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SF PERUSALS

The Family of Mann

by Theresa Rebeck

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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World Premiere Production by
The Second Stage Theatre, June 28, 1994
Artistic Director: Carole Rothman
Producing Director: Suzanne Schwartz Davidson

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The Family of Mann premiered on June 28, 1994 at the Second Stage Theatre. It was directed by Pamela Berlin and had the following cast (in order of appearance):

ED/DAVE----------David Garrison
BILL ----------Richard Cox
BELINDA/SISSY ----------Julie White
CLARA ---------- Lisa Gay Hamilton
REN/BUDDY----------Robert Duncan McNeill
SALLY/GINNY ----------Anne Lange
STEVE/UNCLE WILLY ---------- Reed Birney

Scenic Designer: Derek McLane
Lighting Designer: Natasha Katz
Costume Designer: Lindsay W. Davis
Original Music & Sound Design: Jeremy Dyman Grody
Production Stage Manager: James Fitzsimmons

CHARACTERS

ED – the Executive Producer, mid-40s, large, friendly, a king.

REN – 31, boyish, good looking, likable.

BELINDA – 31, smart, opinionated, extremely emotional.

BILL – mid-40s, the director; a hatchet man.

SALLY – early 40s, feminine but determined.

STEVE – mid-40s, a fierce has been.

CLARA mid-20s, black, deferential but observant.

THE SIT COM

DAVE	Played by Ed
GINNY	Played by Sally
BUDDY	Played by Ren
SISSY	Played by Belinda
UNCLE WILLY	Played by Steve

The actress playing CLARA grows wings in the second act. Although no one comments on them, she should wear them in every scene.

TIME & PLACE

The Present. Los Angeles.

ACT I

Scene 1

FIRST READ THROUGH

The LIGHTS come up, bright on an ambiguous space. ED sits at a large table, EVERYONE else slightly behind him. EVERYONE holds script binders in their hands.

ED. Before we read through today's script, I just wanted to take a moment to welcome our actors, our production personnel, our talented staff of writers—all of you—to *The Family of Mann.* I think we're all excited to be here today, embarking on a project which will hopefully say something we can all be proud of, and maybe give us all a couple of laughs in the bargain, since that's what we're being paid for.

(HE laughs easily. EVERYONE else does too.)

ED. If you've seen any of the other shows we've worked on here, hopefully you realize that what we're trying to do is quality television that people can watch without being completely, egregiously offended morally and intellectually. It's a crazy idea, but we like to kid ourselves that stories about people living relatively decent, normal lives, the kind of lives I think most of us had in our childhood, might be of interest to America. Anyway,

it's of interest to me, and I've had some success with this approach, so we're going to try it again and see if we can prove to the networks that Americans are not merely interested in amoral, sex-crazed psychopaths, or whatever it is they're putting on the air this week. Now, before we get started, I want to explain a few things about our organization. We really do consider ourselves a family here; mostly what we're interested in is creating a world where people can just enjoy coming in to work. If it's not fun, then I'm not interested in it, and I don't think you should be either. So I hope we can all just relax and enjoy each other and make some comedy here! (*There is scattered applause.*) I give you our director, Bill.

(EVERYONE holds pencils and opens identical scripts. BILL, the director, starts to read.)

BILL. Okay, here we are in the Mann family kitchen. It's a Saturday morning, the day is bright and lovely and Ginny, the lovely wife of Dave Mann, is talking to her husband. Scene one.

(LIGHTS change.)

Scene 2

Belinda: THE WRITERS' ROOM

Scene changes to the writers' room. All the WRITERS sit around the table, scripts open before them. EVERYONE speaks very quickly.

ED. He's as big as a fucking cow. I mean, the last time I saw him was at the pilot, he looks great, and today, what, he's put on thirty pounds in two months.

SALLY. I put a call into his agent.

ED. Fuck his fucking agent. The man's old enough to know when he looks like a pig. Fucking actors. I can't believe this. He gets paid sixty thousand dollars a week to stay in shape and he shows up looking like Orson Welles.

REN. We have the same lawyer, I had lunch with him last week? First thing he says, so, how much weight has Jim put on? His last show, every hiatus he put on thirty pounds. Apparently he does this all the time.

