to the real dream. Cartoon-like. I'm this guy in the middle of this cartoon. I have this pet, and the pet, which I keep in a pen, is a tv, a tv that growls. And bites. I try to muzzle it, but it bites off a finger. And eats it. But this is a cartoon, not to mention a dream, so I don't feel any pain, and as a matter of fact, I don't really miss it because it's just a finger. (Growing anxiety) And I love my pet, and I don't want to muzzle him, so I laugh it off. And soon he's biting off other bits, and the dream-cartoon-me is walking around with daylight showing through all of the holes that my pet is leaving. And in the dream- while the dream is happening- the cartoon me thinks that it's funny. It's funny and I love my pet. So it's not really an upsetting dream- the only upsetting thing is how I don't want to go to sleep anymore. This is not a scary dream. But I'm terrified to go to sleep. I need something- a sleeping, no-dreaming something.

Scene 6. Harold's office. The following Wednesday evening. Julia and Harold.

JULIA

Did you look at the footage?

HAROLD

It's very unique.

JULIA

It's fabulous.

HAROLD

Did Eddie shoot it?

JULIA

No, why would Eddie shoot it?

HAROLD

Or Paul? Or Steve?

JULIA

Marty shot it. Come on, Harold, it's amazing, admit it.

HAROLD

Sure, but what's the angle? Beyond a monumentally voyeuristic invasion of privacy?

JULIA

(pitch) We are saving a soul. A lost soul lifted out of the mire.

HAROLD

How are we doing that?

JULIA

(pitch) This man has built a solitary life based on being a hideous object of derision and disgust. Nobody has ever said, I care, to this man. We will be there with care and affection.

(Threat) I'm sure that's what the boys upstairs will say.

HAROLD

In what form is this care and affection?

JULIA

In the form of the fund we establish for him. In the form of the support from the thousands of guilty New Yorkers who are so glad they're not Robert. (Brief pause) Come on, admit it, it's great.

HAROLD

Can you get your plastic surgeon on it?

JULIA

I don't have a plastic surgeon, who said I have a plastic surgeon?

HAROLD

The guy who fixed Marty's chin.

JULIA

Ask Marty. He's her plastic surgeon.

HAROLD

(brief pause) Alright, Julia, if somehow, someone could somehow get the surgeon, get the surgeon interested in doing a public service, to help some deformed slob sleeping with sex dolls, it might be a story that we can air.

JULIA

I'll get the surgeon. It's going to be a great feature, Harold.

HAROLD

If we run it.

JULIA

Admit it, you've never seen anything like it.

HAROLD

Yes, and there may be a good reason for that.

JULIA

Don't worry; it will land within our ethical limits.

HAROLD

They aren't limits, they're standards.

JULIA

So I start promos on Monday?

HAROLD

Maybe.

JULIA

What do you mean maybe?

HAROLD

Joe may come back from Virginia with a better story.

JULIA

(panic) What's in Virginia? There's no story in Virginia.

HAROLD

A story I'd have to run instead.

JULIA

What the fuck's in Virginia?!

HAROLD

(happy at how upset she is) If he's got something, I'd have to run it.

JULIA

We don't need it. We don't need something from Virginia. Not in New York City.

Scene 7. A screening room, Sunday night. Joe watching video, when Julia walks in.

FEMALE VOICE ON VIDEO

(VO, Virginia mountain accent) Yeah, I knew them- lived right next door, a wild bunch if you ask me, but what can you expect- (from a family like that.)

JULIA

(over) Hi.

JOE

(As he snaps off video with the remote.) Jesus. I didn't think anybody was here.

JULIA

Everybody's here. We work seven days a week in tv.

JOE

Seven nights a week, too?

JULIA

If need be. I wanted to show you something. Get your take on it.

JOE

(rewinding his tape) Oh, great. What is it?

JULIA

Some tree footage. I figure you're the on-staff expert on trees.

JOE

That's terrifying.

JULIA

I know. It's funny how you get a niche. I mean, with you, it makes sense, anything vaguely environmental or "left-of-center," you're the guy. But me, I thought they were going to tag me with the fashion page.

JOE

Because...of what?

