

SKIN-DEEP IN TINSELTOWN

By

Wayne Milford Assam

Based on the novel

"Skin-Deep in Tinseltown"

By Wayne Milford Assam

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Ph: +27 822 18 3290
Email: waynemilfordassam@gmail.com

FADE IN:

INT. - KASSANDRA COOPER'S BEDROOM - KASSANDRA'S MANSION -
BEL AIR - SUNRISE

A LADY-LIKE SNORING ruffles the tranquility of the extravagantly opulent space.

Draped with mosquito netting, and looming ominously out of the semi-darkness, is a regal four-poster bed. Its OCCUPANT (KASSANDRA-FAY COOPER, late 30s) is dimly visible.

In her sleep, she begins to make vicious chopping motions, accompanied by unintelligible angry words, in a Kentucky accent.

On the single bedside table, the ALARM of a \$100,000 Brikk Lux iPhone XS Max Ingot BUZZES annoyingly.

The chopping ceases. A manicured feminine hand seeks a way through the netting. Presses the snooze button. Retreats.

Silence.

Wall-mounted on one side of the bed are a grid of Venetian masks: some gilded, some with stuck-out tongues. Between the open french windows of the juliette balcony, through gaps in the curtains of red velvet, the sun reaches in. Its touch awakens the masks to sinister mockery.

The curtains breathe, and the the investigating sun reaches down below the masks, to a wall-mounted mouth of shark's teeth, which begin to glint ominously.

The sun reaches even further down, to a pair of crossed misericorde knives, which flash a coded message.

At last, the silence is broken. First by a YAWN: feminine, drawn-out, almost lamenting, and utterly bored.

Then by the WHINE OF A MOSQUITO. And then by the SOUND OF TWO HANDS CLAPPING together.

Rolling over, KASSANDRA sighs with contentment...

Once again, the LADY-LIKE SNORING ruffles the tranquility.

INT. - SARAH-KAY RIDDLE'S BEDROOM - SARAH-KAY'S APARTMENT -
VENICE - LA - MOMENTS LATER

SARAH-KAY (mid-20s) wakes up under her ocean-and-dolphin-themed blanket, and sighs.

On the left bedside table, beside an ancient Blackberry Bold 9900, a Kentucky-themed ALARM CLOCK BUZZES needlessly.

SARAH-KAY dives under the blanket, and rolls over.

INT. - MURRAY ZELIGMAN'S BEDROOM - MURRAY'S HOUSE - VENICE -
LA - MOMENTS LATER

From the mantelpiece, beside a signed photo of Dan Aykroyd, the skull of an empty Crystal Head vodka bottle looks on.

Through a gap in the curtains, sunlight reaches in and caresses the balding crown of a man lying face-down, fully clothed, and cruciform on a brass bed. One hand still clutches an empty vodka glass.

MURRAY (late 40s) wakes up unwillingly. Swiveling his head, he glances sourly at the clear blue sky, then turns toward the right-hand bedside table.

There, facing him, are a Mont Blanc fountain pen set upon an open, blank-paged Moleskin notebook. MURRAY sighs, and guiltily turns the other way.

His hand still clutches the empty vodka glass.

EXT. - PARKING AREA - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR -
MORNING

Kassandra's needle-thin PUBLICIST (KITTY KRAKEN, 30s, beak-like nose, big eyes, iridescent dress) gets out of her car.

Grimacing, she clutches briefly at her stomach, and relaxes.

Above her, at a lace-curtained window, a small chink briefly opens up.

INT. - ENTRANCE HALL - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - A
SHORT WHILE LATER

Hastening down along the great staircase of Carrara marble are the chubby legs of Kassandra's AGENT (LEDA PILATE, 40s, black dress with horizontal blue bands).

The doorbell rings, then her smartphone. LEDA answers on the go. Her accent is English (middle-class).

LEDA

Leda Pilate...

(wincing)

Um don't worry, we're getting her
ready...! Talk later. Kitty's here!

LEDA rings off. The doorbell rings again.

Emerging from the kitchen, the HOUSEKEEPER (MARÍA) vents a long-suffering sigh.

LEDA

I've got it, María! It's only
Kitty!

MARÍA
(to herself; in Chipilo
Venetian)
Oh all right then, suit yourself.

MARÍA goes back. LEDA opens the door. KITTY enters,
clutching at her stomach. LEDA looks on with mild concern.

KITTY
(would-be-blasé)
Just a few butterflies, Leda dear.
These press conferences always...
(confidentially)
How...does she...look?!

LEDA
(ominously)
Come and see for yourself!

INT. - GRAND STAIRCASE - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - A
FEW MOMENTS LATER

The facing wall along the entire length of the sweeping
staircase is covered with photographs:

A) KASSANDRA COOPER as a beautiful, slim young gymnast; as a
highly competitive young swimmer; as a chillingly ambitious
Hollywood starlet; and as a cynical but still
youthful-looking Hollywood A-lister.

B) Kassandra's THREE EX-HUSBANDS:

1) All-American or at any rate All-African-American football
hero BUTCH LICKMAN (late 20s - as virile, handsome, and
straight-looking as Michelangelo's David).

2) Greek-American film director KOSTAS PAPPAKOSTAS (50s,
tall, lean, refined, aloof, hypersensitive; clings to a
tear-stained Maltese dog).

3) Roman-Venetian business tycoon, His Serene Highness
PRINCE RAFFAELE LORCA DE' LORENZINI - 'Lello' to family and
friends (50s, commanding, refined but rakish, white
eye-patch, short black hair greying at the sides; serenely
seated at his desk in his tastefully sumptuous office at
Sovereign Enterprises Plc., Malta).

Ignoring the photographs, LEDA and KITTY pensively climb the
stairs. KITTY's stomach murmurs discreetly.

INT. - BOUDOIR - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - MOMENTS
LATER

Rococo setting. To one side, on a counter, are a row of
mannequin heads wearing wigs in various hair colors, and
wraparound designer sunglasses.

In a Turkish terry bathrobe and slippers, with her hair in
rollers, KASSANDRA COOPER sits before a backstage mirror,

applying her face cream . Every now and then she takes a ladylike drag from a cigarette in an amber cigarette holder. The vintage ashtray is made of solid silver.

Entering, LEDA and KITTY exchange nervous glances. Because KASSANDRA looks distinctly out of shape. Moreover, her smoking and late-night partying are beginning to catch up with her. KITTY's stomach rumbles indiscreetly.

KITTY

(upper-class English
accent)

Um hi, Kass. Um get enough sleep?!

KASSANDRA

(California accent;
blasé)

Oh it's just a bit of...sleep
inertia. Besides, I always seem to
...sleep with...one eye open.

MARÍA enters with coffee and croissants on a silver tray. She glances at KASSANDRA, still applying her cream before the mirror. MARÍA sighs, and begins pouring and serving.

MARÍA

Principessa... Miss Leda... Miss
Kitty... Oh Principessa, if only
they could discover...if they could
discover...discover a skin cream
that actually delivers on its -!

KASSANDRA has turned her trademark unnerving stare upon MARÍA, who, suddenly self-conscious, swallows hard, and makes herself scarce.

KITTY and LEDA exchange a glance. Then they all tuck in.

INT. - RECEPTION - SOVEREIGN ENTERPRISES - VALLETTA - MALTA
- AFTERNOON

A Baroque palazzo of Maltese limestone has been converted into the sumptuous corporate Headquarters of Sovereign Enterprises, Plc.

The wall facing the entrance to Reception bears a photograph of the group CEO and Chairman: PRINCE RAFFAELE. Beneath the photograph is the Prince's heraldic coronet, which is bejeweled and surmounted by four pearls between five strawberry leaves.

At her desk is the Prince's voluptuously stylish, snooty, wearily disdainful PA (QUEENIE, 40s, retroussé nose, manicure). Yawning, she glances up at the clock: 4.36 pm. She frowns, yawns again, and sighs. Looking around for a distraction, she finds yesterday's Sunday Times of Malta.

Flipping idly through the society pages, QUEENIE winces at the sight of a photograph captioned: "ALL SMILES AT THE

PRESIDENT'S GRAND BALL ARE: PRINCE RAFFAELE LORCA DE' LORENZINI, WITH DIVINE YOUNG MODEL THE BARONESSINA FLAVIA BALENOTTI, AND THE MARQUIS & MARCHIONESS OF ÓRCADI".

Fuming, QUEENIE removes a vicious pair of scissors from a desk drawer, and gleefully starts cutting FLAVIA out of the picture.

The phone rings. Balancing the receiver like a violin between ear and shoulder, she continues cutting.

QUEENIE

Sovereign Enterprises... Discovery, sir, what discovery...?! Oh don't be absurd...! Oh on the contrary, sir, I do understand. But alas, His Highness is UN-available... His Highness is with a VIC... Very Important Client... Oh I'm sure you are, sir. But you see, a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire is NOT someone we just "get on the goddamn line"! So thank you, and good day!

QUEENIE rings off as if the receiver were something unclean. Then, checking that the coast is clear, she finishes "separating" FLAVIA from the PRINCE, whom she reverently adds to a large scrapbook, wholly dedicated to him. FLAVIA, however, she crumples up with disdain, and consigns to the trash.

INT. - PRINCE RAFFAELE'S OFFICE - SOVEREIGN ENTERPRISES - VALLETTA - MALTA - MOMENTS LATER

Upon their silver tray, the two china cups of coffee and the plate of snacks have not even been touched.

At an extravagantly carved Victorian desk of Brazilian rosewood is the VERY IMPORTANT CLIENT (beak-like nose, large bald head, iridescent suit). In very ill humor, he starts putting away some papers into a designer briefcase.

Opposite him, PRINCE RAFFAELE - mortified, indignant, and disconsolate - slowly shakes his head.

PRINCE RAFFAELE

But how can Silvia DO this to us?! Her world-shaking discovery would not even have been possible without our funding! After all, even scientific genius like hers is -!

VERY IMPORTANT CLIENT

(rising abruptly)

Lello, it's quite simple. Either you make Dr. Delfini see reason...

(sinister smile)

Or... You catch my drift... Nothing personal against your cousin.

The VIC goes out, with a curt though not unfriendly nod.

Sighing, the PRINCE slowly leans back in his high leather chair. He considers. He bites his lip.

Checking his gold Patek Philippe "World Time" wristwatch, he rings for QUEENIE. Soundlessly, she enters at once.

QUEENIE

Your Highness?

PRINCE RAFFAELE

Get Venice on the line, would you, Queenie. The palazzo...

(frowning)

And after that, the...Princess...
In Bel Air.

QUEENIE

Your Highness.

Wincing, her mind racing, QUEENIE bows and leaves.

INT. - MURRAY'S BEDROOM - MURRAY'S HOUSE - VENICE - LA - MORNING

The early-1900s house - spacious and beautifully restored - lies just behind Ocean Front Walk.

Like a disappointed father, a poster of DANTE ALIGHIERI frowns down upon MURRAY from the wall above his head.

MURRAY

(to Dante; sheepishly;
plummy English accent)

Buon giorno, professore!

Sighing, and slowly sitting up, he takes care to avoid looking at the blank-paged notebook on the right bedside table.

On the left bedside table is a photo of a thin, pretty, IDEALISTIC YOUNG WOMAN - his daughter BEA (20). He looks at her sadly for a few moments, then slowly turns away.

INT. - BOUDOIR - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - MORNING

KASSANDRA is still trying to work magic with her face cream. Looking on, KITTY twists her mouth to one side. She shoots a pensive glance at LEDA, then bites the bullet.

KITTY

Um Kass, I was um thinking? Of setting up a meeting? With Murray Zeligman? The writer? He lives round the corner? In Venice?

KASSANDRA can't quite see the point. But she plays along.

KASSANDRA

Zeligman... Zeligman... Ah yes.
Pulitzer Prize... For that ...
play... "If The ... Shoe Fits"?

KITTY

"Where The Shoe Pinches".

KASSANDRA

Ah.

LEDA

(venomously)

They say he drinks like a fish!

KASSANDRA

(amused)

After winning a Pulitzer Prize?

KITTY

(glaring at Leda)

Oh people exaggerate! In fact,

(studiedly casual)

even as we speak, he's shopping
round his new script. So if this
rom-com thing doesn't...pan out...

KASSANDRA fixes KITTY with her trademark unnerving stare.

KASSANDRA

And just why wouldn't it?

KITTY's stomach burbles. Alarmed, she clutches at it.

KITTY

Um...no...reason! I merely...

(glancing at the door)

Um perhaps I should use your... Or

perhaps the one on the landing...

(gripping her stomach)

Or in fact, perhaps one downstairs!

KITTY's stomach gurgles obscenely. Grimacing, with her arms trailing behind her, she makes an indecorous exit.

Nonchalantly, LEDA starts removing Kassandra's rollers.

LEDA

No wonder she's so thin. In at one
end, and straight out the other!

KASSANDRA

Hmm. As for me, I take simply ages
to digest my food! Which reminds
me. My teeth - are they clean?

KASSANDRA opens her jaws. Undaunted, LEDA PILATE peers in.

EXT. - OUT AT SEA - SUNRISE - DREAM

Dressed in dolphin-patterned pajamas and slippers, SARAH-KAY surfs blissfully upon an idyllic white-and-blue ocean.

Surging into sight from unfathomable depths, a MEGALODON SHARK opens its monstrous jaws to envelop her.

INT. - SARAH-KAY'S BEDROOM - SARAH-KAY'S APARTMENT - VENICE
- LA - MOMENTS LATER (MORNING)

Supine in bed, SARAH-KAY wakes up with a start. Slowly recovering her composure, she glances to her right.

On the facing bedside table, in a silver frame, is a photograph of a WHITE-HAIRED MAN (DOLPHY, late 30s). White hair is also visible on his chest above the V of his checkered shirt. Although his noble features are prematurely aged and painfully thin, his shoulders are broad and strong.

SARAH-KAY gives him a long, loving, sorrow-filled smile. Sighing, she raises herself to a half-sitting posture.

Facing her from the mantel at the end of the bed is another photo of DOLPHY. Beside him is a calendar, with the 5th OF JULY encircled in black. She quickly turns away.

INTERCUT: INT. - KASSANDRA'S BOUDOIR - BEL AIR - MORNING /
PRINCE RAFFAELE'S OFFICE - VALLETTA - MALTA - AFTERNOON

While LEDA looks on in diplomatic silence, KASSANDRA, adjusting and re-adjusting her girdle in the mirror, tries to find the most flattering angle. But in vain.

Kassandra's Ingot iPhone rings. She glances at the screen, smiles, and answers.

KASSANDRA

(into phone)

Lello! Ciao! How are you, angel?

PRINCE RAFFAELE

(into phone)

Cara, I'll come straight to the point. I need you to host someone. At the - your - palazzo in Venezia.

KASSANDRA

(into phone; guardedly)

Hmm... And just who, pray tell?

PRINCE RAFFAELE

(into phone; pensively)

My cousin. Distant cousin. Italian-Swiss. Dr. Silvia Delfini. As a pharmaceuticals researcher - a genius. As a businesswoman - a maddeningly idealistic populist!

KASSANDRA

(into phone; intrigued)

Hmmm. However, my tenants - am I just supposed to tear up their leases, and throw them out?

PRINCE RAFFAELE

(into phone)

By a strange coincidence, your tenants have all just given a fortnight's notice. Naturally, you will be fully compensated.

KASSANDRA sits up, her mind racing.

PRINCE RAFFAELE

(into phone; urgently)

Cara, you have the ability to read the motivations of people, then get them to move them in the...right direction... Do this?! For me?!

KASSANDRA

(into phone; calculating)

Hmm... Fine. I'll come and play the charming hostess. But not for long.

PRINCE RAFFAELE

(into phone)

Grazie, Kassandra mia carissima! You really are a star! Ciao-ciao!

Pensive, KASSANDRA passes the phone to LEDA, who rings off for her. KASSANDRA glances at her Búlgari "Serpenti" bracelet watch, and grunts. Then, without bothering to cover her mouth, she yawns cavernously.

INT. - LIVING ROOM - SARAH-KAY'S APARTMENT - VENICE - LA - MOMENTS LATER

A surfboard with pilot-fish decals rests against a wall. At the nearby desk, in an alcove functioning as a study, SARAH-KAY sits reading.

Absently and effortlessly, she whistles along with tricky improvised figures from HERBIE HANCOCK's "DOLPHIN DANCE" CD, playing in the bg.

On the wall above her are a posters of Abraham Lincoln and Edgar Cayce, and signed photographs of Muhammad Ali, Lionel Hampton, Loretta Lynn, Billy Ray Cyrus, Barbara Kingsolver, George Clooney, Johnny Depp, and Jennifer Lawrence.

Glancing at her watch, SARAH-KAY rises abruptly, and shuts her book: "An Actress Prepares: Women and 'The Method'" by Rosemary Malague.

INT. - BALLROOM - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - A WHILE LATER

Kassandra Cooper's Press Conference.

Expectant atmosphere. The assembled JOURNALISTS include SPHINX KACHINSKY (50s, "Gertrude-Steinish") and her BUTCH FRIEND (ROZ, 40s).

Snacks and beverages at the back. Among the especially-hired CATERING STAFF is a BIG-HAIRED OBESE WOMAN (mid-50s). She wears a faintly sneering expression.

On the name-tagged participants' table, KASSANDRA COOPER's empty seat at the center is flanked by the already seated KITTY KRAKEN and LEDA PILATE on her left; and on her right, by director KOSTAS PAPPAKOSTAS (holding FIFI, his MALTESE DOG) and by leading man CHICK MANLEY (late 20s, tall, handsome, refined, insecure, straight-looking).

KITTY

(aside to Leda)

Isn't Chick so cute?! I'd give my right arm to...! But then, he must already have dozens of girls!

Greatly surprised at this statement, LEDA glances pityingly at KITTY, but keeps mum.

At last, Ingot iPhone in hand, KASSANDRA makes her entrance. There are GASPS and DISCREET SNIGGERS at her less-than-stellar appearance.

KASSANDRA glances skeptically at the SOUND TECHNICIAN (EDDIE, 20s, surfer dude, Miami Dolphins cap & T-shirt). He gives her a confident thumbs-up. Although still skeptical, she shrugs, and lets it go.

EDDIE's ASSISTANT is ELMER SPHAGNUM (20s, small, slight, nondescript, polite, detached; weirdly obsessed with KASSANDRA; at every free moment, he watches clips on his smartphone of the TV series "Six Feet Under").

KASSANDRA

(into mic)

Thank you all for coming! Welcome!

(clears throat)

I announce my participation - along with Chick Manley and Kostas Pappakostas - in a new romantic comedy: "Leading Men Don't Snore"!

SCATTERED SNIGGERS. Then a slight problem with the mic. But EDDIE soon fixes it. He gives Kassandra another thumbs-up. She sighs at him, then turns wearily to the journalists.

KASSANDRA

Mr...Flybridge.

FLYBRIDGE

(snidely)

Ms. Cooper, for this movie I assume you won't be doing your own stunts!

Among the journalists, a few snide smiles.

KASSANDRA

(icily)

You must mean publicity stunts, Mr. Flybridge.

A few CHUCKLES.

KASSANDRA

(wearily)

Yes, I've a weakness for rich food. And yes, I've put on a few temporary pounds. But as you all know, I started in Hollywood as a stunt woman, and I still design and execute my own stunts! Mr. Hooke.

HOOKE

(studiedly casual)

Ms. Cooper, actors have commented on your unusual physical strength. Would you care to comment on the speculation that you use steroids?

KASSANDRA

(sighing)

Among gymnasts, my strength is not unusual. Besides, only mainstream economists still believe that healthy growth comes from steroid injections...! Mr. Sinker.

SINKER

Ms. Cooper, how guilty do you feel as one of the most visible members of the "One Percent"?!

KASSANDRA

(dazzling smile)

Unlike you, Mr. Sinker, I started from nothing! Must I now be ashamed of all the sacrifices, grind, and sheer perseverance behind my success? Is it now un-American to dare to dream, and to work hard to realize your dreams? Oh and yes, I am part of the 5% who pay 70% of our taxes. Would you call that a "fair share", hmm...? Ms. Pike.

PIKE

Don't bite my head off, Ms. Cooper, but with your love of gas-guzzling supercars, don't you worry about your carbon footprint? And secondly, d'you like being a star?

KASSANDRA

(dazzling smile)

Is breathing the new Original Sin, Ms. Pike? If you expect me to give my...indulgence to this modern-day Inquisition, then don't...hold your breath! Oh and most people are not tough enough to be stars. They would soon suffer from "altitude sickness"! Herr Quastenflosser.

QUASTENFLOSSER

Zey say you first came to LA as a pool shark!

KASSANDRA

(wearily amused)

That old chestnut! If my life lived up to the gossip columns of Sphinx Kachinsky, then I wouldn't need to look for excitement, now would I?

SPHINX and ROZ exchange a wry glance.

KASSANDRA

Ms. Cooder.

COODER

(venomously)

With respect, Ms. Cooper, can you really see yourself as the romantic interest of a Chick Manley?! In the autumn years of your career?!

DEATHLY SILENCE. But KASSANDRA is serene.

KASSANDRA

If that is indeed so, Ms. Cooder, then I shall accommodate myself thereto with grace... Or rise phoenix-like from my own ashes!

COODER

(dazzling smile)

Why not simply relocate to Phoenix?

GASPS. KASSANDRA darkens instantly.

KASSANDRA

(unnerving stare)

Yes... Perhaps I...should...

DEATHLY SILENCE. Sullenly, KASSANDRA SIPS some water.
FLYBRIDGE changes the topic.

FLYBRIDGE

Mr. Pappakostas, your films have
more critical than commercial
success. Wouldn't you be UNDER your
depth, as it were, in a rom-com?!

KOSTAS

(huffily; Greek accent)

Genre is not the point. My film
language is not understood of the
public. My...cinematic idiolect is
Greek to them!

FLYBRIDGE

But you ARE Greek!

LAUGHTER. Huffily, KOSTAS waits for silence.

KOSTAS

All the same, even though dear
Kassandra has, alas, allowed
herself to get a bit, well, fat -

Much too late, KOSTAS covers his mouth. SILENCE. Then a
burst of NERVOUS LAUGHTER. Glowering, KASSANDRA rises.

KASSANDRA

Out...! Now...! ALL OF YOU...! OUT!

Through a concealed door, KASSANDRA melts away.

A SHOCKED SILENCE. One by one, people rise and creep out.
Along the way, a few surreptitiously pocket snacks.

Aghast, uncertain, KITTY and LEDA exchange looks as if to
say: What, us too?!

With cool, sneering irony, the OBESE WOMAN looks on.

INT. - ON A BUS - LA - A SHORT WHILE LATER

The bus is full. SARAH-KAY interrupts her reading of "The
Theater of the Oppressed: Rituals & Masks". Cheerfully, she
gives up her seat to a LIMPING, ELDERLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN
WOMAN, whom everyone else pretended not to see.

INT. - STUDY - MURRAY'S HOUSE - VENICE - LA - A SHORT WHILE
LATER

Books everywhere: Dante, Goethe, Dictionaries, Drama, Film
Theory, Healthy Living, the Holocaust.

From a high shelf, a BUST OF DANTE scowls down.

Below, MURRAY stands bent over his desk, his index finger
hovering over the power button of his iMac. In the glossy

black screen, his wavering features stare back at him.
He frowns, sighs, withdraws the finger, and lowers his head.
Under the scowling DANTE, MURRAY turns tail, and flees.