ED. Oh, Jesus. (*To Sally.*) Did you know about this?

SALLY. Of course not—

BELINDA. I don't think he looks bad—

ED. You put a camera on him, he's a mess. Six months ago, the guy is America's perfect father. This is making me sick. Get his agent on the phone.

(SALLY picks up the phone.)

SALLY. (*Into phone.*) Clara, can you get Andrew Stein for me, please? (*SHE hangs up.*)

STEVE. (*Overlap.*) The script's in good shape.

ED. The script's phenomenal. As long as Jim doesn't sit on it.

(BILL enters as the PHONE rings. SALLY picks it up and speaks while BILL and ED speak.)

ED. How's it going?

BILL. Fine, except for the fact that Jim is as big as a fucking house.

SALLY. (*Overlap.*) Andy? Oh, wonderful. Yes, it went very well; everyone's very excited. The network is very happy. Listen, Andy, we're a little concerned about Jim's weight.

ED. Could you believe it when he walked in? The guy's supposed to be our leading man, his gut is hanging over his—

BILL. And he's eating donuts, he doesn't pass the fucking table without picking up something, I think he's already had four or five.

ED. Jesus.

SALLY. (*Overlap.*) So he is aware of it?

BILL. He's stuffing himself.

SALLY. Well, Ed's not sure—here, let me have you talk to Ed—

ED. Fuck him, I don't want to talk to some fucking agent. I want to talk to his trainer. If he's so fucking aware of it, how come he's still fat? The guy's being paid sixty thousand dollars a week to stay thin—

SALLY. (*Into phone, overlap.*) Andy, we just wanted to make sure something was being done. Is he seeing a trainer, or—oh, good, good. So you'll tell him that we are concerned? Good. Okay. (*SHE hangs up.*)

BILL. I've seen this before. This is bad, this is fear of success. You can't start like this; if you don't come out of the gate like a fucking maniac it's all over.

BELINDA. I don't think he looks bad. He's incredibly appealing. My mother has the hugest crush on—

ED. Oh, Jesus, I feel sick. Can we get some lunch menus in here?

(SALLY picks up the phone again.)

BILL. (*Overlap, to Belinda.*) You don't understand; you can't start like this. If you start like this, it's all over. He's sabotaging the whole show.

ED. I didn't want to cast him in the first place. The guy looks like a weasel. Now he looks like a fat weasel.

(HE and BILL laugh.)

SALLY. Clara, can you bring the lunch menus in? Thanks. (*SHE hangs up.*)

ED. Fuck him. The script's phenomenal; it's going to be a great show. We'll just keep the camera on Monica all week, is she a beautiful girl or what?

REN. She has the most beautiful skin of any girl I have ever seen. She glows. She actually glows.

ED. What a punim. She good?

BILL. Unbelievable.

ED. Terrific.

CLARA. (*Enters with a book of menus.*) You guys ready to order lunch?

ED. Skip the menus, do we need to see menus? Just pick up a bunch of pizzas. Six or seven, I don't care. Jesus, this is making me—and stop off at Victor's for chocolate cake. We'll sit here and stuff our faces and make fun of how fat Jim is.

(HE and BILL laugh. BLACKOUT.)

Scene 3

Ed: THE FAMILY OF MANN I

A suburban kitchen. DAD sits at a table, reading the newspaper while MOM chatters. THEY perform in a bright, skittish, sitcom style.

GINNY. Maybe I'll write a novel today.

(DAD gives her a look. The LAUGH TRACK chuckles.)

DAVE. You're going to write a novel, today? What are you going to write tomorrow, an encyclopedia?

(More laughter.)

GINNY. I mean it, Dave. I want to do something *big* today.

DAVE. How about we paint the living room?

(More laughter. SHE glares at him.)

DAVE. What? we have a very large living room!

(More laughter.)

GINNY. Dave, we're finally free! We could do anything! We could travel or go back to school, or learn how to ski!

DAVE. Go bungee jumping.

GINNY. Anything! Now that the kids have finally moved out, I feel so energized! Dave. We finally got rid of them.

(More laughter.)

DAVE. You sound like you hate your own children.

GINNY. No, hate would be too strong a word. Or maybe it wouldn't ...

(More laughter.)

DAVE. Ginny!