JULIA

Because I'm hip and get my hair done and I'm...(shrugs)

JOE

Height weight proportionate?

JULIA

Yeah, I guess that's it. And young.

JOE

You think you're young?

JULIA

You don't think I'm young?

JOE

Oh no, I think so, it's not that, it's that I don't think I'm young, and you're my age...I think.

JULIA

I'm thirty-seven.

JOE

...Nine. ... I mean, aren't you?

JULIA

That's still young.

JOE

I'm forty-three. I think that's ancient.

JULIA

...What were you looking at?

JOE

What?

JULIA

(Indicates video)

JOE

Oh, nothing. (Takes tape out of machine) Where's your tree footage.

JULIA

At my apartment.

(A pause)

(A new pause)

JOE

Oh.

JULIA

Shall we go? (Pause) Are you blushing?

JOE

No.

JULIA

You don't look forty-one now.

JOE

I feel fourteen.

JULIA

You look fourteen.

JOE

I think I'd like to go get a drink.

JULIA

Do you have ID?

JOE

I do.

(Julia takes a flask out of her purse.)

JULIA

Great. I'd hate to be arrested for serving a minor.

JOE

Oh. (He reluctantly takes a swig, surprised.) Oh. Martini.

JULIA

Sorry there's no olive. Your tree-piece was good. Much better than your weather piece.

JOE

Did you mind I used Marty? I sort of just grabbed whoever was standing around.

JULIA

I don't have an exclusive on Marty.

JOE

Great.

JULIA

I prefer Marty. But Eddie's good, Steve's good., Paul.

JOE

(brief pause) Yeah. You and Marty have that special thing, though.

JULIA

You just have to know how to talk to her.

JOE

I know how you helped her out.

JULIA

Listen, all I did was make them hire her so she'd have health insurance to get her face fixed. I had no idea she'd turn out to be a great cameraman. I thought she end up doing some job in the mail room.

JOE

What did you think she'd do in the mail room?!

JULIA

...Sort mail.

JOE

Oh, yeah, what am I thinking? (Beat) She's a sweet kid.

JULIA

She's wonderful. If you don't mind the simplicity. The literalness. The lack of challenge.

JOE

Uh huh. Is it awkward?

JULIA

How do you mean?

JOE

That whole one-way gratitude thing. Can make for resentment.

JULIA

Marty isn't capable of resentment.

JOE

What about you?

JULIA

I don't have anything to be resentful about. Or grateful.

(She kisses him on the mouth.)

JOE

(Shaking his head) Um-

JULIA

(shushing him) Tree-footage, anyone?

(Marty comes in. An awkward moment.)

JULIA
Hi, Marty.

JOE
Hi.

JULIA
Did you want to talk to me?

JOE
Or me?

MARTY
(Points at JULIA) To you. You're in the schedule tomorrow.
(Reads) "Julia-promo, sweeps feature."

JULIA
Yeah, that's why I'm still here.

MARTY
What story?

JULIA
You know I can't say what story. Not in front of somebody.

MARTY
(to Joe) Go out.

JOE
Yeah. I have to go anyway. 'Night. (exits, taking his tape.)

MARTY
A new story? An old story? Did I tape it?

JULIA
An old story. That you didn't tape.

MARTY
What story?

JULIA
A human interest story about a family with septuplets.

MARTY
How many is sep?

Seven.

JULIA

Why didn't I tape it?

MARTY

JULIA
(scuffling) It's before you. It's a story from when they were born and now it's their seventh birthday. Next week. It's a follow up with old footage and new.

MARTY

Who did the new?

JULIA

Eddie. He's sworn to secrecy.

MARTY

You swear it's not the tapes of Robert?

JULIA

It's not the tapes of Robert.

MARTY

Where are they?

JULIA

In the archive. So deep no one will ever find them.

MARTY

(brief pause) Why are you talking to Joe?

JULIA

I can talk to Joe.

MARTY

You hate him.

JULIA

I never said I hated him.

MARTY

He's taking your job.

JULIA

Nobody's taking my job.

MARTY

I think I want to stay at your apartment tonight.

JULIA

You haven't done that in a long time.