INT. - LIVING ROOM - MURRAY'S HOUSE - VENICE - LA - A SHORT WHILE LATER

At an open window, MURRAY stands sweating. Magnetically his eyes are drawn toward the drinks cabinet.

Forcibly, he looks away. He frowns at his watch. He glances at his keys on the coffee table, and twists his mouth.

INT. - SOLARIUM - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - LATE MORNING

KASSANDRA, LEDA and KITTY sit in an awkward silence. In the bg., a clock ticks, and a phone rings.

Startled by a buzzing in her handbag, KITTY furtively checks her smartphone. She smiles. Studiedly neutral, she answers.

KITTY
(into phone)
Kitty Kraken... Um not yet... Roger that... I'll um see what I can do.

Footsteps are approaching. KITTY rings off, her expression more studiedly neutral than ever. KASSANDRA is vaguely suspicious, but lets it go.

Avoiding KASSANDRA's gaze, MARÍA enters with coffee.

MARÍA
(in Chipilo Venetian;
confidentially)
Oh Principessa, Mr. Beeniman, of Klondike Bank, he phoned again! Mr. Beeniman says you must please -!

KASSANDRA rolls her eyes. MARÍA swallows hard.

MARÍA
(bowing and leaving)
Principessa.

KITTY exchanges a glance with LEDA, then clears her throat.

KITTY
Um look, Kass, maybe we can still squeeze out of this! Or even just cover it all up in clouds of ink!

KASSANDRA grimaces wearily. They sip in silence. KASSANDRA sets down her cup, rises, and starts to leave.

KASSANDRA

Can't breathe in here...! Might go
and...get a bite to eat...

KITTY's face lights up. But in an instant, she is studiedly neutral again.

KITTY

At, oh, "The A-List"? For example.

KASSANDRA

Hmmm... Yes, why not! Let
yourselves out when you're ready.

KITTY winks at LEDA, who peers back quizzically.

INT. - ACTING WORKSHOP - LA - BEFORE NOON

SARAH-KAY sits distractedly among the PARTICIPANTS. The WORKSHOP LEADER notices her eying her watch.

DRAMA WORKSHOP LEADER

Moving on now from Newspaper
Theater to the theatrical form
called Rituals and Masks. The masks
of behavior people adopt when
acting out the rituals of societal
roles... Um Sarah-Kay, are you...?

SARAH-KAY

(Kentucky accent)

Say what...? Oh, beg pardon...!
Please, go on!

DRAMA WORKSHOP LEADER

Now, as I was saying... Rituals.
Masks. And societal roles...

EXT. - VENICE FISHING PIER - LA - MOMENTS LATER

In a Mandela shirt, a panama hat, shorts, sandals, and sunglasses, MURRAY observes his milieu and makes notes.

His phone buzzes. Reading a text message, he frowns, considers, shrugs, and turns back.

INT. - RECEPTION - "THE A-LIST BAR & GRILL" - HOLLYWOOD -
ABOUT 12:45 PM

Celebrity-hungry customers queue doggedly for a seat, while the MANAGER shrugs helplessly at them. Suddenly frowning, he studies his watch.

In the bg., MURRAY sits impatiently opposite his AGENT (IZZY BRINKMAN), who flips back and forth through a script.

Late for her waitressing job, SARAH-KAY dashes in. Sheepish and apologetic, she starts getting ready.

MANAGER

Actors!

MANAGER'S WIFE

In this town, tell me who isn't?!
Glad you got that particular bee
out of YOUR bonnet years ago!

He blinks, and it all comes back to him. With a bitter-sweet smile, he sighs, shrugs, and returns to reality.

INT. - MURRAY AND IZZY'S TABLE - "THE A-LIST BAR & GRILL" -
HOLLYWOOD - A SHORT WHILE LATER

IZZY is still flipping through the script, entitled "Skin Deep". MURRAY sips at a large vodka, and sighs.

SARAH-KAY passes them, en route to the table of SPHINX KACHINSKY and ROZ, her butch friend, who are observing MURRAY. Jotting down a note, SPHINX smiles maliciously at ROZ, while the distracted SARAH-KAY clears their table.

MURRAY

Well? Well?! Well?! Aren't you
supposed to have read it already!

IZZY

I have! I'm just...refreshing...
my...! No, no, it has potential.
Good potential. Great potential!

This is more or less what MURRAY has wanted to hear.

IZZY

You should write more! That "Shoe"
play bought your house, remember?!
Cash! No mortgage! Finito! Millions
should be so lucky! Dammit, I
should be so lucky!

MURRAY

Sure. Writing is easy. It's the
sitting alone in a room for months
and months that's the hard part!

IZZY

Hollywood isn't exactly beating a
path to your door, you know!

MURRAY

(fluttering eyes, woman's
voice)

Oh Hollywood, marry me, marry me,
marry me! Oh would that I too were
"Holly-wooded"! Oh Hollywood, how I
long for your ring, your ring, your
ringety-ring-ring-ring of approval!

People are staring. Insouciant, MURRAY sips his vodka.

IZZY

(whispering)

OK, so you've blown off some steam.
Now. Get. A. Grip...! Uh-oh,
Kachinsky at eight o' clock!

MURRAY raises his glass to SPHINX. She examines her menu.

IZZY

I'm sending this to Pappakostas!

MURRAY

Uh...OK...OK.

IZZY

So get cracking on another draft!

MURRAY sighs deeply, but nods yes.

KASSANDRA has just come in. Nauseatingly obsequious, the
MANAGER seats her at the best table in the house.

QUEUING CUSTOMERS look on ruefully...then desperately
contort themselves to take selfies with KASSANDRA in the bg.

IZZY

And I also want to send it to...
Well, speak of the devil!

INT. - NEAR KASSANDRA'S TABLE - "THE A-LIST BAR & GRILL" -
HOLLYWOOD - A SHORT WHILE LATER

SARAH-KAY

(to Patron; inhaling)

Uh well, sir, straight off the top
of my head, I couldn't rightly -

On hearing the Kentucky accent, KASSANDRA spins round and
studies SARAH-KAY, who strongly resembles her.

KASSANDRA

Come over and say hi!

SARAH-KAY

Such an honor, ma'am! Princess!

KASSANDRA

Call me Kassie or Kassie-Fay. And
what's your name?

SARAH-KAY

Sarah-Kay, ma'am... Kassie...!
Kassie-Fay...! Uh it's Riddle.
Sarah-Kay Riddle.

KASSANDRA

(guardedly)

Riddle, you say? Which town are you
from?

SARAH-KAY

Wish I could-a come from Pikeville,
like you! But I's from Hazard.

KASSANDRA

(pensive)

Hazard... Hazard, Kentucky.

SARAH-KAY & KASSANDRA

"We have met the enemy and they are
ours!"

They chuckle together.

SARAH-KAY

Uh I been livin' here now, oh, a
good while. I was still there,
though, for President Clinton's
visit. Oh he meant well. But it was
devastatin', havin' your poverty
rubbed in your face like that!

(grievingly)

'Specially on that day of days...!

KASSANDRA is frowning darkly. She sips some water.

SARAH-KAY

But in this town, an Appalachian is
a fish outta water! Not you, the
biggest fish in this here pond! You
likely can't even remember how they
treats someone from the South!

KASSANDRA

(with black intensity)

Oh I remember all right!

SARAH-KAY recoils in shock. KASSANDRA softens.

KASSANDRA

Your...daddy. What does he do?

SARAH-KAY

(discreetly sorrowful)

Daddy...was a logger.

KASSANDRA

(pensive)

Was...? My daddy...is a miner.

SARAH-KAY

(shyly)

I'm also hopin' ta be an actor!
Some day! Kentucky Shakespeare come
to our school one time. Gimme the
ol' actin' bug!

KASSANDRA is pleased to hear this.

SARAH-KAY

I seed a picture of you once,
drivin' a big-ass red Ferrari. A
whatchucall...Testagrossa?

KASSANDRA

(discreetly amused)

Testarossa.

SARAH-KAY

Gorsh, you must think I'm so
ignorant!

KASSANDRA scribbles her number on a scrap of paper.

KASSANDRA

Come for tea. Next week, when I'm
back from New York. I'll pick you
up. In my big-head red Ferrari!

INT. - MURRAY & IZZY'S TABLE - "THE A-LIST BAR & GRILL" -
HOLLYWOOD - A MOMENT LATER

IZZY is sarcastically observing KASSANDRA and SARAH-KAY.

IZZY

Look at the Princess and that
waitress. How sweet! They could
even be mother and daughter!

MURRAY

What...? No, I fail to see it.

IZZY

In that case you must be family!

MURRAY

You think I...am like Cassandra?

IZZY

Sadly, not. You, my friend, lack
her celebrated killer instinct!

As if having overheard this remark, KASSANDRA raises her
glass to MURRAY and IZZY. They raise theirs to her.

IZZY

Bingo! There's your cue! Now you
scoot over there and say hi!

With a deep breath, MURRAY slowly gets up.

INT. - KASSANDRA'S TABLE - "THE A-LIST BAR & GRILL" -
HOLLYWOOD - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

MURRAY nervously approaches, stretching out a hand.

KASSANDRA
(smiling)

I never shake hands while eating.

MURRAY is not offended. Inviting him to sit with a gesture, KASSANDRA continues eating.

KASSANDRA
Your...new script... Can you...see
me...in the lead?

Taken aback by her directness, MURRAY quickly recovers.

MURRAY
Um... Well... Actually... Yes!

KASSANDRA stops eating.

KASSANDRA
Have Brinkman send me a copy. We
can meet again next week. When I'm
back. From New York.

KASSANDRA resumes eating. Taking the hint, MURRAY rises. He stretches out a hand, and instantly withdraws it. Awkwardly smiling, he leaves.

KASSANDRA stops chewing, and stares out of a window.

EXT. - UPMARKET SHOE STORE - MANHATTAN - DAY

KASSANDRA emerges from the store, pausing at the entrance to admire her shiny new designer shoes.

Her phone rings. Glancing at the screen, she rolls her eyes.

EXT. - SIDEWALK - MANHATTAN - A SHORT WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA
(into iPhone; frostily)
Mr. Beeniman, can't speak now.

KASSANDRA rings off. As she puts away the phone, she notices that she has stepped in some dog poop.

KASSANDRA
Oh shit! My shoes...! Where the
hell are we?! Vienna, Austria?!

EXT. - OUTSIDE KASSANDRA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - MANHATTAN -
A SHORT WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA is still "fuming" about her soiled new shoes, still not quite clean. As she is about to enter her building, KOSTAS - hugging a script, and with FIFI on a leash - is exiting.

An awkward glance. An awkward pause. An awkward hug. An awkward silence.

KOSTAS

(fishing)

Um Annamaria said Lello wants you
to...come over...to...Venezia?

KASSANDRA

(guardedly)

Oh just to host his Swiss cousin.
Some tedious academic. Apparently.

KOSTAS was hoping for something more exciting. But he gets
over it. Swallowing, he comes to the point.

KOSTAS

Look, darling, I know you. You
can't stay still. You have to keep
moving. And I'm just the same. So
can't we just get over this? By the
way, you're looking stunning!

KASSANDRA half-smiles. A less awkward hug. But to her
annoyance, FIFI, meanwhile, is sniffing at her shoes.

KOSTAS

(in Greek)

Fifi, be a good girl! Stop that!

(in English)

Darling, I believe you haven't yet
seen Murray's latest draft. I have
it here. Just bear with me...

KOSTAS starts paging through "Skin Deep".

Meanwhile, FIFI won't stop sniffing. KOSTAS interrupts his
paging to apologize. He decides to tether FIFI'S leash to a
nearby lamp post. Although displeased, FIFI is soon
distracted by the sight of ANOTHER DOG across the street.

KASSANDRA gets an idea. She smiles darkly to herself.

KOSTAS

Now here, at this climactic point,
about two thirds into Act I...

Unnoticed by KOSTAS, KASSANDRA has loosened the leash.
Recklessly, FIFI crosses the street toward the OTHER DOG.

KOSTAS

By the way, nice shoes...! But
what's that smell? Fifi, have you
been...? Fifi...? Fifi...?!

The SOUND OF TIRES SCREECHING. KASSANDRA and KOSTAS spin
round. A THUD. Silence. FIFI has been run over by a taxicab.

KOSTAS

FIFI!

INT. - DRAWING ROOM - KASSANDRA'S PENTHOUSE - MANHATTAN - A
WHILE LATER

Half-facing each other, a "tender" KASSANDRA and a broken
KOSTAS sit on a couch.

In the bg., Cassandra's New York HOUSEKEEPER (ANNAMARIA)
tiptoes in and out, fetching, carrying, eavesdropping.

KASSANDRA

Darling, please. It wasn't your
fault. I can guarantee it.

KOSTAS bursts into tears, and bows his head.

KOSTAS

I'll never forgive myself!

KASSANDRA

Darling, that's so unnecessary. But
if Fifi's passing brings us closer
together...then who knows, perhaps
she won't have died...in vain...?

KOSTAS rests his head in her lap. Tenderly stroking his
hair, KASSANDRA smiles darkly to herself.

INT. - A FERRARI - ROUTE 50 - NEVADA - DAY - DREAM

Exhilarated, and looking a little like KASSANDRA, SARAH-KAY
drives a Ferrari California that is the color of blood.

Just ahead, SARAH-KAY sees the famous sign: "THE LONELIEST
ROAD IN AMERICA". Resting her head against the window, she
begins to sob softly to herself.

Icily indifferent, her PASSENGER - KASSANDRA - is dressed
exactly like her, in a tracksuit and running shoes.

INT. - BEDROOM - SARAH-KAY'S APARTMENT - VENICE - LA -
MOMENTS LATER - (NIGHT)

In the fetal position upon an armchair before the faintly
glowing embers in the grate, SARAH-KAY opens her eyes wide.

Blinking in confusion, she peers round into the moonlit
semi-darkness.

Slowly, she lets down her legs. Raising both hands to her
head, she labors to make sense of her dream, but cannot.

From the calendar on the mantel beside her, the encircled
date of JULY 5th thrusts itself into her consciousness.

She reaches out for the photo of DOLPHY. Resting her head
upon him, she begins to sob softly to herself.

EXT. - OUTSIDE SARAH-KAY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - VENICE - LA
- DAY

KASSANDRA pulls up in a Mercedes SL600. SARAH-KAY gets in.

KASSANDRA
The Ferrari's in the shop. Typical
temperamental Italian!

SARAH-KAY
Don' matter none! This is one fancy
ride! But don't drive too fast now!

KASSANDRA
Well, that I can't promise you!

Smiling and bantering, they pull away.

EXT. - MAIN GATE - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - A WHILE
LATER

The SL600 passes through the imposing main gate, with its
name plaque: VILLA SCHIFANOIA. They wind their way along the
seemingly endless, tree-lined driveway of the magnificent
Lower Bel Air estate. Every now and then, the mansion itself
peeps tantalizingly through the centennial firs and beeches.

SARAH-KAY
Wow! I'd give anythin', anythin',
to change my life for yours!

KASSANDRA
Careful what you wish for!

INT. - DRAWING ROOM - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - A
WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA and SARAH-KAY are hitting it off. MARÍA - in and
out in the bg. - is not quite sure what to make of this.

SARAH-KAY
I have a sister. But she run away
from home afore I wuz born.

KASSANDRA is not really interested.

SARAH-KAY
Momma - ain't seen her in years!
She's kinda hard to get along with!
Anyway, Momma said my sister had
went to Nevada... 'Cos there it's
legal. Ta be a...you-know-what!

KASSANDRA
(suddenly intrigued)
You don't say. Tell me, your
sister. You've seen photos of her?

SARAH-KAY

Momma said they burned the photos.
'Cos of the shame an' all! Heck,
they never even told me her name!
It's like she never existed!

KASSANDRA

Why did she run away? Did
anything...? Did your daddy...?

SARAH-KAY

You mean...?! Daddy...?! You mean
...?! Lordie, no! Daddy was the
gentlest, most lovingest, most
decent human bein' I's ever knowed!

KASSANDRA

(darkly pensive)

Then you're a very lucky girl...!
Anyway, we'll speak again when I
get back. From Venice, Italy.

KASSANDRA rises, and so does SARAH-KAY.

KASSANDRA

I like talking to someone who knows
where I'm coming from. We're just
two Urban Appalachians, trying to
fit in.

SARAH-KAY

But you're the Establishment now!

KASSANDRA

Someone like me will never fit in.

SARAH-KAY raises an eyebrow.

EXT. - HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME - NEAR HOLLYWOOD & HIGHLAND
CENTER - LATE AFTERNOON

KASSANDRA wears a wig and wraparound sunglasses. With her
head bowed, she walks slowly over the NAMES OF THE STARS
beneath her. She herself is not yet among them.

Some PASSERS-BY think they recognize her. But finally they
decide that it couldn't possibly be Cassandra Cooper.

INT. - LIBRARY - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - MORNING

Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves on three sides. Beside the
mantel-side wall, a full-size billiard table.

The visiting MURRAY is overwhelmed by Cassandra's exhaustive
collection of works by and on Dante Alighieri.

KASSANDRA

I hear you even named your daughter
Beatrice. Are you close?

MURRAY

Um...no. Not lately.

KASSANDRA

(discreetly intrigued)

Ah. I'm sure there's story to it.

MURRAY

(looking away)

Well, if must know, she joined the Hare Krishnas. I haven't seen her now in more than two years.

MURRAY sinks into a lugubrious silence. Sighing, KASSANDRA tries to think of a way to cheer him up.

KASSANDRA

Oh, I loved your Pulitzer-winning play: "Shoe On the...Other Foot"?

MURRAY

(gloomily)

"Where the Shoe Pinches".

KASSANDRA

Ah... By the way, "Skin Deep" - when can I see your next draft?

MURRAY

Um. Soon. I'm...working on ...working on it... I mean...!

KASSANDRA

(pensively)

Hmm. Anyway, we can meet again when I get back from Venezia. But first I have to go and see Kostas again in New York. "Skin Deep" simply has to put me back on the map!

EXT. - SIDEWALK OPPOSITE "THE SHRINE ETERNAL CAFE" - NEW YORK - DAY

With nothing better to do, MISS RISSO - a straitlaced, heavy-bodied spinster - is on "litter patrol".

She frowns with gleeful displeasure as a DREAMY LITTLE GIRL drops a chewing-gum wrapper onto the sidewalk.

MISS RISSO

Young lady, you go right back, and pick...that...up!

DREAMY LITTLE GIRL

(rudely awakened)

Yes, Miss Risso!

Mortified, the DREAMY LITTLE GIRL dashes back, picks up the wrapper, pockets it, and runs off.

Banging her walking stick and nodding her head with self-satisfaction, MISS RISSO continues her "patrol".

INT. - "THE SHRINE ETERNAL CAFE" - NEW YORK - A MOMENT LATER

KASSANDRA wears a wig and wraparound sunglasses. The INDIAN CAFE OWNER (sari, bindu, nose-ring, and bangles) is ringing up Kassandra's big bag of chili potato chips.

CAFE OWNER

Oh thank you most kindly for asking! "Shrine Eternal", you see, it's named after the Somnath Temple, in Gujarat, India. Six times, you know, it was destroyed, that temple! And six times rebuilt! Hence the name.

KASSANDRA

Hmm. Like the mythical phoenix, rising again from its own ashes.

CAFE OWNER

Like a phoenix. But not a myth!

Smiling goodbye, KASSANDRA dips into her bag of chips.

EXT. - MISS RISSO'S SIDEWALK - NEW YORK - MOMENTS LATER

Spotting KASSANDRA with the bag, MISS RISSO's eyes widen. She decides to track her from across the street, scrutinizing her above and between the passing traffic.

Noticing MISS RISSO, KASSANDRA rolls her eyes.

INT. - AN SUV APPROACHING "THE SHRINE ETERNAL CAFE" - NEW YORK - A SHORT WHILE LATER

The DRIVER divides her attention between the road and her smartphone, upon which she is tweeting a response to a follower who has dared to criticize her taste in shoes.

EXT. - KASSANDRA'S SIDEWALK - NEW YORK - MOMENTS LATER

KASSANDRA scoops the last few fragments into her mouth. In her contentment, she forgets to wipe her mouth.

She crumples up the bag, and makes to deposit it into a trash can. But a gust of wind snatches the bag away, blowing it off in the opposite direction. KASSANDRA shrugs and keeps walking.

EXT. - KASSANDRA'S SIDEWALK - NEW YORK - MOMENTS LATER

Furious, MISS RISSO waves her walking stick at KASSANDRA, who ignores her.

KASSANDRA

Just where in hell are we?!
Switzerland?!

Blind with outrage, MISS RISSO recklessly begins crossing the road. A banshee-like SCREECHING OF TIRES. Then a heavy THUD. MISS RISSO has been knocked flat by the SUV.

Horrified, the TWEETING DRIVER still clutches her phone. Using it to call an ambulance doesn't even occur to her.

Upon the road, MISS RISSO and her outrage lie silent, motionless, and barely breathing. Unmoved, KASSANDRA looks.

EXT. - KASSANDRA'S SIDEWALK - NEW YORK - A SHORT WHILE LATER

A MAN IN A HAT pushes through the gawking ONLOOKERS. Snatching the phone from the zombie-like TWEETING DRIVER, he dials 911, then returns the phone. She has barely noticed.

KASSANDRA finally remembers to wipe her mouth.

KASSANDRA

As usual, Dante said it best:
"Look, and pass on."

Ignoring MISS RISSO, she walks way. The HAT MAN sighs.

HAT MAN

If only that cow stopped stuffing herself with potato chips! Then she'd win any number of Cassandra Cooper look-alike competitions!

INT. - ON A GREYHOUND BUS - I-65 N - KENTUCKY - EVENING

Beside her phantom reflection, and wrapped in her ocean-and-dolphin-themed blanket, SARAH-KAY peers out of her window seat and sees the famous "Welcome to Kentucky" sign. She smiles joyfully...then lowers her head and sighs.

EXT. - GREYHOUND BUS STOP - LONDON - KENTUCKY - A WHILE LATER

In drenching rain, the bus pulls away, revealing a wretched, bedraggled figure, marooned beneath the sinister heavens.

Shivering forlornly, SARAH-KAY hugs her small, battered old suitcase to her herself, and sobs.

INT. - RECEPTION - OUR LADY OF MERCY HOSPITAL - NEW YORK - DAY

Elegantly but simply dressed in white, KASSANDRA is formally welcomed by DOCTOR PILLAY, RESPIRATORY THERAPIST HEAVISIDE, and the RISSO FAMILY.

PILLAY

Ms. Cooper, thank you most kindly
for lending your moral support!

KASSANDRA

Please don't mention it, doctor.
Why, we were practically neighbors.

FANNY RISSO

Ms. Cooper, such an honor!

HEAVISIDE

And if I may, you look marvelous!

KASSANDRA smiles back with regal graciousness.

PILLAY

If you'll kindly follow me.

FANNY RISSO

(aside to Heaviside)
So selfless! So giving!

HEAVISIDE

(aside to Fanny)
And they say these megastars have
no heart!

INT. - OUTSIDE MISS RISSO'S ROOM - OUR LADY OF MERCY
HOSPITAL - NEW YORK - A SHORT WHILE LATER

DOCTOR PILLAY has already begun to treat KASSANDRA almost as
if she were the head of the RISSO FAMILY.