GINNY. Dave, now that they're adults, it's time we faced facts. We have the most annoying children in America.

DAVE. I like them!

GINNY. I like them too, when they're not driving me crazy. Twenty-two years of "Mom, it's your day for car pool." "Mom, will you press my new blouse?" "Mom—"

BUDDY. (*Off.*) Mom, what's for breakfast?

GINNY. (*To Dad.*) Yes, I especially hated that one. Mom, what's for breakfast? In that annoying nasal twang Buddy has. You sounded just like him for a second there.

BUDDY. (*Entering.*) Mooooom! What's for breaaaaakfast?

GINNY. (*Laughing.*) Oh, stop! How do you do that?

(DAD stares at her. SHE gets it, leaping to her feet.)

GINNY. Buddy! What are you doing here?

BUDDY. I thought I'd come by for breakfast.

(HE sits, expectant. MOM is confused.)

GINNY. You live in Chicago, sweetheart. Why would you come all the way to Minneapolis to have breakfast?

BUDDY. Well, see, there's this little thing called a recession, Mom. Could I have some orange juice?

(More laughter. SHE stares at him.)

SISSY. (*Off.*) Mooooooom!

(MOM turns, desperate.)

GINNY. Sissy!

(SISSY enters, weeping, and throws herself on Mom's shoulder.)

SISSY. It's so awful—oh, Mom—

GINNY. What is it, sweetheart, what's the matter?

SISSY. My husband is the most hateful man that ever lived.

GINNY. (*Sympathetic.*) We've all known that for years, sweetheart. Why are you crying?

(More laughter.)

SISSY. Can I stay here, Mom?

BUDDY. Mom, I lost my job and my apartment, and I'm broke. It's okay if I stay here, isn't it?

GINNY. Oh, my poor sweet babies. I'd rather stick my fingers in a waffle iron than let you move back home.

(More laughter. Beat.)

SISSY and BUDDY. Daddy?

DAVE. Oh, she's kidding. Of course you can stay! Isn't this great. We're a family again!

(HE puts his arms around Buddy and Sissy. After a moment, GINNY makes a running jump and leaps on Sissy, trying to strangle her. ALL try to pry them apart. Laughter and applause. BLACKOUT.)

Scene 4

Bill: IT'S NOT REAL ENOUGH

The writers' room. EVERYONE is sitting around the table. There is food and Coke cans everywhere.

ED. This doesn't, it just doesn't start right.

STEVE. Well, we talked about her, you know, her feeling of liberation when—

ED. Yeah, but a novel, it's too literary, everyone in America's going to be going who are these fucking people, writing novels, it's not real—

BELINDA. My mother tried to write a novel once.

ED. (*Not listening.*) That's the mistake everybody makes, like all this sniping at each other, that's not real. Once you give into that sort of shit, you're dead.

STEVE. Well, we don't have to start with the novel, I just thought it would give a sense of her, you know—

ED. Yeah, but it's got to be real. This show is—we're bringing the family together in adulthood, now, we're showing Americans moving out of their adolescence into a deeper maturity.

BILL. I think we should start with Sissy and Buddy, that's where the heat is going to be. Either one of them could be a breakout. I say we just start with the heat.

REN. What, do you mean open with them already there?

BILL. Yeah, some sort of funny scene with the two of them plotting to get their old rooms back or something.

REN. Except he's after her room. Just getting back in the house isn't enough, he's—

ED. You mean, she's got the room with the view of Minneapolis?

REN. Something like that. A spectacular view of downtown Minneapolis, and he's after that room.

SALLY. Ren, that is a great idea.

BELINDA. So they get into some totally moronic juvenile fight about it? That could work. I mean, they start out as children and then—

ED. Yeah, but it's still—there's something not right about the tone. These people should not be mean to each other. They tease each other, but without meanness.

BELINDA. Well, if we started with the brother sister thing we would lose the section where Dave picks on Ginny, that's where I thought it was sounding kind of—

ED. No, that part's okay. It was the stuff about her not liking her kids that I thought really went too far.

BILL. The attitudes are reversed. Dave should be the one who doesn't want the kids back; that's where the comedy is. She's gotta be thrilled to see them.

ED. Yeah, this stuff about not liking her kids doesn't work.