MARTY

Yeah, I think I'll be over tonight. I'll be there. I'll come right in with my key.

Scene 8. Harold in his office a few minutes later. Marty enters.

HAROLD

Oh. I was just... (looks past her) Where's...?

MARTY

Where's who?

HAROLD

Where's Julia?

MARTY

Gone.

HAROLD

Oh. You're usually with Julia.

MARTY

I'm on my own.

HAROLD

...What-? ...Do you want something?

MARTY

Oh. (Brief pause) I'll have a whiskey sour.

HAROLD

(confused) A whiskey sour?

MARTY

Do you know how to make one?

HAROLD

Whiskey sour mix.

MARTY

Plus whiskey. Shake.

HAROLD

...Okay... One whiskey sour. Coming up.

(He makes it. They are silent, except for his exasperated sighs. He hands it to her.)

MARTY

It's good. (Brief pause) You want to taste it?

HAROLD

No thank you.

MARTY

No, it's good. Here. (He tastes it) Good?

HAROLD

Yes. (Brief pause, he gets the whole wrong idea) What is going on-? (brief pause) Should I have something to drink, too?

MARTY

Yes, you shouldn't be so dry.

HAROLD

Alright. Let's see.... (brief pause) should I ... lock the door?

MARTY

I don't think anybody will mind.

HAROLD

You don't?

MARTY

No, why should they?

HAROLD

You're right. What business is it of theirs. I'll lock it anyway. (He locks door.)

MARTY

It's really okay. Everybody does it.

HAROLD

...I didn't know that.

MARTY

Yeah, right here.

HAROLD
Good God. You?

MARTY
Yep.

HAROLD
Who do you do it with?

MARTY
...I wouldn't want to get somebody in trouble.

HAROLD
Oh! Right. We wouldn't want to go talking about this. To others. We truly want to keep this to ourselves. ... Are we capable of that?

MARTY
Of what?

HAROLD
Are we capable of keeping a secret?

MARTY
A secret?

HAROLD
Yes, can you keep a secret?

MARTY
I keep plenty of secrets.

HAROLD
I knew it! Come tell me a good one.

MARTY
I know a secret about nepotism.

HAROLD
What? Jesus- it was not nepotism.

MARTY
(relieved) No?

HAROLD
Absolutely not. It's- that's ridiculous. Just forget it.

MARTY

Then nobody should get into trouble.

HAROLD

No one will.

MARTY

Or fired.

HAROLD

...You are very cute with your chin.

MARTY

(correcting) Beautiful.

HAROLD

I never noticed. I suppose I keep seeing you as I first saw you. I don't know why I haven't ...you know...talked to you...I've always tried to talk to...(gets excited) God, the two of you, maybe we could go to my summer place. Oh my God, that would be amazing.

MARTY

I want to thank you.

HAROLD

Yes, do it, do it, thank me now. (He leans back for thanks)

MARTY

For my assignments.

HAROLD

Are you kidding? You are above and beyond-- the shot of him french kissing the sex doll is priceless.

MARTY

...You saw that?

HAROLD

Of course I saw it, I'm the boss. God, maybe I should get the tape, it's a real turn on-

MARTY

(sad) I wanted to know if you saw it. I was going to ask.

HAROLD

We can't run 'em before I see 'em.

MARTY

Where is it?

HAROLD

In Eddie's drawer. (Marty starts for the door.) Are you going to get it?

MARTY

I am.

HAROLD

Great. I'll be waiting. Don't forget to come back.

MARTY

Why should I come back?

HAROLD

You haven't ...thanked me.

MARTY

Thanks, Harold. (Exits)

Scene 9. A screening room adjacent to the taping studio. Monday evening. Harold, Joe, in suit and tie, enters with a tape.

HAROLD

Where have you been?

JOE

I just finished editing.

HAROLD

Let me see it.

JOE

There isn't time. Just yank her and I'll go on. Look, I'm wearing a tie.

HAROLD

Tell me what it is.

JOE

She's on in three minutes.

HAROLD

We are fast and we are flexible, but you have to tell me.

JOE
Human interest. A deep dark secret. Of a minor celebrity.

HAROLD
Is it news worthy?

JOE
It's uh genetics and uh murder. And plastic surgery!