PILLAY

(aside to Cassandra)
You know, deep-coma patients often
make a better recovery than the
milder cases. But alas, they also
tend to wake up in great confusion.
Amnesia... Dysarthria...

KASSANDRA

Dysarthria... Difficulty
in...expressing themselves?

PILLAY

(impressed)
Correct! Oh by the way, you'll
notice soft-cloth restraints on her
wrists. That's to prevent her from
pulling on her tracheal tube.

KASSANDRA

(fascinated)
Patients do that, in a coma?!

PILLAY

Oh I assure you! Comatose patients
can be highly dangerous to
themselves! Hence the restraints.

This gives KASSANDRA an idea. She smiles darkly to herself.

KASSANDRA

Um doctor, isn't it true that
people in a coma can often still
hear people talking to them? So if
I were to, for instance, read to
her - do you think that might help?

DOCTOR PILLAY twists his mouth to one side.

KASSANDRA

(charm on)

At least it couldn't do any harm!
Surely, doctor! Unless of course
the family have any objection...?

On the contrary, the RISSOS couldn't be more delighted.

PILLAY

(to Heaviside)

You've checked the patient?

HEAVISIDE

Yes, doctor. Airway management is
fine. The restraints are secure.

Shrugging, PILLAY leads the way into MISS RISSO'S room.

INT. - MISS RISSO'S ROOM - OUR LADY OF MERCY HOSPITAL - NEW
YORK - A SHORT WHILE LATER

To the comatose MISS RISSO, KASSANDRA is reading a
stupefyingly boring New York Times article on garbage
removal. Stifling yawns, HOSPITAL STAFF and the RISSOS look
on in suitably edified silence.

Then, one by one, first the STAFF and then the FAMILY begin
to tip-toe out. Soon KASSANDRA is all alone with MISS RISSO.

Leaving the newspaper on the bed, KASSANDRA checks that the
coast is clear. Then she slightly loosens the restraints on
MISS RISSO's right wrist. Grunting, MISS RISSO knocks the
newspaper to the floor. KASSANDRA picks it up.

KASSANDRA

(wagging a finger)

Naughty, naughty! Littering, you
know, is a criminal offense!

Nonchalantly, KASSANDRA walks to the door, where she waves
goodbye - with the newspaper.

KASSANDRA
(dazzling smile)
Now you sleep tight, dear!

The SOUND OF A HEART POUNDING.

INT. - SARAH-KAY'S MOTEL ROOM - HAZARD - KENTUCKY - SMALL HOURS - JULY 5

Wrenching away the ocean-and-dolphin-themed blanket from her face, SARAH-KAY wakes up with a start.

Curled up on a rug before the dying fire, she clutches at her pounding heart. In a daze, she peers round.

On a coffee table is a birthday cake with 26 candles.

INTERCUT: INT. - KASSANDRA'S TAXI - NEW YORK - EARLY AFTERNOON / INT. - BEENIMAN'S OFFICE - KLONDIKE BANK - LA - LATE MORNING - JULY 5

Kassandra's iPhone rings. Glancing at the screen, she rolls her eyes, re-considers, puts on a smiley face, and answers.

KASSANDRA
(into phone; neutral)
Mr. Beeniman.

BEENIMAN
(into phone; smug)
Finally I catch you, Ms. Cooper! Or should I say: Princess! Yes, yes, I've been digging into your history, financial and otherwise!

No reaction from KASSANDRA.

BEENIMAN
(into phone; deflated)
Well now, there are matters we must discuss! Urgently! Not least, your quite alarming overdraft situation!

KASSANDRA
(into phone; neutral)
We'll have to leave that, alas, for when I get back. From Venice.

BEENIMAN
(into phone; triumphant)
But I too am headed...to Venice!

This is news to KASSANDRA.

BEENIMAN
(into phone)
So I'll call you from Venice... "Your Highness"!

BEENIMAN rings off, and leans back smugly in his chair.

KASSANDRA shrugs, rings off, and settles back in her seat.

INT. - KASSANDRA'S WINDOW SEAT - ALITALIA AIRPLANE - JFK AIRPORT - NEW YORK - LATE AFTERNOON - JULY 5

As the plane prepares for take-off, KASSANDRA looks down upon the runway from her "Magnifica" Class window seat.

INT. - BEENIMAN'S TAXI - LA - EARLY AFTERNOON - JULY 5

BEENIMAN

Venice, if you please, my good man!

Frowning at "my good man", the CAB DRIVER sets off.

With gleeful anticipation, BEENIMAN looks out of his window seat. On his lap: "The Banker" magazine, July edition.

EXT. - GRAVEYARD - HAZARD - KENTUCKY - EVENING - JULY 5

A sky of pitch. Insidious rain. Eddies of dead leaves.

SARAH-KAY's only company, peering down from a dripping, high branch: a CROW. Dressed in her humble Sunday best, SARAH-KAY is composed in her deep grief.

Kneeling, she tenderly sets a bouquet of chrysanthemums at the foot of a simple, rustic gravestone. Lovingly, shakily, her fingers caress the name inscribed upon it:

"RUDOLPH RIDDLE - 3 March 1961 - 5 July 1999".

SARAH-KAY

Daddy, I'll always, always love
you! I know you is lookin' down on
me. I know you is protectin' me!

High above her, the CROW cackles, and shakes its head.

The SOUND OF LADY-LIKE SNORING.

EXT. - YARD - THE RIDDLES' HOUSE - PIKEVILLE - KENTUCKY - EVENING - JANUARY 1994 - SEPIA DREAM

While the SOUND OF THE SNORING CONTINUES, a shapely and super-supple KASSIE (12), wearing a blood-red leotard, does gymnastics exercises, stretching, twisting, bending over.

Her towel hangs over a nearby chair. In the bg., Grandpa's logging ax rests against a wall.

At a certain point, KASSIE feels someone's eyes upon her. She spins round, but only in time to catch a glimpse of a shadowy figure disappearing around a corner.

Frowning, KASSIE wraps herself protectively in the towel.

INT. - DRAWING ROOM - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO - VENICE - ITALY -
DAY - THE PRESENT - DAY

With an UNLADYLIKE SNORT, the SNORING CEASES.

Near the double-doors to the balcony, on a Louis Quinze sofa, KASSANDRA wakes up, shuddering. Frowning, she blinks, rubs her eyes, and notices that her cashmere shawl has fallen to the mosaic floor.

In a strange fit of abstraction, she bends to pick up the shawl, and wraps it around her shoulders. Sightlessly, she looks about her.

Almost oppressively sumptuous, her vast palazzo is filled with priceless friezes, frescoes, brocades, tapestries, Burano lace, Murano glass chandeliers, and antiques.

Scarcely less priceless are the views upon the Grand Canal from almost every window. The silence is broken by the SOUND OF A WOMAN'S STEPS.

THE SAME - MOMENTS LATER

All in black, the beak-nosed, hoarse-voiced Sicilian HOUSEKEEPER (ILÁRIA) brings in the coffee on an antique silver tray. There are two porcelain cups.

KASSANDRA still hasn't noticed ILÁRIA, who, looking on with her Mona Lisa smile, discreetly clears her throat. Coming back to the present, KASSANDRA discreetly wipes the edges of her mouth, and sits up.

Just then, PRINCE RAFFAELE enters, rings off his smartphone, and comes over. KASSANDRA is herself again.

KASSANDRA

Ah, there he is! Ilária, Prince Raffaele tells me that for a Sicilian you make absolutely marvelous Venetian sarde in saor.

ILÁRIA

(bowing and leaving)
Principessa. Príncipe.
(to herself; in Sicilian)
What do I know? I'm from Sicily!

PRINCE RAFFAELE

(pensive)
There was a time, you know, when Sicily was richer than England!
When Portugal was a World Power!

KASSANDRA

(nonchalant)
Sometimes it's the Royals,
sometimes the Rebels. Sometimes the
(MORE)

KASSANDRA (cont'd)
Indians, sometimes the Yankees.
Sometimes the Mariners, sometimes
the Marlins. And once upon a time
even the Dolphins were on top!

PRINCE RAFFAELE
Hmm. By the way, have you removed
my coronet? From the motorboat?

KASSANDRA
Certainly not! I love driving a
motorboat with your princely
coronet emblazoned upon it!

Deeply touched, PRINCE RAFFAELE presses her hand.

KASSANDRA
But I've changed the name. Of the
motorboat. To "Appalachia".

PRINCE RAFFAELE
"Appalachia". Hmm. Yes, I like it!

KASSANDRA
But enough suspense. When do I meet
your cousin? And what is all this
really about?

The PRINCE draws a very deep breath.

EXT. - BALCONY OFF DRAWING ROOM - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO -
VENICE - ITALY - A SHORT WHILE LATER

The PRINCE smokes a cheroot; KASSANDRA, a cigarette, in an
elegant holder. They look out absently over the Grand Canal.

PRINCE RAFFAELE
Italian-Swiss. A researcher of
genius! Silvia. Dr. Silvia Delfini.

KASSANDRA
(reciting)
"Silvia, rimembri ancora / quel
tempo della tua vita mortale...?"
But you know...how it ends!

PRINCE RAFFAELE
Brava, cara! Bravissima!

KASSANDRA takes a bow.

PRINCE RAFFAELE
Well, if I helped you to appreciate
the Italian poets, then our
marriage was not in vain!

Discreetly, KASSANDRA caresses a wall of the palazzo.

KASSANDRA

Oh not in vain. Not in vain at all!

Deeply touched, PRINCE RAFFAELE presses her hand.

Below, a water bus full of waving TOURISTS is passing by. KASSANDRA waves back. The PRINCE ignores them.

PRINCE RAFFAELE

Mind like an industrial-strength laser, that Silvia! She is being bankrolled by me and a consortium. Of investors. And yet she doesn't - won't - understand how things work in the real world! You see, her research is so significant that it is arousing...unwelcome interest!

KASSANDRA

I see... So then this research -

The PRINCE raises a finger to his lips. Down below, a gondola is passing by. Its passengers are a CHINESE COUPLE, tourists, apparently. They stare up, cameras at the ready.

PRINCE RAFFAELE

Let's go in - before they make sharkfin soup out of you!

INT. - LIBRARY - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO - VENICE - ITALY - A SHORT WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA and the PRINCE sit side by side on a Regency ottoman. They sip coffee from elegant china cups.

KASSANDRA

So then I take it Silvia needs somewhere both private and inspiring? To complete her work?

PRINCE RAFFAELE

Oh the work is done. It's merely the - how you say? - dotting of the T's and the crossing of the I's.

KASSANDRA

(amused)

I see... And...you, darling? Will your own eyes be needing any... dotting and crossing?!

PRINCE RAFFAELE

(fighting temptation)

That's very...considerate of you, cara. But I have a...friend now.

KASSANDRA is pleasantly surprised.

PRINCE RAFFAELE

Slightly younger than me. Slightly taller. A model. Flavia. From an impoverished but distinguished Maltese family. They go back, you know, many centuries. Not as far back as my own family, of course. But...far enough. Far enough.

KASSANDRA

My own family is not distinguished. And for all I know, by now it might even be completely ex-tinguished!

PRINCE RAFFAELE

I married you, my dear, not for your family, but for your beauty, your fame...and your fantasies!

KASSANDRA smiles wickedly. PRINCE RAFFAELE guiltily looks away. He checks his Patek Philippe gold wristwatch.

PRINCE RAFFAELE

I've told Flavia all about you. She has a very...competitive nature!

KASSANDRA

Oh does she now? So then can she also put her feet behind her head?

PRINCE RAFFAELE

(rising)

Not yet. But I have...high hopes!

EXT. - JETTY - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO - VENICE - ITALY - A WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA, ILÁRIA, and PRINCE RAFFAELE stand watching the approach of a water taxi. In it is an AWKWARD-LOOKING YOUNG WOMAN (Dr. SILVIA DELFINI, 20s).

EXT. - THE SAME - A SHORT WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA, ILÁRIA, and SILVIA wave goodbye as the taxi bears away PRINCE RAFFAELE. Frowning at Silvia's scant, threadbare luggage, ILÁRIA picks it up and takes it in.

SILVIA herself is a mousy, awkward young woman, her face half-hidden by longish, stringy hair.

KASSANDRA

Shall we?

SILVIA

(bowing awkwardly)

Principessa!

KASSANDRA

(smiling)

No formality, please. Call me
Kassandra.

Awkwardly, Silvia draws the hair from her youthful face. Her coal-black eyes burn with genius and determination.

KASSANDRA

My, my! It's certainly true what
they say about great scientists!
That you do your best work in your
twenties! You look as if you're
barely out of university!

SILVIA's only answer: a tantalizingly enigmatic smile.

EXT. - GREYHOUND BUS STOP - LONDON - KENTUCKY - DAY

SARAH-KAY looks up from the bench to see her bus approaching in the distance. She yawns, stretches, and rises. Up above, uncertainly, the sun peeps through the clouds.

EXT. - BEACHFRONT BISTRO - VENICE - CALIFORNIA - DAY

Sipping iced tea, MURRAY becomes aware of the inanity of the conversation all around him. Magnetically, his eyes are drawn to his antique gold wristwatch: relentless, it ticks off the seconds. Seconds that once past, are gone forever.

Breathless, he dabs at beads of perspiration upon his brow.

Abandoning his half-emptied glass, he rises abruptly, tosses a banknote onto the table, and hastens away.

INT. - DRAWING ROOM - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO - VENICE - ITALY - DAY

KASSANDRA and SILVIA are also having tea.

SILVIA

(gazing around in awe)

I adore these frescoes! And those
friezes...! Still, this is all too
much for me! I'm just a simple
girl, you know, from a remote
mountain village in Italian
Switzerland. It's not even a
village. Up there, the locals speak
mainly in dialect. To my mother,
Italian is practically a foreign -

SILVIA's cellphone rings. She glances at the screen.

SILVIA

Ma che coincidenza!

(into cellphone)

Mamma, ciao! Tütt a poscht...?!

KASSANDRA discreetly retreats, but stays within earshot.

INT. - "HARRY'S BAR" - VENICE - ITALY - DAY

KASSANDRA and SILVIA sit at a table and study their menus. SILVIA is horrified at the prices. But waving dismissively, KASSANDRA signals to the WAITER.

Addressing her as "Principessa", he fawns all over her. Several patrons swivel round and stare.

INT. - "LA FENICE" THEATER - VENICE - ITALY - DAY

KASSANDRA and SILVIA look on in admiration.

SILVIA

And to think that this theater
several times burnt down to the
ground! Yet here it still is today!

KASSANDRA

If only we could all learn that
trick! To rise like phoenixes from
our very own ashes!

SILVIA

(enigmatic smile)

Perhaps some of us already have!

KASSANDRA stares questioningly at SILVIA, who just smiles and walks away. Frowning, KASSANDRA follows her.

EXT. - RIALTO BRIDGE - VENICE - ITALY - DAY

Exclusive shops and boutiques line both sides of the bridge, which swarms with people of many nationalities. There are even some Venetians.

KASSANDRA sports a red-haired wig and wraparound sunglasses. She and SILVIA climb the cigarette-littered steps, then stop and stare at a shop-window. Eyelessly staring back, Venetian masks stick out their tongues at them.

KASSANDRA

Want one? You know what Oscar Wilde
said about masks and the truth!

SILVIA

Oh. Thank you, no. I just wouldn't
feel comfortable, to wear a mask!

KASSANDRA shrugs, smiles. They look, and pass on.

EXT. - KASSANDRA'S MOTORBOAT - BRIDGE OF SIGHS - GRAND CANAL
- VENICE - ITALY - SUNSET

KASSANDRA and SILVIA slowly pass under the bridge.

SILVIA

How romantic! And how sad! The
convict's final glimpse of Venice!
Then judgment, solitude, darkness!

KASSANDRA

(to herself; darkly)

Hmm. Yes. How romantic!

EXT. - STRADA NOVA - VENICE - ITALY - DAY

KASSANDRA - wearing wraparound sunglasses and yet another wig - and SILVIA are out for a stroll.

A HARE KRISHNA PROCESSION is passing by. One of the participants is a distracted, thin, veiled, and sari-clad Western young woman: MURRAY's daughter BEA. Without much conviction, she chants, and beats a tambourine.

BEA hears Cassandra's American accent, perhaps even recognizing her voice. Her hand suspended above her tambourine, BEA stops, and stares at KASSANDRA, who stares back, as if recognizing her.

Then, perhaps alarmed by something in KASSANDRA's eyes, BEA suddenly looks away. Distractedly beating her tambourine, BEA rejoins the procession.

EXT. - KASSANDRA'S MOTORBOAT - GRAND CANAL - VENICE - ITALY - DAY

In a scarf and wraparound sunglasses, KASSANDRA is letting the nervously exhilarated SILVIA drive the motor boat.

They shoot past a water bus full of TOURISTS. Beginning to relax, SILVIA allows herself a nervous little wave at them.

With what seems like sisterly affection, KASSANDRA smiles upon SILVIA, who smiles back through tears of gratitude.

INT. - BALLROOM - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO - VENICE - ITALY - AFTERNOON

Now SILVIA is completely at ease with KASSANDRA. Together they make flowing, meditative T'ai Chi movements.

SILVIA

You know, Cassandra, you're not at all like my naive preconception of a star! You're so approachable! So supportive, so warm, so open!

KASSANDRA smiles darkly to herself.

KASSANDRA

Tell me, the investors supporting your research - don't they also give you moral support?

SILVIA

Oh to them research is just about
marketing, margins, and money!

KASSANDRA

Whereas to you, research is poetry?
Music? It is...prayerfully
exploring...the Mind of God?

SILVIA gazes at KASSANDRA in astonishment. On the point of confiding in her, she pulls back. No pressure from KASSANDRA. SILVIA smiles in gratitude.

EXT. - BALCONY OFF SILVIA'S BEDROOM - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO -
VENICE - ITALY - SUNRISE

Pensively, breathlessly, SILVIA looks out over the Grand Canal. Suddenly she finds that she has come to a decision.

With a gigantic sense of relief, of a burden lifted, she turns and hastens inside.

INT. - LIBRARY - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO - VENICE - ITALY - A
SHORT WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA is frowning. SILVIA, seated in a throne-like high chair, serenely shakes her head.

SILVIA

But in fact, no. Despite what
Jonathan Swift said, death is NOT
natural, necessary and universal.
Aging is NOT inevitable. Aging is
just a disease. You know, certain
kinds of fish show very little
aging. And even certain human cells
are naturally "immortal". But alas,
those are mainly the cancer cells!
So then the trick is to induce
"immortality" in the normal cells.
But without the cancer!

KASSANDRA

I should certainly hope so!

SILVIA

Now it all starts to get rather
technical. So I'll make a long and
complicated story short and simple.
(proudly)

You see, I...I have found a way to
reset the molecular clock in
certain cells! To make them, to all
intents and purposes, immortal!

Staring intensely at SILVIA, KASSANDRA gets up and paces.

SILVIA

(proudly)

And here is the beauty of my method. My secret recipe of ingredients - one of which is a well-known castor-oil derivative - my recipe is absorbed into the skin by applying a simple cream! Like so many things in nature and in science that seem utterly impossible, as soon as you understand how things work, it becomes mere child's play!

KASSANDRA

(stopping dead)

I think I need some air. Shall we?

EXT. - THE LIDO - VENICE - ITALY - A WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA and SILVIA - both wearing straw hats - abstractedly thread their way through the beach-goers.

KASSANDRA

Not to sound ungraciously skeptical - but how do you know it really works? Outside the laboratory?

SILVIA

(serene)

Oh it works, it works. I call it "Rub-On Genetic Regeneration"! It makes you feel - and look - 30 years younger! And crucially, I myself...am the living proof!

KASSANDRA stops dead, stares at her. SILVIA stops too.

KASSANDRA

But surely you can't mean...?!

SILVIA serenely nods yes. KASSANDRA stares hard at her.

KASSANDRA

Your mother - how old is she?

SILVIA

Almost eighty-three.

KASSANDRA

(wide-eyed)

At your birth, how old was she?

SILVIA

Twenty-eight.

KASSANDRA silently calculates, and her eyes widen even more.

INT. - ALTANA (ROOFTOP TERRACE) - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO -
VENICE - ITALY - AFTERNOON

Like a hackneyed yet ever-inspiring picture postcard, Venice and the Grand Canal are spread out magnificently below.

An elegant wrought-iron coffee table bears an antique silver tray with a half-full crystal decanter of moscato, together with two half-full crystal glasses.

KASSANDRA (sourly pensive) and SILVIA (serene) sit eating roast chestnuts. KASSANDRA tops up their moscato.

KASSANDRA

I admire your idealism. But what about your backers? Surely they expect to recoup their investment!

SILVIA

Oh those greedy, selfish One-Percenters! They already have too much money...! No offense!

KASSANDRA

(amused)

None taken. But aren't you being naive? Not to mention, ungracious and ungrateful. I mean, without their money, your research -

SILVIA

Would still have been completed! It might only have taken a bit longer.

KASSANDRA

Fine. But an epoch-making discovery like this - to just give it away! For nothing!

SILVIA

What money can bring the sacred privilege of exploring the handiwork of the Lord? What money can bring the joy of changing people's lives? People who have suffered injury, disfigurement, abuse, violence, torture!

KASSANDRA

(deep breath)

Fine. But with respect - nothing is free. Someone still has to pay.

In an instant, SILVIA's serenity vanishes. She rises.

SILVIA

Principessa, forgive me. You have been over-generous, and I have taken advantage.

KASSANDRA

That's not what I meant! You are more than welcome! This is your second home now. Come. Sit... Come.

SILVIA sits beside KASSANDRA, who strokes her hair.

KASSANDRA

Your integrity is unshakable. I see that. I respect it. I honor it.

Radiant with gratitude, SILVIA kisses KASSANDRA's hands.

EXT. - RICHARD WAGNER MEMORIAL PLAQUE - ADJOINING CA' VENDRAMIN CALERGI - GRAND CANAL - VENICE - ITALY - DAY

KASSANDRA and SILVIA stand in the motorboat and silently read the verse tribute to Wagner by Gabriele D'Annunzio: literary genius, Prince of Montenevoso, and presumed originator of the castor-oil torture technique.

SILVIA

Lovely, isn't it?

KASSANDRA

Indeed. Even if the Italian of the Prince of Castor Oil reads a bit like Latin! Then again, no-one has ever written more passionately in praise of Venice than he.

SILVIA

Because Venice is so very, very beautiful! In fact, you know, I wouldn't even mind to die here!

KASSANDRA smiles darkly to herself.

INT. - LIVING-ROOM FIREPLACE - SARAH-KAY'S APARTMENT - VENICE - LA - EVENING

From the mantel SARAH-KAY takes up the photograph of DOLPHY and removes it from its frame.

Kneeling before the fire, she gazes upon him with a fathomless ache of daughterly love.

She gives him a long, lip-quivering kiss on the forehead, then hugs him to herself.

She rocks back and forth, back and forth, shaken to the root of her being with a grief unreachable by words.

She draws a deep, closed-eyed, shivering breath.

Opening her eyes, she sets DOLPHY lovingly amid the flames.

And waves goodbye.

INT. - SILVIA'S BEDROOM - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO - VENICE - ITALY - EVENING

KASSANDRA'S hair is up, and she is all dressed in black. Standing at Silvia's desk, she carefully packs several jars of skin cream into a briefcase. Then, gathering together some sheets of chemistry formulas, she turns to leave.