BELINDA. (*Cheerful.*) Well, I don't know. My mother hated me all the time. Didn't your mother hate you?

ED. No, I don't think—you're very nosey. Is this why your mother hated you?

BELINDA. It was just a periodic thing. You know, when you date drug addicts and come home trashed, parents tend to get upset. And isn't that like what we're going for with these two, that they're both—

ED. No, they're good kids, they aren't—

BELINDA. Well, I was a good kid too. I was just a good kid who got arrested a couple times. (*SHE laughs.*)

REN. You got arrested?

BELINDA. Oh, for buying cocaine. Big deal. I was a minor. It's not like I have a record or anything.

ED. Well, that's a big relief. You were buying drugs, but you were underage. I feel much better.

BELINDA. So, let's give Sissy a drug phase.

STEVE. Drugs aren't funny.

BELINDA. They're not?

ED. These are good kids. They're not drug addicts.

SALLY. Maybe if the opening is just more about Ginny's realizing the kids are gone—

ED. I need more coffee. CLARA! Is there coffee? CLARA!

CLARA. (*Enters.*) I'm in the next room, Ed. You don't have to roar.

ED. We need coffee.

SALLY. (*Overlap.*) She doesn't know what to do with herself ...

CLARA. I just made a pot fifteen minutes ago. (*SHE picks it up and looks at it, pours it into his cup.*)

ED. Oh, this is fresh? I didn't know this was fresh.

SALLY. (*Overlap.*) There's a sense of confusion and loss—

ED. Oh yeah, those confusion and loss jokes are always such a scream.

(The GUYS laugh.)

SALLY. No, I mean, if we tried to play it comedically—

ED. Comedically. Ohhhh. Now, everything is clear. (*Off coffee.*) This stuff is phenomenal. How do you make this?

CLARA. Well, you put the little white filter in the machine. Then you open the little silver bag and pour the coffee in.

ED. Phenomenal.

CLARA. I can't believe they pay you so much and me so little.

ED. I adore this girl.

BILL. Could I have some of that?

(BILL holds out his cup. As CLARA pours, HE puts his arm around her.)

ED. She's phenomenal, isn't she?

BILL. Fantastic.

ED. So what do we have? Comedic confusion and loss.

BILL. I just think we gotta be careful not to lose Dave in all this. What I want to know is where Dave is.

ED. As played by Jim, Dave is standing in the corner with his fist up his ass.

(The GUYS all laugh.)

REN. Sitcom for the nineties. (*Doing Jackie Gleason.*) "Norton! How would you like my fist up your ass?"

(The GUYS howl.)

BILL. "Alice! Why, I oughta just shove my fist up Norton's ass!"

REN. (*As Alice.*) "You do whatever you want, Ralph. Trixie and I are going to go lick each other dry."

STEVE. (*As Norton.*) "Hey, Ralph, Ralpheroonie, the girls are going to ... lick each other dry! Don't you think we should, uh ... watch?"

REN. (*As Alice.*) "Why that's a great idea, Norton. You coming, Ralph?"

BILL. "Alice ... you're the greatest."

(THEY are laughing uproariously. BELINDA watches, puzzled, and SALLY smiles politely. CLARA does not respond.)

BILL. Oh, God. Oh, God ...

REN. (*As Ralph.*) "Norton!"

(THEY all laugh even harder.)

ED. So what do we have, Dave is standing around with Norton's fist up his ass? Well, at least it's funny.

(THEY continue to laugh. LIGHTS change.)

Scene 5

Belinda: REALITY

ED and BELINDA are in his office.

ED. You like it here? I mean, everything's going okay? Need anything?

BELINDA. No, it's great. Everything's great.

ED. It's an amazing job, isn't it? I mean, the first show I got, I thought, they have to be kidding. I couldn't imagine how anybody would be willing to pay me for this. They put me in a room with three other guys and said, all right, entertain yourselves all day, eat as much as you like, and while you're at it, if you write a few things down, we'll put them on television for you. Oh, and by the way, we'll pay you a zillion dollars for this. It's like stealing money.

BELINDA. It's pretty amazing. I mean, it seems—I'm still getting used to it, but, you know—I'm writing for a TV show! I'm sorry, I'm sounding like a moron—

ED. No, no—

BELINDA. Anyway, thank you for the opportunity. And, I hope I wasn't crossing lines in there, with the drug stuff—

ED. Not at all.