HAROLD
And it's true?

JOE
It's true.

(Julia enters dressed for the camera. She is holding empty cassette boxes.)

JULIA
(to Joe) Did you take my tape?

JOE
What are you talking about?

JULIA
My tape is gone.

HAROLD
Where is it?

JULIA
Ask him.

JOE
I didn't take her tape.

HAROLD
(elated) Well, Julia has no tape. Joe wins by default. Sorry, Julia. Joe, come on, you're it. (Takes the tape.)

JULIA
(to Joe) Is this how you win? By theft?

JOE
I didn't take your tape!

JULIA
You're going to put a thief on the air?

HAROLD

I'll put anybody with tape on the air.

JULIA

You can't do this.

HAROLD

Is it cued up?

JULIA

I won't let you do this.

HAROLD

You can't stop me.

JULIA

No! (She violently grabs the tape.) This is my story.

HAROLD

The Robert saga is nothing without tape--

JOE

That's mine.

HAROLD

Give it here, Julia, be a good girl.

JULIA

(calm, resolved) The story of your dreams. (Exits)

HAROLD

Come back here. You can't-- Shit, what's she doing? Shit.

(Julia speaks directly to the camera. Joe and Harold watch on tv monitor.)

JULIA

Good evening. Tonight we deviate slightly from our usual format to bring you a special story. A personal story. A week from today Tonight Live is going to begin a special series. It is the story of one person's struggle against fear...and shame. A child born in poverty, the middle of three children whose two siblings were both horribly deformed and retarded--

(Marty enters with the Robert tapes. She joins Joe and Harold as they watch.)

HAROLD

What's she talking about?

MARTY

I'm not horribly retarded.

HAROLD

What-?

JULIA

This child, this girl, grew up fearing that some day her own seeming normalcy would be questioned or even proven to be a lie. She lived with the constant fear that she would exhibit signs of her father's violent insanity. As a teenager she fled her circumstances, reinvented the story of her past, and lived in fear of discovery. This story is not a story to me, because I was that child. I risk what I always feared, the scorn, ridicule of my sophisticated life, because I have come to realize that only by revealing my story can it be of possible help to those in similar circumstances.

(Julia glances at the other three and exits.)

HAROLD

Jesus. Well. I guess you couldn't have beaten that.

JOE

I could have tied it.

Scene 10. Julia at office packing a box. Marty enters. Friday. On the tv, Julia's voice: "I never knew what was inside me waiting to come out at any moment. To have to look into Marty's face—"

MARTY

(Marty clicks off the tv. Brief pause) What are you doing?

JULIA

Packing. We're moving up, Marty. You should pack before they padlock your desk.

MARTY

I don't have a desk.

JULIA

Yeah, I don't need half this crap. I should just leave it behind. I haven't seen you all week?

MARTY
You haven't been here.

JULIA
I've been doing appearances. Have you been watching?

MARTY
I don't watch tv.

JULIA
Everybody says I'm brave.

MARTY
I didn't hear brave.

JULIA
Do you know how many calls came in?

MARTY
Forty-three. And two thousand.

JULIA
But only one matters.

MARTY
Which one?

JULIA
The Network.

MARTY
They decided?

JULIA
They decided. You are looking at the newest, hottest Network anchor.

MARTY
(loaded) Are you going to put Robert on the Network?

JULIA
We don't need Robert. They're using our story. With me to introduce it.

MARTY
Am I in it?

JULIA
Of course you're in it.

MARTY

Is my chin in it?

JULIA

Yes, and the surgeon. How I arranged for your chin to get fixed.

MARTY

So it wouldn't embarrass you to be seen with it.

JULIA

Come on, Marty. This is good. This is what we wanted. It's going to be great. They'll probably want you to get some more training. They're very high tech.

MARTY

I'm not going.

JULIA

Yes you are. I told them they had to take you.

MARTY

Aren't you afraid of nepotism?!

JULIA

Marty, come on. You can't stay here. Harold's not going to keep you without me.

MARTY

I quit Harold. I'm freelance.

JULIA

You have to come with me- you're my camera.

MARTY

You lied-

JULIA

It was nepotism- I was really scared they'd fire us.