With utter indifference, she steps over a DEAD BODY lying prone on the floor, its head twisted to the other side. Into its back a stiletto is plunged.

The body of is that of SILVIA, and the expression on her face is of utter, uncomprehending astonishment.

INT. - BASEMENT - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO - VENICE - ITALY - A SHORT WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA locks up the formulas in a large, heavy safe. Then, twisting her mouth, she glances up to the point where, outside in the Canal, the water level would be.

She blows a kiss to the wall of impermeable Istrian stone, crosses herself, shrugs, and bounds up the steps.

EXT. - JETTY - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO - VENICE - ITALY - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Checking that the coast is clear, KASSANDRA drags a sack evidently containing the body of Silvia to the motorboat. She heaves the sack inside, unmoors, and drives off.

EXT. - BRIDGE OF SIGHS - GRAND CANAL - VENICE - ITALY - A WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA comes to a stop under the bridge. There is no-one in sight. With utter indifference, she heaves the sack over the side, and into the water.

In a heartless parody of the Italian poet Leopardi's poem 'Silvia', she begins reciting.

KASSANDRA
Silvia, how, oh how passé you are,
my dear New Age companion!

Smiling to herself, and shaking out her hair, KASSANDRA drives off.

The SOUND of Franz Liszt's PIANO PIECE "La lúgubre gondola".

INT. - STUDY - MURRAY'S HOUSE - VENICE - LA - DAY

The house is silent but for a CD OF LISZT PIANO MUSIC, and the TAPPING UPON A COMPUTER KEYBOARD.

At the wall, the landline is disconnected. On Murray's desk, his cellphone is switched off.

With fierce joy, MURRAY sits hunched before his iMac.

And up above, from DANTE, is that a glimmer of approval?

EXT. - JETTY - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO - VENICE - ITALY - DAY

Kassandra's DRIVER is busy packing her designer luggage into the motorboat, with its princely coronet emblazoned on the port and starboard sides. He glances at his watch, frowns, and works more quickly and efficiently.

Elegantly dressed in white - with a headscarf, wraparound designer sunglasses, her Ingot iPhone, and a designer handbag - KASSANDRA nonchalantly emerges from the palazzo.

Anxiously, ILÁRIA follows. About to speak, she is briefly distracted by the sight, on the Grand Canal, of an approaching water bus. Marked ACTV, it is crammed with gawking TOURISTS raising their cameras and smartphones.

INT. - WATER-BUS - GRAND CANAL - VENICE - ITALY - MOMENTS LATER

AMERICAN TOURIST

But what I want to know is, what
does a TV station - a TV station! -
have to do with water buses! Hmmm!

EXT. - JETTY - KASSANDRA'S PALAZZO - VENICE - ITALY -
MOMENTS LATER

ILÁRIA

But Principessa, the Silvia has
completely disappeared! The
Silvia's mother is beside herself!
To the mother, what must I say?!
Besides, her Swiss-Italian dialect,
I can barely understand it!

KASSANDRA

(not interested)

Ilária, I can't do anything about
it now. I'll be late for my plane.

The DRIVER, now at the wheel, discreetly clears his throat.

KASSANDRA

(embarking)

You and Prince Raffaele will just
have to sort this out yourselves.

ILÁRIA

(sighing, and bowing)

Principessa.

(to herself; in Sicilian)

What do I know? I'm from Sicily!

INT. - WATER BUS - GRAND CANAL - VENICE - ITALY - MOMENTS
LATER

The water bus is just passing the palazzo. That KASSANDRA was bowed to and addressed as 'Principessa' has drawn the attention of the TOURISTS: Americans, Britons, Chinese, Japanese, Germans, French.

CHINESE TOURIST
'Plincipessa' mean 'Plincess'!

The news "splends" like wildfire. Cameras click madly, heads bow, and one or two inveterate monarchists even curtsy.

A GERMAN TOURIST draws attention to the motorboat's princely heraldic coronet. A JAPANESE TOURIST raises his binoculars.

JAPANESE TOURIST
Boat's name... "Appa... Apparachia"!

CHINESE TOURIST
Mus' be Plincipality of Plincess!

General assent.

BRITISH TOURIST
But where on earth IS Apparachia?!

FRENCH TOURIST
(superciliously)
Obviously some miniscule
counter-revolutionary throwback
crammed with tax-dodging
One-Percenter!

JAPANESE TOURIST
Yes-yes-yes! Rike Monaco, Andolla
or Riechtenstein!

General assent. Except for the few AMERICANS on board, who are wryly shaking their heads.

EXT. - KASSANDRA'S MOTORBOAT - GRAND CANAL - VENICE - ITALY
- MOMENTS LATER

Meanwhile, the rapidly departing PRINCESS KASSANDRA waves goodbye to her "subjects" with regal dignity.

INT. - DRAWING ROOM - KASSANDRA'S PENTHOUSE - NEW YORK - DAY

Picking her nose with her ungloved right hand, KASSANDRA, sits expectantly on a sofa. Her Ingot iPhone rings.

KASSANDRA
(into phone; brightly)
Ciao, Lello...! What...?! Nooo...!
In the Canal?! She must have fallen
out of the... Nooo...! And her
(MORE)

KASSANDRA (cont'd)
vials and secret formulas...?!
D'you think it's industrial
espio-...?! Hmm...Perhaps the
Chinese? Or the Russians, Iranians
or North Koreans...? Well, you
would know...Ciao-ciao.

Ringling off, and smiling darkly, she ungloves her left hand:
it is visibly younger than the right.

EXT. - PARKING AREA - OUR LADY OF MARTYRS CHURCH - NEW YORK
- EARLY AFTERNOON

KASSANDRA arrives in a black Mercedes Benz ML63 SUV. The
parking area is jam-packed. But she is expected. With great
ceremony, a PARKING ATTENDANT runs up and directs her to a
space that has been reserved especially for her.

As KASSANDRA gets out of the SUV, her phone rings. She
glances at the screen, grimaces, but answers anyway.

INT. - BEENIMAN'S OFFICE - KLONDIKE BANK - LA - LATE MORNING

BEENIMAN
(into phone)
Ms. Cooper! When I was in Venice, I
called you repeatedly! Yet you
never once...! Why, Venice, LA of
course...! But then where? Venice,
Illinois? Venice, Florida? Venice
New York? Venice uh Louisiana...?!
Ah. Ah. I see... Well uh thanks for
uh clearing that up! Uh ciao!

Red-faced and deflated, BEENIMAN rings off.

INT. - OUR LADY OF MARTYRS CHURCH - NEW YORK - A WHILE LATER

The Funeral Service for MISS RISSO. RESPIRATORY THERAPIST
HEAVISIDE is also present. She looks so haggard and wretched
that even the grieving RISSOS feel sorry for her.

Elegantly but simply dressed in white - and gloved -
KASSANDRA is delivering the eulogy.

KASSANDRA
(cynically nonchalant)
To be, well, brutally honest, I
would have thought that the obvious
choice for this signal honor would
NOT have been me. In fact, to
Respiratory Therapist Heaviside I
say: Don't take it so hard, dear. I
know it wasn't your fault!

HEAVISIDE bursts into tears. Even the RISSOS comfort her.

Looking on discreetly from the bg. are DETECTIVES ZANZARA and PESCATORE. (They have New Jersey accents.)

PESCATORE
(aside to Zanzara)
A great accolade for the family.
Such a famous actress an' all. No?

ZANZARA
Well. Yeah. I suppose.

INT. - WOMEN'S RESTROOM - OUR LADY OF MARTYRS CHURCH - NEW YORK - A WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA enters and checks that she is alone. A very deep breath. Slowly, she removes her gloves: both hands are, to sight and touch, younger and smoother.

She replaces the gloves, then paces, considering. Coming to a halt, she smiles with sinister delight.

She takes out a notebook and jots down a half-page list of names, headed by those of her three ex-husbands. She takes out her Ingot iPhone and presses Speed Dial #2.

KASSANDRA
(into phone)
Ah, Lello. Remember what I did for you in Venice? Well, I need you to return the favor... I want you in Bel Air a month from today... But you owe me...! Good! In a month. Don't forget...! Good! Ciao-ciao!

She rings off, consults her list, and makes the next call.

INT. - MEN'S RESTROOM - OUR LADY OF MARTYRS CHURCH - NEW YORK - A SHORT WHILE LATER

ZANZARA and PESCATORE stand washing their hands.

KASSANDRA'S VOICE can faintly and indistinctly be heard coming through from the adjoining women's restroom.

PESCATORE
So whadya think? Nursie looks shook up pretty good to me! Still, maybe it's...whachumacall - Munchkin's?

ZANZARA
Münchhausen by Proxy. No, no, not the nurse. She's no actor... But anyway, don't forget - we're not even here! We're just observers.

PESCATORE
Yeah, sure! We're just, oh, keeping our eye in, while on vacation!

Chuckling, they go out.

INT. - WOMEN'S RESTROOM - OUR LADY OF MARTYRS CHURCH - NEW YORK - A MOMENT LATER

KASSANDRA crosses off the last name on her list and replaces notebook, pencil and iPhone in her handbag.

She opens the door: the coast is clear. Slipping out, she bares her teeth in an uncovered, shark-like yawn.

The sound of a LADY-LIKE SNORING.

EXT. - WOODS NEAR PIKEVILLE - KENTUCKY - DAY - JANUARY 1994 - SEPIA DREAM

While the SOUND OF THE SNORING CONTINUES, bands of LOGGERS are hard at work chopping trees and sawing timber.

Carrying a hamper, KASSIE (12) searches for someone among them. Evidently knowing who she is, and what she is doing there, the LOGGERS continue working.

For her part, KASSIE is mesmerized by their chopping technique.

Finally spotting DOLPHY and GRANDPA in the near distance, she goes toward them.

EXT. - ANOTHER PART OF THE WOODS NEAR PIKEVILLE - KENTUCKY - A SHORT WHILE LATER - SEPIA DREAM

While the SOUND OF THE SNORING CONTINUES, DOLPHY wipes his brow, smilingly takes the hamper from KASSIE, sits on a log, and tucks in.

GRANDPA comes over and, unseen by DOLPHY, leeringly squeezes KASSIE's cheek. Stoically, she endures this, as if daring herself not to react. Frowning, he stops. She smiles to herself.

Still unseen by DOLPHY, GRANDPA now begins finding pretexts to rub up against KASSIE. In silent fury, she pulls away. Now it is GRANDPA's turn to smile.

With the unsuspecting, blissful ignorance of the pure in heart, DOLPHY is still eating. KASSIE is furious with him for not protecting her.

Sitting down beside DOLPHY, and starting to eat, GRANDPA gives KASSIE one last leer as she turns to go.

INT. - KASSANDRA'S BEDROOM - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - MORNING

The SNORING CEASES as KASSANDRA wakes up in a high-backed leopard-skin armchair turned toward the balcony. She yawns, stretches, and removes her black sleeping mask.

Glancing at her "Serpenti" bracelet watch, she quickly rises.

INT. - BALLROOM - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Kassandra Cooper's Second Press Conference.

Nervous but intrigued atmosphere. Snacks and beverages at the back. Among the waiting, especially-hired CATERING STAFF is the usual sneering BIG-HAIRED OBESE WOMAN.

The assembled JOURNALISTS include - in the 2nd row - SPHINX KACHINSKY, accompanied by her butch friend ROZ.

In the front row are SARAH-KAY; PRINCE RAFFAELE; his girlfriend FLAVIA (20s, tall, aristocratic, beautiful, jealous, insecure); BUTCH LICKMAN; and - huddled beside him - CHICK MANLEY.

On the name-tagged participants' table, KASSANDRA COOPER's empty seat at the center is flanked by the seated KITTY KRAKEN and LEDA PILATE on her left; and on her right, by KOSTAS PAPPAKOSTAS, MURRAY ZELIGMAN, and IZZY BRINKMAN.

To GASPS of admiration, KASSANDRA - still gloved, and carrying her Ingot iPhone - makes her entrance, takes her place, and has a sip of water. She has all but regained the looks and figure of her younger days.

KASSANDRA peers quizzically at the SOUND TECHNICIAN (EDDIE, 20s, surfer dude, Miami Dolphins cap & T-shirt). Beaming reassuringly, EDDIE gives her a double thumbs-up.

ELMER SPHAGNUM, EDDIE's ASSISTANT, seems as obsessed with KASSANDRA as ever.

KASSANDRA

(into mic)

Good morning, and welcome! I know I was a bit of a drama queen last time. But rest assured...

(raising a gloved hand)

...I have taken my medication!

LAUGHTER. Instantly, everyone relaxes.

KASSANDRA

I shan't detain you long. Just a quick announcement.

Sipping at her water again, KASSANDRA makes them wait.

KASSANDRA

As you know, I am playing the lead in Murray Zeligman's "Skin Deep", with Kostas Pappakostas directing, and the three of us co-producing.

(MORE)

KASSANDRA (cont'd)
What you don't know is that "Skin
Deep" will be my last film. I
hereby announce...my retirement!

HUBBUB & CONSTERNATION. KASSANDRA coolly takes yet another
sip. Things quickly SETTLE DOWN.

KASSANDRA
As you know, I am approaching the
critical age for a Hollywood
actress. And I hope Groucho Marx is
not in the audience!

LAUGHTER.

KASSANDRA
But I must face reality. I must
graciously make way for someone who
will step into my shoes... Someone
like my dear, loyal and trusted
protégé Sarah-Kay over here!

All eyes on SARAH-KAY - who is more shocked than anyone.
SPHINX KACHINSKY and ROZ exchange a look.

A forest of hands.

KASSANDRA
Mrs. Kachinsky.

SPHINX KACHINSKY
May I say, Ms. Cooper, you look
lovely! Really slim and youthful!
Not retirement material in the very
least! Yet why the gloves?

KASSANDRA
(secret smile)
Rest assured, the...gloves will
soon be off...! Mr. Sinker.

SINKER
So is it true you're living on
nothing but coffee and cigarettes?

KASSANDRA
Well, I am at least trying to be
a...model citizen!

LAUGHTER. Even the jealous FLAVIA smiles despite herself.

KASSANDRA
Seriously, though, I've merely
resumed the exercise routines of
gymnastics and so forth from my...
former years. Mr. Flybridge.

FLYBRIDGE

You seem to have resolved your spat with Mr. Pappakostas. In fact, I notice that all of your ex-husbands are present here today!

KASSANDRA

My ex-husbands know that they can always count on me to...be there for them in their...hour of need!

FLAVIA shoots a dirty look at the PRINCE. And CHICK raises an eyebrow at BUTCH, who smiles back reassuringly.

Meanwhile, Kassandra's MIC has ignominiously DIED. Aghast and incredulous, EDDIE hastens to her aid. Detached, yet obsessed with KASSANDRA, ELMER SPHAGNUM looks on.

Unnerved and sweating under Kassandra's stare, EDDIE struggles in vain with the mic.

KASSANDRA finally gives up on EDDIE. Rising, she smiles reassuringly at everyone else, but ominously at him.

KASSANDRA

(to Eddie)

Next time you're on "dawn patrol", watch out for..."tombstoning"!

EDDIE swallows hard, and looks away.

KASSANDRA

(to everyone else)

Friends, "Eat! Drink! Be merry!"

Through a concealed door, KASSANDRA melts away.

Sneering, the OBESE WOMAN looks on.

INT. - DR. SAWYER'S OFFICE - LA - AFTERNOON

The office has a slightly faded olde-world and olde-money opulence. On the antique desk is an elegant but faded name plate reading: "DWIGHT D. SAWYER, LLD".

Flustered, sweating, and sputtering, SAWYER has almost finished perusing some papers. Waiting opposite him, sipping tea, and sighing with impatience is KASSANDRA (gloved). In a narrow arc, her chair swings idly from side to side.

SAWYER

(looking up)

Well, Ms. Cooper! This is all most...irregular! I mean, you barely know the...party in question! Wouldn't you want to...reconsider?! Or at least to -

KASSANDRA

(smiling icily)

If you are unhappy to stay on as my lawyer, Dr. Sawyer, do say so.

SAWYER

No. Please. You misconstrue.

(taking up a paper)

Uh in the uh melancholy event of your going uh in the personal sense uh belly-up, then Sawyer & Associates would be delighted - but not delighted per se! - to uh continue to represent your uh designated heiress. As you yourself herein suggest... Albeit -

KASSANDRA

(unnerving stare)

I was hoping, Dr Sawyer, that this matter might be...expedited?!

SAWYER

Oh...! I'll...just...!

Leaping to his feet, almost tripping over himself in his haste to escape those eyes, SAWYER makes himself scarce.

KASSANDRA reaches for her iPhone.

INT. - LA FASHION WEEK VENUE - EVENING

KASSANDRA - gloved - and SARAH-KAY have front-row seats.

Several people - including SPHINX KACHINSKY and ROZ, as well as various CELEBRITIES - notice them together.

Outrageously sexy yet ostentatiously blasé, the MODELS parade, pout, and pose. Wearing reading glasses, KASSANDRA scrutinizes the designs, and makes notes in her catalog.

SARAH-KAY is gawking like a hick. KASSANDRA smiles to herself.

INT. - GYMNASIUM - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - MORNING

The quintuple-volume gymnasium is professionally designed, set up, and equipped for gymnastics, boxing, martial arts, and general strength and fitness.

While SARAH-KAY gawks in awe, KASSANDRA - now ungloved - elegantly dismounts from the balance beam, then climbs all the way up the rope to the ceiling.

SARAH-KAY

You're amazin'! I could never be you!

KASSANDRA smiles down darkly.

IZZY
(pleasantly surprised)
Wonderful...! You seen her again?

MURRAY
Lately, no. She's always with that
(snapping fingers)
Sarah-Kay... Sarah-Kay... Why am I
thinking of conundrums and enigmas?
Anyway, must be talented.

IZZY
It's Riddle. And no. No talent.
Must be love.

MURRAY looks up. He shrugs. He scratches his head.

EXT. - FRONT ENTRANCE - " UPRIGHT CITIZENS BRIGADE THEATRE" -
HOLLYWOOD - DAY

KASSANDRA and SARAH-KAY are noticed arriving.

INT. -"UPRIGHT CITIZENS BRIGADE THEATRE" - HOLLYWOOD - A
WHILE LATER

In the front row, KASSANDRA and SARAH-KAY watch as a
rehearsal is just ending. ACTOR #1 approaches the apron.

ACTOR #1
Ms. Cooper, I'm sure I speak for
all my colleagues. We are honored
by your presence here today!

Respectful salutations from the Stage and from the scattered
"AUDIENCE". KASSANDRA responds with a queenly wave.

ACTOR #2 has an idea. He comes forward.

ACTOR #2
Perhaps Ms. Cooper would care to
give us a performance suggestion?

KASSANDRA
(instantly intrigued)
Oh...! Hmmm... What about... the
Sacrifice of a Virgin to the gods?!

The ACTORS are taken aback. Nevertheless, they accept the
suggestion, and prepare to improvise upon it.

KASSANDRA
(to Sarah-Kay)
Archeologists, you know, have even
found sacrificial victims buried in
the very foundations of buildings!
Sort of like a whole new beginning.
Built upon someone else's necessary
sacrifice! Almost poetic, not so?

SARAH-KAY smiles back weakly.

INT. - "FORMOSA CAFE" - HOLLYWOOD - EVENING

With one or two CELEBRITIES in the bg., KASSANDRA and SARAH-KAY sit eating at a table. SARAH-KAY is fidgeting.

SARAH-KAY

Kassie, I jus' can't keep lettin' you foot the bill!

KASSANDRA

(waving dismissively)

You can pay me back when you're famous. And don't you worry - I'm not a loan shark!

SARAH-KAY

Well, I'd sure love to foller in your footsteps! If I could! But don't hold your breath!

KASSANDRA

Oh nonsense. And don't be shy.

KASSANDRA raises a hand to summon the CHINESE WAITER.

KASSANDRA

(straight face; Kentucky accent)

Garcon-Waiter, this here fine upstandin' young lady-woman needs a fixin'-a hot brown, with some taders and maders, and some sop for her biscuit-bread! But leave off with the toad-frog's legs now, d'ya hear! An' could ya get a move on? It's a-startin' to get airish!

CHINESE WAITER

...Ex-...cuse?!

Guiltily cracking up, SARAH-KAY claps a hand over her mouth. KASSANDRA winks back conspiratorially.

EXT. - VENICE FISHING PIER - LA - DAY

KASSANDRA and MURRAY admire the view: the sailboat-flecked ocean; Santa Monica; Malibu; and Catalina Island.

Then they peer down into the water, where leopard sharks circle and forage.

MURRAY

Ah, but can the leopard shark change its spots?

KASSANDRA stares at him in silence for a moment. Then, as one, they begin walking along the pier.

MURRAY
(studiedly casual)
How's your...young waitress?

KASSANDRA
(half to herself)
I've taken her under my fin...
Wing, I mean. She has...potential.

MURRAY
That's not what I've heard.

KASSANDRA
(glittering smile)
Well you heard wrong. In fact, I've
just installed her in my house in
Bel Air...Ya know, what with us
gals bein' two hillbillies in
Hollywood an' all!

MURRAY is studiedly noncommittal.

They approach a HEAL THE BAY MAN, who addresses a small crowd, while handing out pamphlets.

HEAL THE BAY MAN
See, people, you have your
bottom-feeders, your middle-feeders
and your top-feeders. Now your
worst pollution you find right down
on the ocean floor. Meaning, your
top feeders are the safest to eat!

MURRAY
In that case, I'm not safe to eat!

KASSANDRA
(smiling darkly)
Me, I'm a top-feeder kinda gal!

EXT. - VENICE BEACH - LA - A WHILE LATER

KASSANDRA and MURRAY stroll along pensively.

KASSANDRA
Tell me, if you were an unwilling
guest in Dante's Inferno, then
which Circle would you be in?

MURRAY
(instantly intrigued)
Hmmm... I suppose...the...Third.

KASSANDRA
Hmm... The Circle...of Addiction.

MURRAY

(shrugging)

On the wagon now, though. Touch wood...! And as for you... The... Second Circle perhaps?

KASSANDRA

(amused)

The Circle of Lust? A common misconception. But in fact, no...

(blasé)

No. For me...the Seventh.

MURRAY

The...?! You can't be...! The... Seventh?! Did you mean to say the...Seventh? The Seventh Circle?!

Smiling, she nods yes. He stares at her in utter disbelief. But no, he finally decides. She must be pulling his leg.

INT. - LIBRARY - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - EVENING

KASSANDRA reclines on a couch, with a small pile of books beside her. She finishes skimming through "Method - Or Madness?" by Robert Lewis, then reaches for another book.

Nearby, curled up on the floor, SARAH-KAY is surfing the internet on an iPad.

MARÍA comes in for the tea-things. Like everyone else, she is not quite sure what to make of SARAH-KAY's presence.

KASSANDRA is now skimming through "Honeyed Speech - Oratory Classical & Modern".

SARAH-KAY sits up excitedly.

SARAH-KAY

Kassie, listen to this! An online quiz! "Are You a Psychopath?! Take the Test, and Find Out!"

KASSANDRA smiles indulgently. SARAH-KAY eagerly begins taking the test. KASSANDRA goes back to her skimming.

THE SAME - A WHILE LATER

SARAH-KAY

"Normal"?! "Normal"?! It's not possible! I can't believe how uninterestin' I is! Fir me, actin's just a pipe dream!