BELINDA. I just thought that might be an area for comedy, so I was—

ED. You'll figure it out.

BELINDA. I just, you know, I'm real excited about being here, so I want to do a good job, and I get—anyway. And on top of it all, to be making so much money, I—

ED. No, you can't do it for the money. That's the first mistake everybody makes. If you do it for the money, you're lost. If it's there, if it's not there, you have to be the same person.

BELINDA. (*Laughing a little.*) Well, some day I hope to be the same person with a lot more money.

ED. You need money?

BELINDA. Oh. No, that's not—I'm fine. I'm doing fine. Thank you.

ED. I mean, the money's good. It's a good thing. To be able to support your family, and take care of the people you love. You don't have that worry right now, but you will. But for now, it's good that you can just learn the craft, and enjoy the opportunity. Television is so powerful; there's no other form of entertainment that reaches so many people. That's what's so great about what we do. We make a difference. We literally affect people's lives.

BELINDA. It's quite a responsibility.

ED. You're a talented girl. You're going to do fine out here. Los Angeles takes a little getting used to, but really, it's a wonderful place. It's possibly the last great cauldron of the American character, do you know what I mean?

We're creating a landscape, creating an art form, creating ourselves. It's the essence of America. That's what I like most about Los Angeles. It allows you to create your own reality.

BELINDA. Oh. But—wow. I don't know. If you create it, is it real? I mean, I thought we were creating fantasies.

(SHE laughs, friendly. HE stares at her. LIGHTS change.)

Scene 6

Ed: DID YOU SEE MY NAME?

BELINDA is at home. SHE is lit by the BLUE LIGHT of a television set. SHE is talking on the phone and drinking a beer.

BELINDA. (*On phone, excited.*) Did you see it? Did you see my name? (*SHE laughs.*) I know, it was wild, wasn't it? Did Grandma like it? (*Pause.*) She thought it was too *racy*? Well, what do you want, she's near death, everything's racy to her. Mom. I'm kidding, Mom. Hi, Daddy! Yeah, it was great wasn't it? Well, not great, but for my first episode on television—yeah, it was exciting. It looked so *real*. And it's so weird, because that's *not* real, you know, but there it is on the television screen, and it's like, man, it's like you exist. It's so ... Dad? Oh. Hi, Gigi! Yeah, it was great, wasn't it? Uh huh. Uh huh. No, I didn't write that, I didn't write that part. Well, you know, as a group, we rewrite things, and—(*Pause.*) No, I—I

didn't write that, either. Yeah, Ed wrote that. (*Pause.*) Yeah, I wrote some of it—(*Lying.*) yeah, I wrote that. That was my line. Good, yeah, I—Uh ... who is this? Mrs. Markgraf! Yeah, it is fun being in Hollywood. No, uh, no I—I haven't met Tom Cruise. Could you put my dad back on? Thanks. (*Pause, laughing.*) Dad, how many people are there? Well, yeah, but—of course I did. I had a, a bunch of friends came over and we watched it together. They're in the other room. Okay, you go back to your party and I'll go back to mine. Yeah. I love you too. 'Bye. (*SHE hangs up. Beat. Calling to no one.*) Be right there. (*Beat.*) I'm sooo pathetic.

(LIGHTS change.)

Scene 7

Belinda: PHENOMENAL

ED and BILL are in Ed's office.

ED. You see the reviews?

BILL. Phenomenal. We're gold.

ED. I can't believe it. You see *The New York Times*? The network guys, they're telling me they've never seen reviews like this. Not since *All in the Family.*

BILL. It just goes to show, people are hungry.

ED. Yeah, but now we gotta hit a home run every week. We gotta keep the heat on until we see what the numbers look like.

BILL. I'm not kidding, this is it, Ed. This is the way I felt the first week of *Family Business*. When it works, it works. We're going seven years.

ED. You think so?

BILL. If Jim goes on a diet.

ED. Fuck him. He can lose the weight or he's out of here. This isn't fucking *Designing Women*, or *Rosanne*, for that matter. Anybody can be replaced. Just make sure he knows that.