MARTY

I didn't even mean that lie, but that was a lie, too, the nepotism lie. I meant the lie about in a hundred years.

JULIA

I got us the network, didn't I?

MARTY

You were always going to put Robert on tv.

JULIA

(brief pause) What are you going to do? You have to have a job.

MARTY

I'll get one.

JULIA

Nobody's going to hire you.

MARTY

They will so.

JULIA

You're unemployable without me.

MARTY

(to hurt her) ...I don't want to be around you. It's too dangerous.

JULIA

It's not dangerous.

MARTY

You're just like Pa.

JULIA

I'm nothing like Pa.

MARTY

Angry mad person loses his temper and shoots people. Better take some deep breaths before you shoot somebody, Paddy.

JULIA

(breathes deeply) Nothing...I am nothing like him... I can control...

MARTY

Goodbye, Julia.

JULIA

Don't...don't leave-

MARTY

Bye, bye bye.

Scene 11. Immediately following, the hallway. Marty and Joe. Joe carrying a box.

Hey, there you are. JOE

What's in the box? MARTY

I'm leaving. JOE

I'm leaving, they didn't give me a box. MARTY

For my stuff. JOE

Everybody's leaving. MARTY

Did Julia get fired, too? JOE

You got fired? MARTY

Well...yeah. Didn't you? JOE

I quit. MARTY

Julia? JOE

Network. MARTY

Oh. (Pause) Uh. Did you tell her? JOE

Did I tell her what? MARTY

Did you tell her she's Irish? JOE

Why should I tell her that? MARTY

JOE

I just wondered if you had.

MARTY

She's a reporter. Let her find out herself.

JOE

...We could use it. It's a piece of the puzzle that the person at the center of the puzzle doesn't have.

Marty

What puzzle?

JOE

Her whole theme collapses- "I live in terror of committing the violent acts of my father." He isn't her father. Without that little connection, her story drifts from the sensational into the pathetic. A pathetic little secret.

MARTY

...It's Ma's secret.

JOE

We could make it look like Julia rigged the whole thing. To get the spotlight.

MARTY

...I have to go.

JOE

What- where?

MARTY

Away.

JOE

Let me pitch us as a team. To channel three.

MARTY

No- no.

JOE

Why not?

MARTY

I'm getting out of the tv business.

JOE

You don't have to. You can be my partner. I'll front for us. I can do this, Marty, I can do it, I know I can.

MARTY

Do what?

JOE

The job. I can do the job.

Marty

I can't.

JOE

What are you going to do? You're a cameraman. That's what you are.

MARTY

Movies. Or...weddings...maybe.

JOE

You're really helping the world a lot by shooting a wedding.

(Pause)

MARTY

Bye, Joe.

JOE

Well, can I-?

MARTY

Bye. Bye bye. (exits.)

Scene 12. Harold on the couch.

HAROLD

(giddy) I accept the truth-- embrace it, hug it tight to my breast- "Life sucks, human beings are vile vile vile." No more contradictions, no more wondering if some higher motivation is inside me or them or them-- there's nothing higher. (Beat) It's good they quit- and Joe! I fired him because I can. Wheeee, a brand new start. Like in college when I'd break up with a girl and realize I could start over with one who didn't know me yet. Reinvent myself. Now I have a chance to let this new me, this uncontradicted me, have full reign- free to start over with a whole new batch. Yes, I feel very strong now. (Continued)

But there are times, times when I get a little twinge of something, I don't know what to call it...conscience. A residual twinge. And I mustn't get that. We must keep any feelings like that far far away. Is there something for that? Can you give me something to keep the twinges far far away?

(As his light begins to fade, Marty's light goes on in a diner in Brooklyn. She has Robert's tapes.)

MARTY

Hi. Hi, Robert. How you doing? These are for you. (Tapes)
They're all about your plight. Plight. P plus light. Plight. I looked it up. I came to give you these, but I also want to tell you a story. It's a secret true story about a girl with no chin. Her plight! Okay? (fast fade to black as) In a valley by a mountain in Virginia in America, two little girls and one little boy lived with their Ma and Pa in a house behind the road...

End.