KASSANDRA

(smiling darkly)

Even pipe dreams can come true.

INT. - WALK-IN CLOSET - BOUDOIR - KASSANDRA'S MANSION - BEL AIR - A FEW WEEKS LATER - AFTERNOON

A strikingly younger KASSANDRA insists that SARAH-KAY choose some of her best clothes and jewelry. Ill at ease, SARAH-KAY removes her track suit and running shoes, leaving them on the floor, and gets into Cassandra's clothes.

KASSANDRA slips out of her dress, and to SARAH-KAY's amazement, puts on the discarded track suit - it has a line extending lengthwise on either side - then squeezes into SARAH-KAY'S running shoes.

Now KASSANDRA is SARAH-KAY, and SARAH-KAY is KASSANDRA.

SARAH-KAY

It's like lookin' in the mi'r!

KASSANDRA

Oh I assure you, no-one but you...could be you. In any case, wearing your clothes makes me feel...so much closer to you!

Deeply touched, SARAH-KAY presses Cassandra's hand.

KASSANDRA

Oh, by the way - this morning, you seemed a little...upset?

SARAH-KAY

What? Oh no, it's just... See, they wuz showin' again on the TV 'bout that actor. The one who went and had his wife killed an' all?

KASSANDRA

(matter-of-fact)

Oh, don't take it personally. I'm sure he didn't mean any harm by it.

SARAH-KAY stares hard at her. KASSANDRA's averted eyes are as cold as black ice.

INT. - FERRARI TESTAROSSA - WINDING MOUNTAIN ROAD - CALIFORNIA - A WHILE LATER

SARAH-KAY sits anxiously in the passenger seat. At high speed, KASSANDRA recklessly but expertly flings the big-hipped Ferrari round the road's dangerous curves.

SARAH-KAY

D'ya have ta ball-hoot like that?!

KASSANDRA

What's that, dear...? Oh... Sorry.

By pure deceleration, and without the use of the brakes, KASSANDRA brings the Ferrari to a very gradual halt.

KASSANDRA

Tell you what, dear - if it'll make
you feel any better, you drive.

KASSANDRA gets out, and discreetly checks that the coast is clear. They swap places. Excitedly, SARAH-KAY takes the wheel and drives off. But she is surprised by the sheer muscular effort of hand and foot required to drive a Testarossa. They chuckle about it.

Then KASSANDRA's smile is replaced by Arctic contempt. SARAH-KAY blinks at her in bewilderment.

KASSANDRA

Well, well, well! After a
lifetime-a bein' a nobody, yer
finally in the driver's seat,
ain'tcha now, girlee?!

SARAH-KAY gapes as KASSANDRA calmly places an incendiary device on the storage space behind the driver's seat.

In a state of uncomprehending horror, SARAH-KAY keeps wanting to turn and look behind her. But they are approaching a dangerous curve and SARAH-KAY is forced, despite herself, to keep her eyes on the road.

Counterintuitively, she increases speed, as if to escape from danger. With grim annoyance, she realizes her foolishness, and pumps the brakes: nothing. Glancing in anguish at KASSANDRA, she pulls up the handbrake: nothing.

KASSANDRA, meanwhile, has been looking on with indifference. Suddenly energized, she grasps the wheel. With her gymnast's strength, she prevents SARAH-KAY from turning it.

SARAH-KAY's survival instinct pushes her anguished incomprehension to the background. She throws herself into a life-and-death struggle for control of the wheel, while the Testarossa fishtails all over the road.

But KASSANDRA is too strong for SARAH-KAY. And now they are heading straight towards the edge of a ravine.

At the very last moment, with one final Arctic smile, KASSANDRA opens her door, and rolls out expertly and harmlessly onto the road.

In one smooth movement she is on her feet again. But the Ferrari sails over the edge, bursting spectacularly into flame even before it has reached the bottom.

KASSANDRA dusts herself off, and sighs nonchalantly.

KASSANDRA

Ah well. Besides, it made my hips
look too big.

EXT. - "DANTE'S DINER" - LA - EARLY EVENING

A sign reads:

"DANTE'S / WHERE-A THE CHILLI / IS-A HOT AS-A HELL! / AND-A
THE PASTA / IS-A PURE-A PARADISO!"

INT. - "DANTE'S DINER" - LA - MOMENTS LATER

Among the munching, drinking, and gesticulating mostly Italian-American patrons are Detectives ZANZARA and PESCATORE, engrossed in their rare steak and hake, respectively.

Up on the muted large flat-panel display, the channel is on CIRCUS TV. The ANCHOR - just thrilled to have the story - is soundlessly breaking the sensational news of the death of Cassandra Cooper. But no-one has noticed yet.

PATRON #1
(finally noticing)
Holy guacamole! Hey Dante, turn up
the volume! It's that actress!

DANTE turns to look. Eyes wide, he points the remote and unmutes. Everyone looks up - except ZANZARA.

CIRCUS TV ANCHOR
...speculation of drink-driving!
Because the Ferrari was apparently
fishtailing all over the road!

Images of a young KASSANDRA COOPER and of her burnt-out Ferrari Testarossa flash across the screen.

DEVASTATED PATRON
I can't believe it.

PESCATORE
(munching; to Zanzara)
Hey, it's that actress. You know.
From the funeral.

At last, ZANZARA looks up. But the story has been replaced, for now, by a life-insurance commercial. ZANZARA makes an Italian gesture of impatience at PESCATORE, who shrugs.

DANTE mutes again, calmly weathering a barrage of protests.

With one eye on the TV, the PATRONS resume their meals.

DEVASTATED PATRON
I can't believe it!

Some of the other PATRONS briefly turn to look at him.

PESCATORE
(munching; to Zanzara)
Body's...just been...fished
out...of a...ravine.

ZANZARA looks up sharply. The KASSANDRA story is back on,
but DANTE, distracted, hasn't unmuted yet.

DEVASTATED PATRON
(almost in tears)
I just can't BELIEVE it...! A
Testarossa! A goddamn Ferrari
Testarossa! Up. In. SMOKE!

The TV forgotten, everyone is staring open-mouthed at him.

DEVASTATED PATRON
(shrugging)
Hey, it's one of the all-time
classics!

They exchange looks. They consider. They exchange more
looks. They begin to see his point. Now no-one is asking for
the TV to be unmuted.

PATRON #2
OK. OK, it's bad, guys! But don't
forget: it could have been worse!
It could have been a 288 GTO!

DEVASTATED PATRON lets out a howl of agony.

PATRON #3
People! Can we at least spare a
thought...for the 365 Daytona!

More agony for DEVASTATED PATRON. Someone stands up.

INDIGNANT PATRON
What is wrong with you guys?! Have
you no sense of values, no sense of
proportion?! Where's your respect?!
Where...are your priorities...?!

Shame-faced looks all round. They bow their heads.

INDIGNANT PATRON
Because no-one has even
mentioned...the 250 GTO!

Several PATRONS palm themselves on the forehead. All are
deeply remorseful about this "sin of omission".

For DEVASTATED PATRON, however, even the imaginary loss of a
250 GTO is too much. Settling his bill, he scampers out.

The DETECTIVES, who have been watching this scene with
bemusement, exchange a look, then resume their meals.

PESCATORE

Shocking...that no-one mentioned
...the F40.

ZANZARA glares at him.

PESCATORE

Just saying.

INT. - SITTING ROOM - MURRAY'S HOUSE - VENICE - LA - NIGHT

MURRAY (devastated) and IZZY (calculating) are watching the news on CIRCUS TV.

A distraught "SARAH-KAY" - in a sweat-drenched track suit - is being interviewed outside Cassandra's Bel Air mansion.

"SARAH-KAY"

Why, ma'am, my stomach's turned inside out! I seed her barely hours ago! She wuz goin' ta some fancy do and she dropped me off. So's I could jog back home, see? People been bad-mouthin' her so much, it really ate me up! But everwho said Kassie wuz done, wuz dead wrong! She wuz workin' like crazy, ta shut 'em up! She inspired me so much! I wanted ta be jus' like her!

REPORTER

Sarah, that must have been some run! You're absolutely drenched!

"SARAH-KAY"

Yeah, I sure needs warshed! I must be smellin' like kyarn about now! I's jus' run a right smart piece!

INTERVIEWER

I...beg your...pardon...?!

IZZY

(yawning)

You can turn it off now. They'll just keep recycling.

Shakily, MURRAY presses the remote.

IZZY

It's regrettable, of course. No-one is denying that. But the main thing is: she got you writing again!

MURRAY

I wasn't thinking of my SCRIPT!

IZZY

Well of course, of course! Didn't mean to sound... Still, let's be practical. This is business...

MURRAY gazes heavenward.

IZZY

So we'll get another actress. Course that Sarah-Kay hick will forget about acting now: she's inherited the lot! Talk about falling with your butt in the butter...! Anyway, actresses are two a penny. Unlike directors... AND writers of course!

MURRAY sighs, and gazes sadly out of the window.

INT. - "ABRACADAVRA FUNERAL PARLOR" - OUTSKIRTS OF LA - CALIFORNIA - MORNING

Mr. SLURRY (early 60s, vaguely Southern accent) is keeping an eye on the control panel of his cremator. He looks up at the entry of ELMER SPHAGNUM.

SLURRY

(inoffensively sarcastic)
Why, if it ain't Elmer Sphagnum!
There you are at last, son!

ELMER

(politely unapologetic;
Illinois accent)
Sorry I'm late, Mr. Slurry, sir.
Some traffic you folks have here!

SLURRY

(instantly disarmed)
Do we ever! And now these damned mosquitoes! Oh, meant to ask: you b'chance related to Rosy Sphagnum? Ran the old Sphagnum Funeral Parlor out of Venice, Illinois.

ELMER

(darkly)
My...mother...sir.

SLURRY

(oblivious)
Small world! Small world! Well, you'll definly fit right in, son! Definly! Probly just a more hi-tech version of what you know already. Anyway, had to start without you. Fact, SHE started without us!

They chortle together.

SLURRY

I'll take you through the
pr'cedure. But this pertickler
job's "Delivery Only".

ELMER looks on in gleeful fascination.

SLURRY

Now, son, this here's what we call
in the trade the cremator, see?

ELMER

I bet it gets real hot in there.

SLURRY

(coolly)

Oh 1,800 Fahrenheit. 1,000 Celsius.

ELMER

Ouch. That's gotta smart.

SLURRY

But cooler 'an where she's headed!
It's all automated. This here's
what we call in the trade a PLC.

ELMER

T-L-C?!

SLURRY

PLC. Programmable Logic Controller.

ELMER's relief is palpable.

SLURRY

Now this here, son, is where you
enter the perticklers of the party
in question. Then you press this
here start button. See?

Discreetly lapping it up, ELMER nods yes.

SLURRY

And then you're lookin' at, oh, one
hour for every 100 pounds or so.

ELMER

Uh sir, couldn't you save time and
money by putting in more than one?

SLURRY

That would be nice, wouldn't it,
son. But unfortunately, regulations
is regulations. No, only exceptions
would be, oh, still-born twins.

ELMER

(indiscreetly gleeful)
Sir, what about a still-born baby,
say, together with its mother, who
died, say, giving birth?

SLURRY

Why, you really have a knack for
this, doncha, son! Well yes, that
would be a fine example! Just watch
out for dental fillin's and
jewelry, though! Over there's our
magnetic detection device for that.
Course, whatever we do find, we
just sell as precious scrap metal.

ELMER makes a mental note.

SLURRY

Now, son, after the gases and such
have gone, all we have left are dry
bone fragments. And those - for,
oh, twenty minutes - go over there,
into the cremulator. See?

ELMER

(eyes closed)
Grinds up... the...bones, sir?

SLURRY

Right again, son! You're a natural
all right! Because, you see, it's
only after cremulation that we get
the ashes we all know and love. Or
as we say in the trade, "cremains".
(wagging a finger)
But only in-house, mind! Never to
family members! Anyway, at the end,
all that will be left of her will
be, oh, 4 pounds - 1.8 kilos.

ELMER

In LA, sir, you can never ever be
too thin!

They chortle together.

SLURRY

Now then, these pertickler
cremains'll go into this here
fine-lookin' what we call in the
trade cinerary urn. It was provided
by the heir - heiress - of the
deceased: Miss - Ms. - Riddle.

ELMER

That young actress, from Kentucky?

SLURRY

That's the one. Anyway, urn and paperwork'll go to her... Now son, have to ask: you wouldn't happen to be uncomfortable, would you now, round dead bodies and such?

ELMER

(studiedly casual)

Oh not at all, sir. Fact is, I find 'em...kinda...stimulating.

SLURRY

(frowning; semi-serious)

Say, hope you're not one of those funeral-home-lovin' serial-killer types? Like John Wayne Gacy...? Or the Yorkshire Ripper...?

ELMER

(studiedly casual)

What makes you...say that...sir?

SLURRY

Yes... Well... Anyway... So you... think you're...up for it?

ELMER

(studiedly casual)

Oh I...believe so...Mr. Slurry sir.

SLURRY

Glad to hear that, son! Glad to! Fact, could use some help now, you know, in my declinin' years!
(bitterly introspective)
What with my very own son not even wantin' to foller in my...!

ELMER

(contained glee)

Sir, by any chance could I do the cremulating? For the little lady?

SLURRY

(old self again)

Why, with pleasure, son! Glad you asked! Hands on! Hands on! That's how you'll learn this trade!

INT. - KITCHEN - MURRAY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sipping at a glass of vodka - the bottle is half-empty - MURRAY is making bouillabaisse. The phone rings.

MURRAY

(into phone; absently)

Zeligman...

(MORE)

MURRAY (cont'd)
(pleasantly shocked)
Bea...?!

INT. - PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HALL - LA - A WEEK LATER -
AFTERNOON

"KASSANDRA COOPER" is dead and buried. The GUESTS mingle, exchange condolences, and stuff themselves.

Among the CATERING STAFF is the mid-50s OBESE WOMAN, wearing a ruminative expression.

Present are, among others: a veiled "SARAH-KAY"; MURRAY, BEA, and IZZY; PRINCE RAFFAELE and FLAVIA; KOSTAS; BUTCH and CHICK MANLEY; and SPHINX KACHINSKY and ROZ.

Many - MURRAY included - are undecided about exactly how they should relate to the woman they take to be SARAH-KAY.

From the bg., ZANZARA and PESCATORE look on discreetly.

INT. - ANOTHER PART OF THE CHURCH HALL - A WHILE LATER

As usual, "SARAH-KAY" is bored. A comic distraction arrives in the form of the PASTOR (Dr. PERIGEE). Like her, he has noticed the presence, even here, of the mosquitoes.

DR. PERIGEE
Everyone is commenting, my dear, on your..."veil of mystery"!

"SARAH-KAY"
(California accent)
Alas, dear Dr. Perigee, a veil of mystery...in a vale of tears!

DR. PERIGEE
(suitably somber)
Ah yes, alas! Alas...! Alas!

"SARAH-KAY"
Yet one must, as our English cousins say, "keep a stiff upper lip, what"! Keep on living, for the sake of the living!

He nods; she shakes her head. He raises an eyebrow; she raises a finger...toward the ceiling: mosquitoes.

"SARAH-KAY"
I hope, Dr. Perigee, that it wasn't the Lord who whistled for these critters to come and...plague us!

Dr. PERIGEE is studiously noncommittal.

"SARAH-KAY"

Though - to believe the experts -
mosquitoes are more dangerous than
the Great White Shark herself!

DR. PERIGEE

Indeed...?! But how so?

"SARAH-KAY"

(confidentially)

From a mosquito bite, I myself, you
know, as a child, back in Kentucky,
once contracted...encephalitis!

DR. PERIGEE

Enceph-...?! From a...?!
Encepha-...?! You mean...?!

"SARAH-KAY"

'Fraid so! However, I've long since
made a complete and utter recovery!
(knocking her skull)

All in perfect working order!

INT. - ANOTHER PART OF THE CHURCH HALL - A WHILE LATER

In the bg., SPHINX KACHINSKY and ROZ look on indiscreetly as
PRINCE RAFFAELE huddles with FLAVIA. Grinning salaciously,
FLAVIA whispers in his ear.

PRINCE RAFFAELE

You're...joking! Since when?!

FLAVIA

(proudly)

Oh since about a week ago. It
wasn't easy. As you know, Lello!
But now, after months of practising
in secret, I can finally do it!

PRINCE RAFFAELE

(aroused)

All the way?! Right behind your
head?!

FLAVIA

(smugly)

Like a golden Kate Moss!

PRINCE RAFFAELE

(inflamed)

When can I see?!

FLAVIA

(pouting)

Tonight. Maybe! If, if, if - just
for once - you let me...come first!

PRINCE RAFFAELE rolls his eyes.

INT. - ANOTHER PART OF THE CHURCH HALL - A WHILE LATER

ROZ

The Prince's grand-daughter's so cute! They're obviously very close.

SPHINX

(teary-eyed)

And even Zeligman's daughter came back to him! After her adolescent fling with...counter-culture! So why am I the only one who...?!

ROZ

He'll make peace with us, love! He will. In the end... You'll see.

SPHINX openly grasps ROZ's hand. But only for a moment.

INT. - MEN'S RESTROOM - PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HALL - LA - A WHILE LATER

PESCATORE and ZANZARA are at the urinals.

PESCATORE

So whadya think? Motive this Sarah-Kay Riddle's got and how!

ZANZARA

Yeah, we'll go visit. After a... suitable period of mourning.

PESCATORE

Morning after is more like!

ZANZARA

Don't you worry! If she's up to something fishy, we'll reel her in!

INT. - WOMEN'S RESTROOM - PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HALL - LA - A SHORT WHILE LATER

"SARAH-KAY" enters and checks that she is alone. Before a mirror, she takes a deep breath. She removes her veil, and gasps. Is she pleased or displeased by what she sees?

Footsteps approach. "SARAH-KAY" quickly veils herself again. A WOMAN enters, nods respectfully, and enters a stall.

"SARAH-KAY" secures her veil, and stifles a yawn.

The sound of a LADY-LIKE SNORING.

EXT. - YARD - THE RIDDLES' HOUSE - PIKEVILLE - KENTUCKY - NIGHT - EARLY FEBRUARY 1994 - SEPIA DREAM

The SOUND OF THE SNORING CONTINUES.

KASSIE (12) has inveigled GRANDPA into teaching her the finer points of logging technique. She chops with a wild venom, which is actually meant for him.

Oblivious, he corrects her technique. She listens. Applying the lesson, she chops with a more controlled venom.

GRANDPA
(salaciously)
I really love your...form, girlie!

KASSIE smiles darkly to herself.

EXT. - YARD - THE RIDDLES' HOUSE - PIKEVILLE - KENTUCKY - NIGHT - EARLY FEBRUARY 1994 - SEPIA DREAM

The SOUND OF THE SNORING CONTINUES.

GRANDPA is dozing in a hammock.

KASSIE (12) creeps up with his ax and raises it to strike him. As her shadow falls over him, GRANDPA wakes up.

Coolly, he holds her gaze, daring her to strike. She freezes. Her arms begin to tremble. Paying her no heed, he yawns, swings out of the hammock, and goes inside.

Humiliated and enraged, KASSIE lowers the ax to the floor.

INT. - "SARAH-KAY"'S BEDROOM - "SARAH-KAY"'S MANSION - BEL AIR - MORNING

The SOUND OF THE SNORING CEASES as an ALARM CLOCK BUZZES ANNOYINGLY.

"SARAH-KAY" wakes up in a high-backed leopard-skin armchair turned toward the balcony.

She yawns, stretches, removes her black sleeping mask, glances at her "Serpenti" bracelet watch, and rises.

INT. - BALLROOM - "SARAH-KAY"'S MANSION - BEL AIR - A WHILE LATER

"SARAH-KAY"'s Press Conference. Faintly hostile atmosphere.

Snacks and beverages at the back. Among the waiting especially-hired CATERING STAFF is the mid-50s OBESE WOMAN.

On the name-tagged participants' table, SARAH-KAY's empty place at the center is flanked by the seated KITTY KRAKEN and LEDA PILATE on her left; and on her right, by KOSTAS PAPPAKOSTAS, MURRAY ZELIGMAN, and IZZY BRINKMAN.

The assembled JOURNALISTS include SPHINX KACHINSKY, accompanied by ROZ.

A WAITER (20s) comes over to the NEW SOUND TECHNICIAN (JOEY, 20s), who, assisted by ELMER SPHAGNUM, is checking the MIC.

WAITER

You seen Eddie? There's been no sign of him in hella weeks!

JOEY

Well, lately the surf's been sharky. But "Eddie would go"!

They all chortle together. Then, as "SARAH-KAY" makes her entrance, they spring back to work.

Stunningly elegant and beautiful, and carrying an Ingot iPhone, "SARAH-KAY" takes her place. She wears the "Serpenti" bracelet watch, a gold cremation locket, and a cremation diamond ring. As a final touch, she props up a copy of Dante's "Vita Nova" on the table, bookshop-style.

"SARAH-KAY" glances quizzically at JOEY. Confidently, he smiles back. She gives him the benefit of the doubt.

"SARAH-KAY"

(California accent)

Thank you all for coming. Welcome. As you know, for reasons best known to the late Cassandra-Fay Cooper, I have inherited her entire estate!

DEATHLY SILENCE. She has a SIP of water. They wait.

"SARAH-KAY"

And perhaps I've even "inherited" more of her persona that I'd care to admit! Naturally, I feel unworthy. But who knows? Perhaps Cassandra saw in me something that I too should learn to see.

She pauses, as if learning to see what Cassandra saw.

"SARAH-KAY"

At any event, be it known that in her will, Cassandra-Fay expressed the wish that, should anything happen to her, her role in "Skin Deep" would be taken over by me!

SPHINX

(aside to Roz)

What did I tell you!

HUBBUB & CONSTERNATION. "SARAH-KAY" speaks above it.

"SARAH-KAY"

The more I... The more I think about it...the more I realize... that Cassandra was... grooming me for...But one more...One more...

MURRAY, KOSTAS and others appeal for silence.

"SARAH-KAY"

Kassandra used to call me "S-K". In her memory, my stage name will be "Eskay". E-S-K-A-Y: Eskay. In conclusion, I intend to prove myself worthy of Kassandra-Fay's confidence in me! Any questions?

A forest of hands.

ESKAY

Mr. Flybridge.

FLYBRIDGE

If she called you "SK", then presumably you called her "KFC"!

LAUGHTER. Serenely, Eskay ignores FLYBRIDGE.

ESKAY

Ms. Pike.

PIKE

Your accent, Ms. Riddle - Eskay! It seems to have galloped all the way back home to Kentucky without you!

LAUGHTER and snide smiles. ESKAY remains serene.

ESKAY

We all know, Ms. Pike, that a California accent is de rigueur for Hollywood actors. After all, even Kassandra Cooper was from Kentucky.

Again the forest of hands. She ignores them.

ESKAY

The great classical guitarist and lutenist Julian Bream - he should have been named after a much bigger fish...! Well, Bream grew up as a Cockney. But he too, in order to advance his career, laboriously acquired a "proper" accent!

QUASTENFLOSSER

You compare yourself, Ms. Riddle - Eskay - to a Chulian Pream?!

ESKAY

(smiling darkly)

Mein Herr, as a fish, I am anything but a...bream...! Ms. Cooder.

COODER

It just occurs to me: Couldn't S-K also stand for...Serial Killer?!

MUTTERINGS & MURMURS. COODER speaks above them.

COODER

So then aren't you using your stage name to publicize your movie?!

ESKAY

If I'm not, well then I should be!

LAUGHTER.

ESKAY

Mrs. Kachinsky.

SPHINX

Eskay, with respect - how can you even hope to step into the shoes of an icon - an American icon, a world icon - like Kassandra-Fay Cooper?!

General assent. To ESKAY's discreet amusement, the same journalists who treated Kassandra with contempt while she was alive, now seem to revere her in her "death".

PIKE

Yes, no offense, Eskay, but I just can't see you as a serial killer! Do you really have what it takes?!

ESKAY

A question I often ask myself. Despite an early start, I'm a late developer, really. Compared to other names I probably shouldn't mention. But reserve judgment. Give me a chance. To...live the part!

FLYBRIDGE

Ms. Riddle - Eskay - let's be honest. You have precious little film experience to speak of. So, realistically, how will you cope?!

HUBBUB. Their hostility is melting away, however. They QUIETEN DOWN. Nervously, LEDA and KITTY look on.

ESKAY

Mr. Flybridge, just try waitressing to a bunch of jerks! Believe me, with bills to pay, and without the luxury of being able to quit your job, you soon learn to act like no acting school could ever teach you!

LAUGHTER; and even SCATTERED APPLAUSE from the more battle-hardened FEMALE JOURNALISTS.

KITTY and LEDA exchange a look which says: "What were we worried about?!"

SINKER

Eskay, tell us: so do you get caught in the end?

ESKAY

Supreme Court, Mr. Sinker? Or the Court of Public Opinion?

DELIGHTED LAUGHTER. They are really warming to her now.

QUASTENFLOSSER

Vasn't zere already a film called "Skin Deep"?!

A sudden HUSH. All eyes on MURRAY.

MURRAY

Uh true, true. But that was completely different. Both in conception and, well, execution!

LAUGHTER. ESKAY rises.

ESKAY

Thank you all for your time.

Again the forest of hands. But ESKAY smiles upon JOEY, waves goodbye to everyone, and leaves. ELMER, newly obsessed, has discreetly waved back at ESKAY.

With cool, sneering irony, the OBESE WOMAN looks on.

EXT. - KASSANDRA COOPER'S TOMBSTONE - "HOLLYWOOD FOREVER" CEMETERY - HOLLYWOOD - AFTERNOON

Dressed with elegant simplicity in black, ESKAY stands sobbing over the elaborate tombstone of Cassandra Cooper.

Red roses partially obscure the death-date of the inscription, which reads:

"KASSANDRA-FAY COOPER / II.20.1982 - [?.?.]2020 / ICON, MENTOR, FRIEND / THE STAR WHO ALL TOO BRIEFLY BRIGHTENED / THE FIRMAMENT OF LIFE / NOW BRIGHTENS THE SILVER SCREEN / FOR ALL ETERNITY".

EXT. - BEHIND SOME TREES - "HOLLYWOOD FOREVER" CEMETERY - HOLLYWOOD - A MOMENT LATER

From nearby, Detectives ZANZARA and PESCATORE observe ESKAY. Has she noticed them?

PESCATORE

Kassandra was a trained stunt driver. Did her own heel-and-toeing and handbrake turns and such. So was she really behind the wheel?!

ZANZARA

Even famous drivers have crashed.

PESCATORE

Yeah... Yeah... I suppose.

EXT. - KASSANDRA'S TOMBSTONE - "HOLLYWOOD FOREVER" CEMETERY
- HOLLYWOOD - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Without looking toward the two detectives, ESKAY smiles to herself and walks off.

Nearby, a MOTION-PICTURE HISTORIAN is giving a guided tour to a MULTI-ETHNIC TOURING PARTY.

EXT. - ANOTHER PART OF THE "HOLLYWOOD FOREVER" CEMETERY -
HOLLYWOOD - A WHILE LATER

The TOURING PARTY stop at the tombstone of composer and band leader NELSON RIDDLE.

JAPANESE TOURIST

I rove his allangements for Flank
Sinatla! Rike "Rady Is A Tlamp"!

General assent. They "look, and pass on".

EXT. - KASSANDRA'S TOMBSTONE - THE "HOLLYWOOD FOREVER"
CEMETERY - HOLLYWOOD - A SHORT WHILE LATER

The TOURING PARTY come to a halt. Some people reverently set down flowers. Some mutter private messages. Some stand or even kneel in prayer. Some, sobbing, wave goodbye.

Even the MOTION-PICTURE HISTORIAN sheds a private tear.

INT. - KITCHEN - ESKAY'S BEL AIR MANSION - LATE MORNING

Wearing an Ichthys (Jesus Fish) brooch over her heart, MARÍA is cheerfully preparing the Venetian dish of "sarde in saor" (fried sardines with flour, onions, sultanas, pine nuts, salt, pepper, sugar, and vinegar).

ESKAY enters in one of Kassandra's most commonly worn outfits, with two lines running along either side.

MARÍA

(in Chipilo Venetian;
unselfconsciously)

Principessa! Morning! I'm preheating the oven for roasted quails. And now I'm trying to make "sarde in saor"! I marinated for two days, though. Too long?

ESKAY
(in Venetian;
unselfconsciously)
Not at all. I marinate for three.
(in English)
Smells good. Now let's have a test
bite.

They peer into the pan. Beat. Together they realize that they have been speaking Venetian. Tense, awkward beat.

ESKAY
(in Venetian; calmly)
I'm out all day, María. But I'll
eat when I get back. Round 6:30?

MARÍA
(bowing; terrified)
Principessa!

Smiling icily at MARÍA, ESKAY goes out.

Feverish with shock, MARÍA feverishly grabs hold of the handle of the oven. But she collapses to the floor anyway, pulling open the oven door in the process.

On her forehead, the oven's red glow is reflected.

INT. - DRAWING ROOM - ESKAY'S BEL AIR MANSION - EVENING

A SOCIALITE NEIGHBOR consoles a "devastated" ESKAY.

SOCIALITE NEIGHBOR
Disappeared?! Just like that! So
Third World! You poor, poor thing!

ESKAY
You do your best for these people!
And this is the thanks you get!
Now I have no choice but to fly in
my Italian housekeeper!

The SOCIALITE NEIGHBOR shakes her head, and sips her tea.

EXT. - MAIN GATE - ESKAY'S BEL AIR MANSION - DAY

Detectives ZANZARA and PESCATORE drive through.

ZANZARA
Judas Maccabeus! Will you look at
this place!

INT. - DRAWING ROOM - ESKAY'S BEL AIR MANSION - A SHORT
WHILE LATER

PESCATORE and ZANZARA sit opposite ESKAY, who seems perplexed. In the bg., ANNAMARIA, the Italian Housekeeper from the New York apartment, is in and out.

ESKAY

No, I'm afraid I can't help you, detective. María has simply vanished! I sincerely hope it's not some sort of Mexican gang thing!

PESCATORE

(consulting notebook)

I thought she was...Puerto Rican?!

ESKAY

Your info is defective, detective. She's from Chipilo, Mexico.

ZANZARA

Miss Riddle, all of this is one... powerful motive! Wouldn't you say?

ESKAY

(amused)

It's Eskay. And is this a fishing expedition? For Predator X or the Loch Ness Monster? Well now, my grandparents met a bad end when I was twelve. Tell me, Detective...

ZANZARA

Zanzara.

ESKAY

Detective Zanzara - am I also under suspicion of doing an Edmund Kemper-type murder? At age twelve?!

ZANZARA and PESCATORE exchange a puzzled glance. ESKAY goes to pour herself a drink. ZANZARA and PESCATORE decline.

ESKAY

And another thing. All three of my ex-husbands are alive and kicking!

The two DETECTIVES are even more puzzled.

PESCATORE

(consulting notebook)

Uh frankly, we weren't even aware that you'd been married, uh Eskay!

ESKAY turns back towards the drinks cabinet, and palms herself on the forehead. Calming herself, she adds a block of ice to her drink, and turns to face them.

ESKAY

(charm on)

Just joking, detectives! A little Cassandra-impression, if you will.

(charm off)

And thank you, detectives, for your oh-so-valuable time. Shall we?

The DETECTIVES exchange a look, then rise as one.

INT. - HALLWAY - ESKAY'S BEL AIR MANSION - MOMENTS LATER

PESCATORE and ZANZARA are staring awe-struck at a cabinet displaying a megalodon tooth beside a cinerary urn.

ZANZARA

"Megalo-Don"! The Boss of Bosses!
... Good thing it's extinct!

ESKAY

(darkly amused)
Like the coelacanth, detective? But
now, if you'll excuse me, I have
bigger fish to fry. Annamaria...

With a curt nod, ESKAY leaves ANNAMARIA see them out.

INT. - THE DETECTIVES' CAR - PARKING AREA - ESKAY'S BEL AIR MANSION - A SHORT WHILE LATER

ZANZARA

What was that about?! She didn't
blink! And that Kemper reference!

PESCATORE

Yeah. And strange how she referred
to HER murdered grandparents! And
HER three ex-husbands!

ZANZARA starts the car.

ZANZARA

Now she can't even tell where
Kassandra's life ends, and hers
begins!

Pensively, they begin driving away.

INT. - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - ESKAY'S BEL AIR MANSION - MOMENTS LATER

Pensively, ESKAY steps back from the window.

Something makes her look up. Directly above her, on the ceiling, there is one solitary mosquito.

ESKAY

(darkly)
Zanzara!

INT. - POOLSIDE - ESKAY'S BEL AIR MANSION - AFTERNOON

While a MOSQUITO hovers nearby, MURRAY and ESKAY relax on deck chairs. Beside them on the ground lie pencil-marked copies of "Skin Deep". MURRAY uses his to swat the MOSQUITO.

ESKAY

Wasn't Dante killed by a mosquito?

MURRAY

Dante? Well, in fact, yes. Malaria. Death in Venice. Or thereabouts.

ESKAY

Hmm. By the way, I'm driving up to Nevada. To absorb the atmosphere. You know, for the gambling scene.

MURRAY

It never ceases to amaze me, the lengths you'll go to for your craft! You put me to shame!

ESKAY

Oh, I'm sure you have absolutely nothing to confess to!
(tracking another mosquito)
Besides, I want to escape the heat.

MURRAY

By going to...Nevada?!

ESKAY

This town is a fishbowl. I need privacy. But first I have to see about another annoying insect...

INT. - BEENIMAN'S OFFICE - KLONDIKE BANK - LA - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Icily, ESKAY sits down opposite a smugly unctuous BEENIMAN.

BEENIMAN

For a simple country girl, Miss Riddle, it sure hasn't taken you long to get used to the good life!

ESKAY

It's Eskay now, Mr. Beeniman. And yes, one can get used to anything.

BEENIMAN

Miss Riddle, the Bank, alas, declines to get used to you racking up all this debt! Uh this uh film - when exactly do you get paid?

ESKAY shrugs noncommittally. BEENIMAN has been eying some papers. He looks up from them with a rapacious leer.

BEENIMAN

This...palazzo! In Venice, Italy! What century are we talking about?

ESKAY

Oh, Cinquecento, Seicento.

BEENIMAN

(feigning comprehension)

Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.

ESKAY

Yes, the palazzo dates from when Venice was still a thalassocracy.

BEENIMAN does a double-take, then cranes forward, squinting, as though the better to scrutinize this unfamiliar word.

ESKAY

It's full of historic frescoes, you know, oil decorations, and friezes.

BEENIMAN

It gets that cold?! In Venice?!

ESKAY just about manages to keep a straight face.

BEENIMAN

(salivating; to himself)

But I'm sure the bank would understand if I took a business trip. To uh appraise the palazzo...

ESKAY

(rising)

But I've taken up far too much of your valuable time, Mr. Beeniman. Besides, I'm going to Reno.

BEENIMAN

You're...getting a divorce?!

ESKAY leaves, smiling. BEENIMAN shakes his head.

EXT. - FRONT ENTRANCE - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA - MORNING

The three-storey motel has a strikingly out-of-place surfer theme, complete with plastic palm trees.

The motel sign reads:

"VACANCIES - AIR REFRIGERATED UP TO 100% - FLAT-SCREEN TV - TRUCK & RV PARKING - HISTORIC PROPERTY - NATURALIZED-OWNED - INSPECTION KINDLY INVITED".

INT. - OFFICE - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA - MOMENTS LATER

The Indian-immigrant owners, MR. PATEL (70) & MRS. PATEL (64), are doing their books.

PATEL
(confidentially)
Benjy seems rather keen on Lolly!

MRS. PATEL
(rubbing her tummy)
Oh he's mad for her! But she's
always acting pricey!

PATEL
Good! Because I'm not standing for
any Eve-teasing in this motel!

INT. - WINE CELLAR - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA
- MOMENTS LATER

BENJY (20s, smitten) watches as LOLLY (late 20s, attractive,
cold, calculatingly provocative) takes inventory.

LOLLY
Look, Benjy, I'm not saying there's
no hope. But frankly, can you
really afford me, hmmm?

BENJY toys noncommittally with his car keys.

LOLLY
(mainly to herself)
You see, Lolly needs a man who can
give Lolly a whole new life!
Preferably in Kingsbury. Or Mount
Charleston. Heck, I'd even settle
for Spanish Springs!
(to Benjy)
So I'm afraid it's...first come,
first served!
(glittering smile)
I'm sure you understand.

BENJY frowns, considers, consults his watch.

LOLLY
Anyway, why are you still here?
Aren't you off till tomorrow?

BENJY decides. Throwing LOLLY a kiss, he dashes off.

Briefly intrigued, LOLLY returns to her inventory.

EXT. - BRIDGE OF SIGHS - "THE VENETIAN" HOTEL - LAS VEGAS -
NEVADA - SUNSET

BENJY on a gondola. Pen and notebook in hand, he anxiously
goes over his paltry assets and substantial liabilities.

The GONDOLIER is surprised that Benjy's attention is not on
the trip itself. He shrugs, and keeps rowing.

They pass under the bridge. BENJY looks up and frowns.

INT. - HOTEL RECEPTION - "THE VENETIAN" HOTEL - LAS VEGAS - NEVADA - MOMENTS LATER

Carrying her car keys and a single medium-sized piece of designer luggage, ESKAY checks in.

INT. - CASINO - "THE VENETIAN" HOTEL - LAS VEGAS - NEVADA - A WHILE LATER

BENJY playing blackjack. He loses. He is annoyed but not too worried.

ESKAY - just absorbing the atmosphere - passes by.

THE SAME - A WHILE LATER

BENJY playing the slot machines. He loses again. He looks worried, but not past hope.

INT. - ESKAY'S ROOM - "THE VENETIAN" HOTEL - LAS VEGAS - NEVADA - A WHILE LATER

In bed, pencil in hand, ESKAY goes through the script of "Skin Deep". Every now and then, she silently mouths a line.

On the bedside table is a route map.

INT. - CASINO - "THE VENETIAN" HOTEL - LAS VEGAS - NEVADA - A WHILE LATER

BENJY playing roulette. He loses. Now he is really worried.

INT. - ESKAY'S ROOM - "THE VENETIAN" HOTEL - LAS VEGAS - A WHILE LATER

Yawning, ESKAY sets the script down on the floor.

She takes up the route map. With her pencil, she traces over the route she has already marked out: Las Vegas to Reno.

She turns off the light, and settles down to sleep.

INT. - BAR - "THE VENETIAN" HOTEL - LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

Self-absorbed in despair, BENJY downs the dregs of his whisky and sullenly orders another.

The BARTENDER eyes him, hesitating, then shrugs and pours.

Without so much as an acknowledgment, BENJY reaches for the glass.

EXT. - PARKING AREA - "THE VENETIAN" HOTEL - LAS VEGAS - SUNRISE

ESKAY, well rested, sets off for Reno in her Toyota RAV4.

EXT. - PARKING AREA - "THE VENETIAN" HOTEL - LAS VEGAS -
LATE MORNING

Bleary-eyed, unshaven, half-dressed, and with his shoelaces untied, BENJY comes running toward his mid-'90s NAS Land Rover Defender. Panic-stricken, glancing at his watch, he unlocks, tosses his bag onto the passenger seat, clambers up, and tries the ignition.

The SUV won't start, even after several attempts. Benjy is about to give in to despair, when at last the engine takes.

Leaning over, he fishes out his electric shaver from his bag. Then, from among the CDs littering the passenger-side floor, he digs out "Murder Motel Madness" by Lollipop Lust Kill. He inserts the CD into the after-market CD player, and selects Track 4.

As BENJY roars off, the disturbing lyrics of "The Perfect Woman" blare out over the parking lot.

EXT. - ROAD TO RENO - A WHILE LATER

Speeding madly, BENJY overtakes ESKAY in a reckless maneuver. Furious, she hoots at him, then lets it go.

EXT. - ROAD TO RENO - A WHILE LATER

ESKAY passes BENJY, who is stuck at the side of the road. Too self-absorbed to notice her, he kicks at a wheel of the Land Rover, then bangs his head against the hood.

EXT. - PARKING LOT - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - LATE
AFTERNOON

Wearing a wig and designer sunglasses, ESKAY pulls in. She parks next to a 1970 Plymouth Barracuda Convertible.

Yawning, stretching, and sighing, she takes her medium-sized designer suitcase from the passenger seat, and gets out.

A merry, cigarette-smoking LITTLE OLD MAN (MO) walks by and tips his hat.

MO

(singing)

"... oh don't you cry for me! I
comes from Alabama with a banshee
on my knee!"

At the top of stairs, a WOMAN twice his size meets him and begins nagging him in intense whispers. Unruffled, he removes his hat from his bald head. They enter. The WOMAN is still nagging, and MO is still unruffled.

This scene has killed a few moments of boredom for ESKAY. Passing the Barracuda, she notices something on the passenger seat. Energized, she checks that the coast is clear. She is about to reach in for the object when she sees

someone coming. She pretends to check her hair in the car's side mirror, then walks toward the motel entrance.

Now recognizing the person as ROCCO THE PAPARAZZO, ESKAY is mesmerized by his bulging crotch. Brushing distractedly past her, ROCCO heads straight for the Barracuda. He looks in, joins his hands in a prayer of thanks, and removes an expensive camera with a long zoom lens.

Kissing the camera, he hooks it round his neck, overtakes ESKAY, and bounds up the steps. She quickly follows.

INT. - RECEPTION - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA -
A SHORT WHILE LATER

The motel has a hotel-type layout with inner corridors. MR. PATEL glances at his watch, then, through the window, at the parking lot. Turning to MRS. PATEL, he shakes his head.

ESKAY enters, and looks around, but ROCCO has vanished.

PATEL

Good miss, welcome! I am Mr. Patel.
And this is my good lady wife.

Rubbing her belly, MRS. PATEL smiles an absent welcome.

PATEL

And what is your good name?

ESKAY

("Pennsylvtucky" accent)
It's Kassie. Kassie uh Barrelman.

MR. PATEL frowns at her designer suitcase.

PATEL

Are you by any chance one of those
Nada Dada Motel arty types?

ESKAY

Lordie, no! I's just a simple
country girl from Pennsylvtucky, so
I am! Been drivin' for eight whole
ar, so I sure needs me a shar!

The PATELS exchange looks of bafflement.

ESKAY signs in, then begins scratching in her handbag.

Clutching her belly, MRS. PATEL lets out a groan.

PATEL

(confidentially)
My missus ate non-veg yesterday,
you see! And now she's having loose
motions constantly!

MRS. PATEL
(not really embarrassed)
Don't tell the whole world!

ESKAY
(palming herself)
Lordie! I's about half! Ma ID card!
Musta letted it on ma bed, so I
must! Mise-well drive all the way
back home now, so I might!

PATEL
(eyes wide)
No-no, please, there's no need of
such formalities! After all, we
have your name and address. Now
let's see... Room 6-6-6, I think...
What am I saying, 6-6-6?! I mean
66! I have cricket on the brain!

PATEL looks out toward the parking lot: nothing.

PATEL
A thousand apologies! The bellhop
is tardy! He is taking advantage
like anything! But never fear! I
myself will step into the fray!

ESKAY makes a gesture of polite but firm refusal.

PATEL
(discreetly relieved)
Upstairs. Room 66. It's unmissable.

Suitcase in hand, ESKAY cheerfully goes up the stairs.

MRS. PATEL
Oh dear! I have to go again!

INT. - ESKAY'S ROOM - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO -
NEVADA - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Wrapped in a towel, and wagging a finger in an ear, ESKAY
emerges from the "shar".

Noticing a large trunk in a corner, she is about to open it,
when her Ingot iPhone rings.

INT. - RECEPTION - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA -
A SHORT WHILE LATER

MR. PATEL is on the phone. Intrigued, MRS. PATEL looks on.

PATEL
(squirming)
But you see, Mr. Leishman, my
cousin-brother has expired. Hence,
in order to pen the eulogy, I shall
(MORE)

PATEL (cont'd)

have to prepone the... No-no, not that I don't fully comprehend, Mr. Leishman. But nevertheless I ...
(eyes wide)

Oh no-no-no, Mr. Leishman, please, that won't be necessary...! No, rest assured, good sir, I will do the needful...! No, it's a really solid idea...! Till tomorrow, then!

Disconsolate, PATEL rings off. Mrs. PATEL raises an eyebrow.

Outside, BENJY is just pulling in, but they haven't noticed.

PATEL

Can you believe it! The Department of Corrections want us to host a ...newly paroled convict!

MRS. PATEL

(titillated)

Oh! Perhaps he's a serial killer!

PATEL

Stop exaggerating, woman! You are seeing too many thrillers! Besides, Mr. Leishman gave me his official assurances that the gentleman in question is now totally reformed!

MRS. PATEL

(suddenly remembering)

Room 66! The trunk! The trunk!

PATEL palms himself on the forehead. He considers.

Outside, a CAR DOOR SLAMS SHUT. They look out and frown at the sight of BENJY running up, covered in engine grease.

THE SAME - MOMENTS LATER

PATEL is not amused. Theatrically he scrutinizes his watch.

BENJY

Mr. Patel sir, I -!

PATEL

Spare me. Wash, change, then go and collect the trunk left in Room 66.

BENJY

I... Yessir, Mr. Patel sir!

Ecstatic at getting off so lightly, BENJY bounds upstairs.

MRS. PATEL
(rubbing her belly)
That boy is taking too much
tension!

INT. - ESKAY'S ROOM - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO -
NEVADA - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Still rapped in a towel, and wagging a finger in an ear,
ESKAY rings off her iPhone, and squats beside the trunk.

Someone knocks at the door.

INT. - CORRIDOR OUTSIDE ESKAY'S ROOM - "CREST OF A WAVE
MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA - MOMENTS LATER

ESKAY sticks out her head, and comes face to face with the
just-showered BENJY. Each half-recognizes the other.

Next door, MO and the LARGE WOMAN enter their room. MO gives
ESKAY a friendly smile and a wave. She smiles back.

ESKAY
(to Benjy; California
accent)
Yes?

BENJY
Sorry for starin', miss! Uh the
previous occupant left a trunk? Uh
in your room? I'll just take it
now, uh if you don't mind.

ESKAY
No. Come back. When I'm decent.

BENJY
Pardon me, miss! Didn't mean to -

ESKAY slams the door in his face.

INT. - ESKAY'S ROOM - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO -
NEVADA - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Now in a dressing gown, ESKAY squats beside the trunk. She
tries the catch. It clicks free. She opens the trunk: empty.

Disappointed, ESKAY waggles a finger in her ear, and at last
unclogs it... But only to hear the WHINE OF A MOSQUITO.

ESKAY
What?! Here too?!

The trunk forgotten, she begins searching the room.

THE SAME - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Enjoying the diversion, ESKAY tries to swat the mosquito
with a wet towel, which crashes into the wall on MO's side.

MO (O.S.)

Stop that goddamn noise! People
tryin' ta get some sleep in here!

ESKAY boils with rage. She is about to shout back, when her gaze falls on a Yellowstone Park brochure on the bedside table. Intrigued, she picks up the brochure, flicks through it, and pauses at a picture of a geyser.

Putting down the brochure, she looks pensively at the MO-side wall. She looks at the geyser. She looks at the trunk. She looks at MO's wall. She looks at the trunk. She looks at the geyser. A malicious grin creeps over her face.

ESKAY

(throwing down the towel)
OK, Mr. Mo. Kassie's a-throwin' in
the towel, so she is. Fer now...!

INT. - BAR - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA -
EVENING

At a table near the bar, directly beneath a "No Smoking" sign, ROCCO and two other PAPARAZZI sit smoking cigars. ROCCO's zoom-lensed camera still hangs from his neck.

In the bg., LOLLY is preparing their next round.

ROCCO

It's tragic that I can't get a nice
juicy picture of Kassandra before
she die! I try, I try, I try! But I
just can't get the shot!

COCKNEY PAPARAZZO

Tell me abou' i'! Im ve UK we're
no' even allowed to follow
celebri'ies or even gavver ou'si'e
deir 'ouses!

GERMAN PAPARAZZO

Zat iss nuzzin! In Chermany you
even need ze permission of ze
supchect pefore releasing ze photo!

COCKNEY PAPARAZZO

Unbe-friggin'-lievable!

GERMAN PAPARAZZO

Colleakes, let us face ze fact: we
get for our virk no respect!

ROCCO

And is pura ipocrisía! Because
without of us, without of us - 'ow
could the stars even BE stars?!

LOLLY comes up with their drinks on a tray. She is her usual calculatingly provocative self.

LOLLY
Anything else, gentlemen?

ROCCO
Your 'usban', does 'e mind you
workin' 'ere?

LOLLY
And thank you for fishin'! But no.
No more husband. In fact, after my
divorce, I went and stood on the
Virginia Street Bridge and threw my
weddin' band into the Truckee
river! Just like Marilyn Monroe!

ROCCO
That bridge - is it like the
Bridge of Sighs, in Venezia?

LOLLY
(leaving)
Oh you KNOW I wasn't sighin'!

COCKNEY PAPARAZZO
(to Rocco; ruefully)
Don' was'e yer time, ma'e. Teaser.
I knows ve type.

THE SAME - A WHILE LATER

Bored silly, ESKAY enters, takes a seat at the bar, and
orders a mint julep. Directly behind her is the table of the
now tipsy PAPARAZZI.

ROCCO
(raising his glass)
To la dolce vita and Federico
Fellini!

GERMAN PAPARAZZO
To Fellini!

COCKNEY PAPARAZZO
To...fellatio!

They laugh uproariously. Amused, ESKAY turns round and
stares at them. They notice her staring and exchange glances
with one another other. But ESKAY seems to have found a
temporary cure for her boredom. She casts a salacious glance
at ROCCO's epic zoom lens.

ESKAY
Never seen one that big!

COCKNEY PAPARAZZO
De bugger almos' wen' an' los' i'
in me 'Cuda! I''s a zoom wiffa
view, all righ'! Dey don' call 'im
Ro'o fer nuffin!

LAUGHTER. To their surprise, ESKAY comes over to join them.

ESKAY

I's a skeptic, so I is. But I will
believe it IF I can see it. Room
66. In half an ar. Shoulda been
room 69...if you catch my drift!
You other two can also...come!

ESKAY downs her mint julep in one gulp and is gone.

The PAPARAZZI exchange looks of utter disbelief.

INT. - ESKAY'S ROOM - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO -
NEVADA - HALF AN HOUR LATER

Expecting to be the victims of an elaborate practical joke,
the PAPARAZZI knock at ESKAY's room.

Wearing a see-through negligée, she opens, and coolly lets
them in. They begin to suspect that this is no joke.

ROCCO

Santa Maria! You look good enough
to eat!

ESKAY

In that case, boys, buon appetito!

ESKAY reclines provocatively on the bed. The PAPARAZZI
exchange a look. Then - frantically - start undressing.

INT. - LOLLY'S ROOM - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO -
NEVADA - A WHILE LATER

BENJY is - foolishly - hoping to score with LOLLY.

LOLLY

Thought about what I said the other
day? Any ideas, any...prospects?

BENJY smiles noncommittally.

LOLLY

By the way, why were you in Vegas?
Not gamblin' again?!

BENJY

Me? Never! All through with that!
Besides, why go to Vegas when
there's casinos right here in Reno?

LOLLY

Hmm. True... OK, but so then what
were you doing there?

BENJY

Oh it was a kind of...career...
opportunity...thing. You know how
it is. I checked it out... And now
I'm waiting...to...hear.

LOLLY is intrigued. But she decides to "act pricey".

LOLLY

Well, let me know how it turns out.
(theatrical yawn)
Oh! 'Scuse me! But Lolly must get
her beauty sleep!
(glittering smile)
That's if Lolly wants to bag a man
who can keep her in the style she
deserves...! You sleep tight now!

BENJY smiles weakly, and leaves.

Removing a small black notebook from her bodice, LOLLY flips to a page headed "BENJY". Beside his name she draws a large, red-ringed question mark.

INT. - CORRIDOR NEAR ESKAY'S ROOM - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL"
- RENO - NEVADA - A SHORT WHILE LATER

BENJY walks with his head bowed. Passing ESKAY's door, he hears men's voices. Tantalized, he stops, and considers.

On tiptoe, he retreats to a convenient observation post.

THE SAME - A SHORT WHILE LATER

As BENJY looks on, ESKAY's door opens. As if dropped by a tornado, the THREE PAPARAZZI stagger out, and supporting each other, make their way down the corridor.

Clad in a sheet, ESKAY appears, looking as if she has just enjoyed a moderately pleasant stroll.

ESKAY

Bye, boys. That was fun. Hey
Rocco, you sure are a mouthful!
Handful! You know what I mean!

BENJY

Holy shit!

BENJY claps a hand to his mouth, but it is too late: ESKAY has spotted him. She frowns. She considers.

BENJY gasps as ESKAY calmly begins to walk towards him.

THE SAME - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

ESKAY is in BENJY's face. Her eyes burn right through him. He swallows. She backs off.

ESKAY
(California accent)
One word about this, and...

She makes a cut-throat gesture. Smiling coldly, she turns and leaves without taking any further notice of him.

THE SAME - MOMENTS LATER

BENJY stands rooted to the spot. He laughs nervously.

BENJY
You don't scare me...! But where oh
where have I seen you before?!

INT. - BENJY'S ROOM - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO -
NEVADA - NIGHT

Pensively twisting and turning in bed, BENJY still can't place ESKAY.

INT. - STAIRCASE - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA -
MORNING

BENJY comes pensively downstairs just as PATEL is going out of the front entrance. Outside, TWO CAR DOORS BANG SHUT.

As BENJY reaches the bottom step, he suddenly places Eskay. But he can't believe it. He considers.

EXT. - PARKING LOT - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA
- A SHORT WHILE LATER

In the bg., BENJY stands rooted to the spot.

PATEL welcomes CORRECTIONAL OFFICER LEISHMAN and his charge: WOLFIN, a fearsome, hulking, hairless beast of a man. At the mere sight of him, several PATRONS are visibly unsettled. Yet he seems docile enough.

INT. - RECEPTION - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA -
A SHORT WHILE LATER

With one eye on PATEL, LEISHMAN and WOLFIN through a window, BENJY is examining the hotel register.

BENJY
Kassie...what's this? Berrelman...?
Burrelman...? Borrelman...?
(budding realization)
...Barrelman?!

EXT. - PARKING LOT - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA
- A SHORT WHILE LATER

LEISHMAN
Anyway, this is Wolfin. He's no
trouble. He keeps to himself.

WOLFIN smiles sheepishly.

INT. - RECEPTION - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA -
A SHORT WHILE LATER

BENJY is paging frantically through an English dictionary.

BENJY

Cooper... Cooper... Come on...!
Come on...! Come on...! Aha!
"Cooper. Noun. A maker and repairer
...of casks...and barrels"!

Triumphant, BENJY slams the dictionary shut.

EXT. - PARKING AREA - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO -
NEVADA - A SHORT WHILE LATER

LEISHMAN

Of course this is only temporary,
Mr. Patel. Just until we can find
something more...suitable.

PATEL

(making the best of it)
Perhaps, Mr. Leishman, we should be
getting in. I think he's making my
customers just a little nervous!

PATEL leads the way. WOLFIN is shepherded along by LEISHMAN.

INT. - RECEPTION - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA -
MOMENTS LATER

Looking through the window, BENJY sees PATEL, LEISHMAN and
WOLFIN ascending the steps to the front entrance.

Then he sees LOLLY coming downstairs and into reception.

BENJY

Have I ever found me a goldmine
today!

LOLLY raises an eyebrow.

The sound of a LADY-LIKE SNORING, which modulates into the
sound of a MAN SNORING AND WHEEZING.

INT. - KITCHEN - THE RIDDLES' HOUSE - PIKEVILLE - KENTUCKY -
DAY - MID-FEBRUARY 1994 - SEPIA DREAM

Through the kitchen window, KASSIE (12) sees GRANDPA dozing
in the hammock. The coast is clear. She creeps out into the
yard.

EXT. - YARD - THE RIDDLES' HOUSE - PIKEVILLE - KENTUCKY - A SHORT WHILE LATER - SEPIA DREAM

To the soundtrack of GRANDPA's snoring, KASSIE tiptoes towards the ax, which is mounted against the outhouse wall.

EXT. - YARD - THE RIDDLES' HOUSE - PIKEVILLE - KENTUCKY - MOMENTS LATER - SEPIA DREAM

KASSIE's shadow falls over GRANDPA. Icily, she raises the ax above his head. Startled awake, he stares in horror.

EXT. - YARD - THE RIDDLES' HOUSE - PIKEVILLE - KENTUCKY - A WHILE LATER - SEPIA DREAM

The SOUND OF A MAN'S SNORING has been replaced by a WOMAN'S SNORING.

From the blood-dripping hammock, one of GRANDPA's arms trails limply down to the ground.

Bespattered with blood, with the bloody ax still raised above her head, KASSIE stares down in a nervously exhilarated trance. Becoming conscious of the ax, she lowers it, and wipes her brow with the back of a bloody hand.

Hearing behind her the SOUND OF A GASP, KASSIE spins round, to see GRANDMA, home early. Mastering her alarm, KASSIE considers, shrugs, and decides.

Kassie's shadow falls over the horrified GRANDMA.

The SOUND OF THE WOMAN'S SNORING CEASES.

EXT. - POOLSIDE - ESKAY'S BEL AIR MANSION - AFTERNOON

Wearing a pink bikini, ESKAY wakes up in a deckchair and brushes away a mosquito, WHINING in her ear.

Yawning, she fidgets and wiggles about on her behind, with a vague sense of inner or outer discomfort.

She reaches for her iPhone.

INTERCUT: EXT. - VENICE FISHING PIER - AFTERNOON / EXT. - POOLSIDE - ESKAY'S BEL AIR MANSION - AFTERNOON

MURRAY

(into cellphone;
frowning)

A few...additional scenes?!

ESKAY

(into iPhone)

Relax. Just hear me out. Then you can decide for yourself.

MURRAY

(into cellphone;
relieved)

All right... Fine... Why not?!

They ring off. Carefree, MURRAY looks out over the ocean.

On her deckchair, ESKAY can't stop fidgeting. Frowning down at her crotch, she twists her mouth to one side.

INT. - DR. ROYA ESFAHANI'S SURGERY - "TEHRANGELES" - LA - MORNING

The walls are choking with degrees, diplomas, and awards.

But this exhibition of intellectual capital is still not enough for DOCTOR ROYA ESFAHANI (late 20s, beak-nosed, big-eyed). In addition, she tries - with scant success - to hide her exotic Persian beauty behind an intellectual (and purely "cosmetic") pair of heavy black spectacles.

ROYA looks up from a folder toward ESKAY (bewigged).

ROYA

So then, Ms. Barrelman, as I thought - as we both thought, come to think of it...you have a good old-fashioned dose of the clap!

ESKAY

("Pennsylvtucky" accent;
flippant)

Ain't the kinda clap I prefers!

ROYA

Hmm. Are you still in...contact
...with the...party in question?

ESKAY

No. An' with that pertickler party,
no more partyin', no siree Bob!

ESKAY notices ROYA frowning at her flippancy.

ESKAY

(charm on)

I know, doc, shoulda used a rubber,
so I should! But see, I was on the
rebound. 'Sides, that hound-dog is
hung like a doggone donkey!

ROYA smiles broadly, then sighs with pensive envy.

ESKAY

(suddenly serious)

So whadya think, doc? Probenecid?
Then aqueous procaine penicillin?

ROYA gazes at "Kassie" with open-mouthed surprise.

ESKAY

(thinking on her feet)

Oh, once I wanted to be doctor
myself, so I did. Never stuck with
it though. Ain't got your obvious
brains, ambition, and perseverance!

The flattery might be unsubtle, but it does the trick.

ROYA

Of course we'll need a follow-up.
I'll just check my diary...

As ROYA flips through the pages, ESKAY - already far away -
gazes sightlessly through the surgery window.

EXT. - YELLOWSTONE LAKE-CALDERA - WYOMING - DAY

Heedless of the unspeakable volcanic danger below,
sailboats, motorboats and canoes bob upon the glinting
waters; and on the shores anglers angle for trout.

Looking on, ESKAY smiles darkly to herself.

ESKAY

('Pensyltucky' accent)

When you blows your top again,
that'll be somethin'! Bye now! I'll
come visit again when your dark
volcano heart is all froze over!

The SOUND OF A MUFFLED SCREAMING.

EXT. - THERMAL AREA - YELLOWSTONE PARK - WYOMING - A SHORT
WHILE LATER

The MUFFLED SCREAMING is louder.

A sign reads:

"CLOSED. DANGEROUS THERMAL AREAS".

EXT. - ANOTHER PART OF THE THERMAL AREA - YELLOWSTONE PARK -
WYOMING - MOMENTS LATER

Barren, steaming landscape. Fumaroles. Sulfur mounds.

The screaming comes from a gagged and goggle-eyed LITTLE OLD
MAN. Is it MO? ESKAY drags him along the acidic wet ground,
which burns holes in his pants. His cap blows off.

ESKAY

(amused but intense)

You know what they say in
Yellowstone! Doncha go runnin'
after your hat now! Or you might
could get yisself burned!

Violently, she pulls "MO" toward a latent geyser.

Tearing off his gag, he starts swearing - between gasps - in Scottish Gaelic.

KOSTAS (O.S.)

Cut...! Cut...! Cut...!

KOSTAS runs up, together with the ASSISTANT DIRECTOR and others. They physically disengage ESKAY from "MO".

ESKAY

Sorry... Got a bit...carried away there. Was I...too rough?

Gasping and shaken, a hand clutching at his throat, "MO" is trying to get his voice back.

"MO"

(Scottish accent)

Michty me, lassie! As ye weel know, I'm all firr The Method! But d'ye hae tae be so damned realestic?!

ESKAY

Apologies, Bruce! I'm just so in love with acting!

Everyone relaxes. The prevailing sentiment is awe at ESKAY's uncommon dedication to her craft.

KOSTAS

(aside to Eskay)

Next time, go easy on the old bugger!

The SCRIPT SUPERVISOR comes over to whisper something in KOSTAS' ear. He pats her on the back and turns to ESKAY.

KOSTAS

Oh Eskay, don't you throw the er ...the er...

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Surfactant.

KOSTAS

... the surfactant into the geyser BEFORE you throw him in? Otherwise it's just not going to blow, is it?

ESKAY

(palming herself)

Good I remembered the first time!

KOSTAS

But...this ...IS the first time!

ESKAY

Oh...! Yes, so it is... Sorry.

In pensive annoyance, ESKAY returns to her marker.

KOSTAS
(aside to A.D.)
Method actors! Of course she's done
it before - in her mind!

The A.D. sighs wearily.

EXT. - LAVA-TUBE "SKYLIGHT" - HAWAII - DAY

A black, congealed, steaming landscape: a lava tube. In it there is a hole - the "skylight" - filled with reddish glowing lava.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Picture is up...! Quiet,
everyone...! Roll sound!

PRODUCTION SOUND MIXER
Sound speed!

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Roll camera!

CAMERA OPERATOR
Speed!

CLAPPER
Marker!

The CLAPPER shuts the clapperboard.

KOSTAS
Action!

Wearing a hat, gloves, old boots, and long pants, ESKAY enters the frame. In a frenzy of rage, she pulls an HISPANIC WOMAN ("MARÍA") toward the rim of the lava-tube skylight.

In a state of strange arousal, "MARÍA" looks behind her. The lava's red glow is reflected on her forehead.

ESKAY
A gift...to the Goddess!

ESKAY is just about to heave "MARÍA" in.

KOSTAS (O.S.)
Cut...!

Disappointed, ESKAY and "MARÍA" look up. KOSTAS approaches.

KOSTAS
(to "María")
Darling, it would really help the
illusion if you didn't look as if
you were ENJOYING it quite so much!

"MARÍA"
(deep voice)
Sorry...

KOSTAS
(to Cinematographer)
Let's try the...fish-eye lens.

The sound of IRON WHEELS SQUEAKING.

EXT. - DISUSED MINE - NEVADA - AFTERNOON

In a wire fence, a large breach. Beside it, a warning sign depicting a skull-and-crossbones over the legend:

"DANGER! WARNING! / DISUSED MINES CAN BE DEADLY! / DON'T GET TRAPPED! / STAY OUT! STAY AWAY! / STAY ALIVE!"

The sound of IRON WHEELS SQUEAKING gets louder.

INT. - MINE SHAFT - DISUSED MINE - NEVADA - MOMENTS LATER

Along a railway track, in the semi-darkness, ESKAY pushes an ore car. In it - bound, gagged, and drugged - is...BENJY?

Stopping for a breather, ESKAY looks back toward the sunlit mine entrance. Icily, she removes a pistol from a pocket, and shoots "BENJY" in the head.

She gives the ore car a final running push, and watches it trundle away into darkness. Hitting an obstruction, it topples over, and spills "BENJY" out onto the ground.

ESKAY
(darkly amused)
See what happens when you ignores
the warnin' signs?

INT. - FOYER - MOVIE THEATER - LA - EVENING - SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

A screening of "Skin Deep" has just ended. Talking animatedly, the PATRONS spill out into the foyer.

Only two of them are troubled, brooding, and silent: DETECTIVES ZANZARA and PESCATORE.

INT. - SITTING ROOM - MURRAY'S HOUSE - VENICE - LA - DAY

In the bg., leaning against a wall: BEA's surfboard with pilot-fish decals.

BEA and MURRAY are watching the end of a talk show.

TALK-SHOW HOST
Eskay, ladies and gentlemen! Eskay!

WARM APPLAUSE. ESKAY favors the AUDIENCE with a royal wave.

TALK-SHOW HOST

(to Camera)

Her movie: "Skin Deep"! Go see it!
IF you dare! Ladies and gentlemen,
Oscar-nominated...ES-KAAAY!

WILD APPLAUSE. MURRAY mutes the sound.

BEA

(American accent)

Wow, dad, she's huge! And she
mentioned your name, dad! On TV!

MURRAY

(sourly)

Hmm, yes, and I'm only the writer.

BEA

That's not what I meant, dad!

MURRAY

That's not what I meant either.

INT. - BEENIMAN'S OFFICE - KLONDIKE BANK - LA - DAY

ESKAY enters. BEENIMAN rises obsequiously.

BEENIMAN

Ms. Eskay! Allow me to -!

ESKAY

Wonderful news, Mr. Beeniman! I am
opening a new account. With another
bank. I am closing this account.

BEENIMAN mouths soundlessly. ESKAY waves goodbye.

ESKAY

All my thanks, Mr. Beeniman! Now
you be sure and have a good day!

And she is gone. Stunned, BEENIMAN plops down.

BEENIMAN

Now I'll never see Venice, Italy!

INT. - SITTING ROOM - DR. ROYA ESFAHANI'S APARTMENT -
"TEHRANGELES" - LA - AFTERNOON

Persian carpets everywhere.

Directly opposite a closed door at the end of a corridor is
a large flat-screen TV (muted).

On a leather couch at right angles to the TV sits a
cheery-faced "all-American" young man: MITCH. While keeping
an eye on the closed door, he works furtively on a laptop.

He also keeps an eye on the flat-screen, on which CIRCUS TV shows the Red Carpet at the Hollywood & Highland Center. Arriving are STARS and CELEBRITIES, including ESKAY (unaccompanied); MURRAY & BEA; KOSTAS; PRINCE RAFFAELE & FLAVIA; BUTCH & CHICK; and SPHINX & ROZ.

INT. - THE SAME - A FEW HOURS LATER

MITCH looks up from his laptop. The muted TV shows closeups of the Nominees for Best Actress in a Leading Role. ESKAY is the only one who isn't nervous.

MITCH shuts down his laptop, and searches for the TV remote.

INT. - ROYA'S STUDY - ROYA'S APARTMENT - "TEHRANGELES" - LA - MOMENTS LATER

The study door is closed, as are the curtains. The walls are lined with bookshelves containing medical textbooks as well as the classics of Persian and Western literature.

Above the desk, in a grid, are signed photographs of notable Iranian-Americans, incl. Andre Agassi, Christiane Amanpour, Jamshid Delshad, Anousheh Ansari, and Shahriar Afshar.

Seated before an iMac at her meticulously ordered desk, ROYA scans the latest medical research on the Internet.

She stretches, and checks her watch. Behind her heavy-framed black spectacles, her eyes widen.

INT. - HOLLYWOOD & HIGHLAND CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

CELEBRITY PRESENTER

And the winner in the category Best
Actress in a Leading Role is...
Eskay, in "Skin Deep"!

APPLAUSE, hugs, congratulations. The RUNNERS-UP smile as gallantly as they can.

Dignified and strangely composed, even detached, ESKAY makes her way toward the stage. Graciously, she accepts the award. She taps the mic.

ESKAY

Well what do you know! It works!

LAUGHTER.

ESKAY

(dazzling smile)

To those who were hoping I'd fail -
better luck next time...!

Wry LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE.

ESKAY

But to all those who worked with me
and supported me - thank you! And
thank you, Academy Award Members,
Film Lovers, and Viewing Public!

APPLAUSE. ESKAY turns toward MURRAY, in the AUDIENCE.

ESKAY

Actors speak what writers write!
Murray Zeligman, you wrote what we
spoke! Murray, I salute you!

WARM APPLAUSE. Choked up, MURRAY blows a kiss to ESKAY.

ESKAY

One more thing. Friends, you know
very well that actors win this
award for pretending, by free
choice, to be people we are not.
And yet, some people are forced by
circumstances to play certain roles
they would prefer NOT to play!

SCATTERED, CONFUSED APPLAUSE. The MUSIC DIRECTOR is frowning
at ESKAY. She ignores him.

ESKAY

Which is why I dedicate this award
...to my big sister...!

INTRIGUED APPLAUSE. But the MUSIC DIRECTOR has heard enough.
He cues the ORCHESTRA, and they play ESKAY off the stage.

ESKAY shrugs at the AUDIENCE, and smiles. Oscar in hand, she
leaves with dignity and grace.

But the AUDIENCE don't like it. They want to hear more. SLOW
CLAPPING. The HOST and PRESENTERS bite their lips.

INT. - SITTING ROOM - ROYA'S APARTMENT - "TEHRANGELES" - LA
- MOMENTS LATER

As the SLOW CLAPPING continues, MITCH sits before the TV
with his feet on the coffee-table. Sipping beer from a can,
and munching popcorn from a bowl, he hasn't noticed that,
behind him, ROYA is watching in shock.

Then, to his delight, she silently comes round and snuggles
up next to him. But he hasn't noticed her mental state.

From the TV comes an EXPLOSION OF APPLAUSE.

INT. - HOLLYWOOD & HIGHLAND CENTER - A SHORT WHILE LATER

As the APPLAUSE CONTINUES, the red-faced MUSIC DIRECTOR
plays the quietly triumphant ESKAY back onto the stage.

ESKAY

Now, as I was saying...

APPLAUSE, together with LAUGHTER. The MUSIC DIRECTOR is trying to make the best of it.

ESKAY

My big sister, whom I never knew!
Who ran away from home at twelve,
before I was born, and was never
seen again! My little big sister
who, they say, was corrupted by the
Big City! My sister who, most
likely, still lives a life of
shadows and of shame!

Expressions of compassion and dismay.

ESKAY

(to Camera)

Not, sister, that I blame you! Not
that I am ashamed of you! After
all, is it right, is it decent, to
be ashamed of an innocent child?!
An innocent child who gets
corrupted?! Corrupted and exploited
by heartless, cynical perverts?!

MYSTIFIED APPLAUSE from the AUDIENCE...

INT. - STAFF LOUNGE - HOLLYWOOD & HIGHLAND CENTER - A MOMENT
LATER

... And OUTRAGED APPLAUSE from the CATERING STAFF, watching
ESKAY on a raised flat-screen TV.

Among them is the mid-50s OBESE WOMAN. Puzzled and frowning,
she does not join in the applause.

INT. - HOLLYWOOD & HIGHLAND CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

ESKAY

Good people, do you know that in
our great though divided country,
if - for their own protection -
children run away from home... Do
you know that their running away
from home is a crime?! And that
even giving aid and comfort to
those children...is a crime?!

Shock. Horror. Outrage. Disbelief. But rueful confirmation
from Dr. SAWYER, seated in the audience.

ESKAY

Nevertheless, I know that deep in
the souls of our corrupted youth,
the flame of innocence still

(MORE)

ESKAY (cont'd)
smolders! Innocence that, once
again, even now, can be fanned into
a proud, raging flame!

CLAMOROUS APPLAUSE. ESKAY raises the statuette.

ESKAY
So, sister, if you should to be
watching - this...is for you!

TUMULTUOUS, TEARFUL APPLAUSE. Many rise to their feet. As do
MURRAY and BEA, both visibly moved.

INT. - STAFF LOUNGE - HOLLYWOOD & HIGHLAND CENTER - MOMENTS
LATER

Shaking her head, the OBESE WOMAN turns and walks away from
the group of tearful, applauding CATERING STAFF.

INT. - SITTING ROOM - ROYA'S APARTMENT - "TEHRANGELES" - LA
- MOMENTS LATER

On the now muted TV, the ovation for the quietly dignified
ESKAY continues. ROYA takes a deep breath.

ROYA
That woman! Eskay! Mitch, I know
her! She...is a patient of mine!

MITCH slowly unhooks his arm from around her shoulders.

MITCH
Eskay?! Your patient?! For real?!

ROYA nods yes. MITCH's brain is ticking.

MITCH
So..why not...keep in touch?
Nothin' too obvious, too needy.
Just send your congratulations.
Then see...where that...leads.

ROYA twists her mouth to one side.

MITCH
After all, babe, as you always
remind me - the most highly
educated ethnic group in America
are Persian-Americans. Look at you!
With your education, and your
brain, don't YOU deserve better?
And don't you...want better?

The seed has been planted. But then she thinks of something.

ROYA
And just what were you doing,
earlier, on the computer?!

MITCH is caught off guard, but recovers instantly. He goes to the hat-rack, which holds a black hat and a white hat. He puts on the white hat, and poses innocently with it.

ROYA breaks into a smile. Again they snuggle up.

Meanwhile, the planted seed is beginning to germinate. ROYA removes her heavy spectacles, and her features are revealed in all their exotic beauty.

She gazes out through the window into the distance. Her big dark eyes are aflame with ambition.

INT. - "DANTE'S DINER" - LA - MOMENTS LATER

DETECTIVES ZANZARA and PESCATORE - their forks dangling in mid-air, their meals forgotten - have just been watching ESKAY'S acceptance speech on CIRCUS TV.

DANTE mutes for a SKIN-CREAM COMMERCIAL, and the PATRONS resume their meals and their conversations.

Ruefully, the two DETECTIVES turn to face each other.

INT. - ROCCO'S HOTEL ROOM - LA - MOMENTS LATER

His eyes wide, ROCCO stands watching the Oscars ceremony on the TV. Then, deeply pensive, he goes to the window.

INT. - HOLLYWOOD & HIGHLAND CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

LEDA

Kassandra certainly taught that girl a thing or two about speeches!

KITTY

Taught her?! It's as if she was dictating to her! From...wherever!

They chuckle together. LEDA's expression darkens.

LEDA

However, it won't be long before that runaway whore of a sister of Eskay's decides to reappear!

KITTY

Hmmm, yes! All six hundred of them!

THE SAME - A WHILE LATER

CELEBRITY PRESENTER

And the winner in the category Best Original Screenplay is...Murray Zeligman, for "Skin Deep"!

APPLAUSE, hugs, congratulations. The RUNNERS-UP smile as gallantly as they can.

Shell-shocked, MURRAY makes his way toward the stage. He accepts the Oscar and - all choked up - bends to the mic.

MURRAY

Thank... Thank you... This means...
so... I owe... I want... I...
dedicate... The person...who made..
it... possible...for me at a time
...time of my...life when...

From the audience, BEA looks on, her heart in her mouth. Beside her, IZZY slowly shakes his head.

IZZY

(to himself)

Dammit Murray, get a grip!

MURRAY

(getting a grip)

I'd like to thank Izzy Brinkman, my
agent. And a special thank you to
my daughter Bea for her love and
support... And for coming home!

APPLAUSE. BEA bursts into bittersweet tears.

Discreetly, ROZ presses SPHINX'S hand.

MURRAY

Finally, I dedicate this award to
someone who is - in the very best
sense - a ruthless professional.
Someone who shamed me into a
rebirthing of my writerly
consciousness. I mean the world's
greatest actor! My mentor,
colleague, friend...Eskay!

TUMULTUOUS APPLAUSE. ESKAY blows MURRAY a kiss.

INT. - GRAND BALLROOM - HOLLYWOOD AND HIGHLAND CENTER - A
WHILE LATER

The Governor's Ball Oscars after-party is in full swing. An endless array of appetizers, dishes and beverages are on offer. It is all very informal, with guests flowing freely among the couches, chaises longues and low tables scattered throughout the dimly lit space.

The SHOW HOST, PRESENTERS, WINNERS, NOMINEES, STARS, STARLETS, CELEBRITIES, PERSONALITIES, HAS-BEENS, NEVER-WERES, WANNABES, COULD-NEVER-BE'S and HANGERS-ON eat, drink, mingle, chat, schmooze, flirt, preen, deal, smile, giggle, congratulate one another, console one another, "roast" one another, or merely make polite conversation.

The more energetic (or taciturn) get down on the custom-built dance floor. Loftily conscious of the gravity of the occasion, the DJ spins his music.

THE SAME - MOMENTS LATER

ESKAY is gazing with approval at financier REX DOLMEN (30s, tall, handsome, aristocratically blasé; Armani suit, Rolex).

His hand is shaken, first, by Mr. BEENIMAN, then by SPHINX's friend ROZ.

REX finishes chatting with his parents - billionaire "philanthropist" Dr. DICK DOLMEN and his wife PATSY - and goes off to mingle.

The DOLMENS notice ESKAY and wave; she waves back. They call her over. An ATTENDANT comes and whispers in ESKAY's ear.

Leaving, Eskay gestures to the DOLMENS that she'll be back.

INT. - OUTSIDE THE ENGRAVING ROOM - HOLLYWOOD AND HIGHLAND GRAND BALLROOM - A SHORT WHILE LATER

The WINNERS queue up to have their Oscars engraved.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR: MALE

(gushing)

That wasn't acting, Eskay my dear!
You simply ARE a serial killer!

ESKAY

Why, thank you. I don't know if I
can ever match the...exploits of
my...colleagues... But I'll
certainly give it my...best shot!

INT. - THE PATELS' SUITE - "CREST OF A WAVE MOTEL" - RENO - NEVADA - MOMENTS LATER

The PATELS - in bed with popcorn before the TV - have been watching the Oscars ceremony. MR. PATEL mutes the sound.

MRS. PATEL

Don't you think Eskay looks
slightly like that funny Kassie
girl. From that funny place.

MR. PATEL

These stars are not unique! Someone
always looks exactly like them!

MRS. PATEL

True. Oh, still no word from Benjy?

MR. PATEL

For all I care, Benjy could be
feeding the fishes! Or even, for
that matter, Wolfin!

MRS. PATEL

It's that girl. She's driven him
completely off the rails!

INT. - HOLLYWOOD AND HIGHLAND GRAND BALLROOM - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Carrying a bloody mary, ESKAY joins MURRAY on a couch. From the bg., SPHINX KACHINSKY and ROZ look on discreetly while MURRAY sips what looks like a large vodka.

MURRAY

Relax, it's only tonic!

ESKAY

Hmm. Resting...on your laurels?!

MURRAY

Ah if only I were more hardy! But seriously - screen-writing is too much like hard work! And frankly, I think I'm all fished out!

She huddles closer.

ESKAY

Have you really done with screen-writing? 'Cos I'm a-gettin' tired-a Hollywood!

MURRAY stares hard at her. He considers.

MURRAY

I saw that wave from "Dr. Dick". You can't be thinking of politics?!

ESKAY

Well, in the title of your play: "If the Shoe Fits"...

MURRAY is about to correct her, but cuts himself short. In utter silence, he sips at his tonic water, while SPHINX and ROZ exchange knowing glances. MURRAY shrugs.

MURRAY

(semiserious)

Well if you ever need a speech-writer...

She hugs him, gets up, and is gone. He sips broodingly.

INT. - ANOTHER PART OF THE HOLLYWOOD AND HIGHLAND GRAND BALLROOM - MOMENTS LATER

SPHINX

He glugs vodka like tonic water!

ROZ

Hmm. We in finance are discovering it's like that with all stimulus measures: after a while you just get no kick from those bubbles!

They chuckle briefly. SPHINX is brooding.

SPHINX

Why is Eskay so chummy with "Dr. Dick"? You know he only bankrolls political candidates and causes!

ROZ

(not serious)

Who knows! Perhaps one day we'll have a "Skin Deep on Capitol Hill"!

SPHINX

(taking her seriously)

Hmm, yes! There's no knowing what the public might want!

INT. - ANOTHER PART OF THE HOLLYWOOD AND HIGHLAND GRAND BALLROOM - A SHORT WHILE LATER

While the OBESE WOMAN looks on from nearby, a low-key ESKAY is the focal point of the DOLMEN CIRCLE.

PATSY DOLMEN

(amused)

Why, is this a funeral, dear?!

ESKAY

Well, Patsy, yes. This Oscar, you know, has just killed my movie career! Mind you, my ambitions are beginning to...lie elsewhere!

Expressions of surprise and even impatience. But Dr. DICK DOLMEN is studying her with interest.

DICK DOLMEN

My dear, are you perhaps thinking of changing your focus from stagecraft to...statecraft?

ESKAY

I see that to you, Dick Dolmen, I am an open book!

Once again, unsubtle flattery is strangely effective.

A Greek god of a WAITER has come bearing snacks. ESKAY chooses paté. After a short inner struggle, PATSY gives in to temptation. Ignoring DICK's raised eyebrow, she has a recklessly generous helping of shellfish.

He shrugs, and turns to ESKAY.

DICK DOLMEN

Dear, let me speak frankly. Our great nation is at the crossroads!

General assent.

DICK DOLMEN

Now more than ever, we need
cultural icons like you to spread
the message, about how to take our
country back!

General assent. PATSY, meanwhile, is brushing off a vague
sense of discomfort.

PATSY DOLMEN

But dear, tell me this: how could a
fine, upstanding, all-American girl
like you give such a convincing
portrayal of...a psychopath?!

ESKAY

Well, who knows, perhaps in another
time and place I really was one!

TITILLATED LAUGHTER.

ESKAY

We actors are often belittled for
living in imaginary worlds. For
trying to take off our Guccis and
our Moschinos, as it were, and put
ourselves in others' shoes.

CHUCKLES.

ESKAY

But the imagination is not a mere
luxury, not a mere toy. It is a
tool. A mode of knowing,
perceiving, apprehending reality!

Rapt attention. Renewed respect.

ESKAY

If only our politicians would USE
their imagination! Use it to
comprehend the daily existential
struggles of their fellow citizens,
their fellow taxpayers!

DICK DOLMEN

Eskay, you are wasted in Tinsel
Town! You should be in Washington!

PATSY DOLMEN

Amen!

DOLMEN CIRCLE MEMBERS

Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen!

For just a moment, PATSY clutches at her stomach. DICK
raises an eyebrow. PATSY smiles back reassuringly.

PATSY DOLMEN
(studiedly casual)
Uh Eskay dear, I notice you...came
without a...partner?

ESKAY
(wicked smile)
And not for first time too!

Only the WOMEN catch the double-entendre.

ESKAY
It wasn't a political statement. Or
even a fashion statement.

CHUCKLES.

ESKAY
It's so hard to meet my kind of
man! I prefer men in high finance.
But to find one who is also
culturally literate - impossible!

Electrified, the DOLMENS exchange a look. Searching
discreetly among the crowd for REX, they spot him, exchange
another look, then smile casually at ESKAY.

Suddenly grimacing, PATSY clutches at her stomach. DICK
squeezes her arm. She smiles back reassuringly.

ESKAY
Now, good people, you'll have to
excuse me for just a moment.
(confidential)
I have to go and "recycle". I'm not
made of sugar and spice, you know!

Initial puzzlement. But on seeing her head toward the
women's rest rooms, they smilingly grasp her meaning.

PATSY whispers conspiratorially in DICK'S ear. He nods in
delighted approval. Radiant with anticipation, PATSY elbows
her way through the crowd toward REX.

Meanwhile, from one side, the OBESE WOMAN is tracking
ESKAY's handshaking journey to the women's rest rooms.

THE SAME - MOMENTS LATER

DOLMEN CIRCLE MEMBER #1
Such eloquence! Such charisma! And
such star quality!

DOLMEN CIRCLE MEMBER #2
Not to mention, such truthfulness!

DOLMEN CIRCLE MEMBER #3
Yes, she was un-be-liev-able!

DOLMEN CIRCLE MEMBER #4
You're telling me! I felt an
instant and total connection!

DOLMEN CIRCLE MEMBER #5
Eskay is just the person we need to
reunite our "Untied" States!

Dr. DICK has been listening. He smiles pensively.

INT. - WOMEN'S RESTROOMS - HOLLYWOOD & HIGHLAND GRAND
BALLROOM - MOMENTS LATER

As ESKAY enters, KITTY and LEDA are just exiting.

KITTY
Don't be too long, Eskay dear! Your
favorite singer is on soon! Oops! I
meant Kassie's favorite singer!

SEVERAL OTHER WOMEN hastily check themselves before the
mirror, then exit, nodding respectfully to ESKAY.

ESKAY - now alone - is quietly triumphant. She studies
herself in the mirror. Frowning, she cranes closer, because
on her cheek there is a strange blemish. Cautiously she
touches it and it comes off: it was just a fleck of pâté.
She sighs with relief, and licks her finger.

Unnoticed by ESKAY, the OBESE WOMAN quietly comes in and
clears her throat. ESKAY absently looks round at her, and
inwardly dismisses her. Returning her attention to her
reflected image, she starts retouching her makeup.

OBESE WOMAN
(sneering)
Has Hollywood really made you
forget me so soon?!

The OBESE WOMAN has a husky voice and a California accent,
with just a sprinkling of Kentucky. Puzzled, ESKAY swivels
round. She stares hard at the woman, but can't quite place
her. Not really interested, she lets it go.

OBESE WOMAN
It's me, me, you darn fool girl!

ESKAY is surprised to hear herself addressed with such
familiarity by a stranger, but, once again, lets it go.

ESKAY
(dismissively polite)
I have, dear, very many fans. Some
of them, admittedly, inherited from
Kassandra Cooper. But I can't take
a personal interest in every single
one of you, now can I?

ESKAY turns back to the mirror.

OBESE WOMAN

Now you listen to me, Sarah-Kay
Riddle! You're not old nor
high-and-mighty enough for a good
spankin', d'ya hear?!

And instantly ESKAY has placed her. Nevertheless, she coolly continues retouching her makeup.

ESKAY

Why, fancy meeting YOU in a place
like this...Momma!

MOMMA

(sneeringly)

What, me miss my baby's night of
triumph! Never in a million years!
I'm sure you meant to invite me. It
must have just slipped your mind!

ESKAY

(detached)

Both your physique and your voice
are...thicker than I remember.

MOMMA

So I smoke. And so I've put on a
pound or two. Price you pay for
bein' in caterin'. Still, have I
really changed that much!

ESKAY closes her eyes, and lifts her head.

EXT. - STREET - PIKEVILLE - KENTUCKY - SUNRISE - 1994

Late-February. Shivering in the gusty cold, wearing a
backpack, and with a hand in a cookie jar, KASSIE (12) runs
away from home down the street.

Cigarette in hand, four months pregnant, unrecognizably
thin, but with the same big hair, MOMMA (26) stands and
stares from the edge of the driveway.

Behind her - silenced, broken, helpless - DOLPHY (32) stands
looking on.

MOMMA

(thinner voice)

You come back! You come back here
right now, Kassie-Fay Riddle!

Blithely munching a cookie, Kassie ignores them.

MOMMA (V.O.)

I said, Sarah-Kay: Have you no
shame, girl, takin' over your
sister's life like that?!

INT. - WOMEN'S REST ROOMS - HOLLYWOOD AND HIGHLAND GRAND
BALLROOM - THE PRESENT - (NIGHT)

ESKAY blinks her eyes open, and glares at MOMMA.

MOMMA

Could you really not make yourself
a life of your own, separate from
the life of your sister?!

ESKAY

WHAT sister, Momma dear?! Just who
the hell do you mean exactly?!

MOMMA

Hmm. So then she really didn't tell
you about y'all bein' sisters!
About her not runnin' away to be a
whore, like I told you all these
years! Typical sick joke of hers,
to take you into her house and not
tell you! But now the joke's on
her! 'Cos you're even startin' ta
look and sound just like her!

Her mind in a whirl, ESKAY turns away from MOMMA.

MOMMA

But I know you. Under the money and
the fame and the Oscar, you're
still my sweet little Sarah-Kay!
D'you really think a mother don't
even know her very own daughter?!

Eskay is beginning to work it out. She is almost amused.

ESKAY

So let me get this straight.
Sarah-Kay was my very own sister?!

MOMMA

But what is WRONG with you, girl?!
Hollywood's good and spoiled you
rotten! Now yer startin' ta play
sick games - just like HER!

ESKAY - not unduly troubled - has worked it all out now.

ESKAY

And Daddy? What happened to him?

MOMMA

(inhaling)

Your father's dead and gone, girl!
When will you let him go?! Dolphy
was weak! Soft in the heart, soft
in the head! Too soft to know that
your sister was the Devil! Can you

(MORE)

MOMMA (cont'd)

imagine he actually forgave her!
Even after what she did! Bringin'
disgrace and shame upon our family!
Ruinin' his good name, his health,
his life, with all her filthy,
vicious, dragon's-tongue lies!

Frowning, ESKAY discreetly turns away from MOMMA.

MOMMA

And then us havin' to uproot
ourselves and move to Hazard, where
nobody knew us...! I shoulda told
you this years ago. But you see,
before you were born, we lived in
Pikeville. And your father, from
bein' a miner, had to up and become
a logger! Why I agreed to leave
Sacramento and marry him and go and
live with him all the way in
Kentucky, I'll never know!

ESKAY turns pensively back toward MOMMA.

MOMMA

In Kentucky it was just one thin'
after another! Then to crown it
all, Dolphy's parents bein' hacked
to death like that! And then your
sister up and runnin' away just
after the murder...! Shoulda got
rid of that mistake of a baby! But
instead I just had to go and marry
Dolphy Riddle at 17 and give birth
to his Devil's Child: Kassandra-Fay
so-called Cooper! Good thin' you
and she weren't twins! For sure she
woulda gobbled you up in the womb!

ESKAY smiles darkly to herself.

MOMMA

No, wasn't minin' killed Dolphy!
Was a broken heart! First losin'
his momma and daddy to some
snake-heart psychopath, who to this
day still roams free! And then him
finally facin' the fact he'd a
lying Devil for a daughter! Was
only when you came along that
Dolphy came back from the dead! In
his universe of darkness, you were
his only light and warmth!

Sullenly, ESKAY spins away.

From outside, FAINT APPLAUSE filters through as (FAMOUS SINGER) takes the stage.

INT. - HOLLYWOOD & HIGHLAND GRAND BALLROOM - MOMENTS LATER

As the MUSICIANS tune up, assisted by ELMER SPHAGNUM, PATSY talks earnestly to REX. He listens, but says nothing.

Grimacing, PATSY clutches at her stomach. Neutral, REX looks on. She waits, hoping for the best. No such luck.

Grimacing, PATSY suddenly abandons him. Rapidly but decorously, she elbows her way to the women's rest rooms.

INT. - WOMEN'S REST ROOMS - HOLLYWOOD & HIGHLAND GRAND BALLROOM - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

ESKAY and MOMMA look round as the rest-room door is flung open. Matronly decorum having yielded to necessity, PATSY DOLMEN rushes in. Hurling herself into the closest stall, she bangs the door shut. Almost at once the TOILET FLUSHES.

MOMMA

(confidentially)

That's just an old trick of people who grew up in small houses, with thin walls! Blowin' your nose is another good one. 'Course you wouldn't know about that, growin' up in our bigger house in Hazard.

Something makes ESKAY look up at the ceiling: there, directly above, a MOSQUITO sits. ESKAY smiles dismissively.

She checks herself in the mirror, and coolly turns to leave.

MOMMA

(sneering)

Just like that?! Oh I get it! It's all about Eskay now, isn't it?! To think that even you would turn out to be so goddamned shallow!

ESKAY

Why, Momma, aincha noticed? Deep down...we're all shaller!

Dumbstruck, MOMMA looks on. In a shark-like yawn, ESKAY briefly opens her jaws. Then, ignoring MOMMA, she leaves.

The door slowly swings closed upon the the first strains, from the bandstand, of "I'VE GOT YOU UNDER MY SKIN".

THE END