BILL. No, he's fine, he's going to the gym, he's going to be—

ED. Is he pulling anything? Come late to rehearsals or anything?

BILL. No, he's scared to death. He's desperate for this show to survive; he's got something like four mortgages to pay off. He's not going to fuck up.

ED. Is that why he's doing all those fried chicken commercials?

BILL. I guess.

ED. Jesus.

BILL. How's the table?

ED. Great. I mean, I'm still not sure this is Steve's kind of show, and Sally's not—you know, we're stuck with her, what are you going to do? They're friends; no one else will give them jobs. But Ren and Belinda are phenomenal. You read their scripts?

BILL. Phenomenal.

ED. First time out for both of them. Unbelievable.

BILL. Where'd you find her?

ED. In a stack. I mean, her spec came in over the fucking transom, I don't even know why I read it. I just pulled it out of a stack one day on a whim, and I thought,

fuck, this is good, let's just hire her. She's got a fucking Ph.D., did you know that?

BILL. You're shitting me.

ED. Taught English at some university and got sick of it. I'm going to call fucking Cosby and say, fuck you and your Ph.D. I got a *story* editor with a Ph.D., take that and shove it up your ass.

BILL. (*Laughing.*) That's perfect. You should, you should do it.

ED. Fucking Cosby and his fucking Ph.D. Anyway, I read her script, and I think, you know, she's good, and then that afternoon, I go to this psychic, who tells me, out of the blue, that a woman named Linda is going to come into my life and make a huge impact.

BILL. Linda?

ED. Is that amazing? I mean, it's not exactly the same, but—

BILL. No, but—you didn't—

ED. Nothing. I was there to ask about whether or not I should buy another house, Deb and I are thinking about buying a place in Santa Monica because the beach house is so far, and there are so many people at the house in Brentwood all the time we can't be alone, with the gardener, and the housekeeper and Becky and the kids—

BILL. Yeah, yeah—

ED. So I hadn't said anything about hiring writers. I mean, we weren't even sure the show was going at that point.

BILL. That's wild.

ED. Yeah. A woman named "Linda." And what about Ren, he remind you of anybody?

(BILL looks at him, actively thinking.)

ED. Me! Doesn't he remind you of me? About twenty years ago?

BILL. Oh—

ED. Yeah, I went back to that psychic today, to talk about the show, and you know what she told me? That I was going to have a son. Out of the blue, she says, I see a son coming into your life. A prince among men. And, you know, Deb's forty-six, she's not—

BILL. Well, you never—

ED. I know, but be realistic. I mean, with these psychics, you can't always be literal. She says a son, but that might mean a lot of things. So when I got back to the lot today, I bumped into Ren, and I thought: This is what she was talking about. A prince. Of course, I didn't know that when I hired him. This just happened today.

BILL. Ren's great. His script is phenomenal.

ED. And what a jump shot. Did you see him yesterday, making that shot from the corner?

BILL. See him? I was trying to stop him. I'm going, all of a sudden he's Michael Jordan—

ED. He played college ball.

BILL. You're shitting me.

ED. You didn't know? He made it to the Final Four. Twice.

BILL. Jesus.

ED. That's why I hired him.

(THEY laugh. LIGHTS change.)

Scene 8

Ren: THE NUMBERS

REN and STEVE and BELINDA are in the writers' room. CLARA enters, carrying yellow sheets of paper.

CLARA. The numbers came in.

(STEVE and REN jump, take the sheets eagerly.)

STEVE. All of them?

CLARA. Just the overnights. We won our slot.

REN. All right! (*HE gives Clara a high-five.*)

STEVE. (*Studying sheet.*) Not by much. Jesus. Not by much at all. A tenth of a point.

BELINDA. Now how do you read these?

REN. (*Pointing.*) This number is the percentage of available sets that were tuned into our show, and this one is—percentage of viewers. Of the sets that were turned on, this is how many watched us.

BELINDA. What?

STEVE. This is not good at all.

CLARA. Bill says we'll bounce in the nationals.

STEVE. You didn't take these down to the set, did you?

CLARA. No, he came by before he went over—

STEVE. Never let an actor see a number. It makes them completely insane.

(ED and SALLY enter. SHE is trying to show him Polaroids.)

SALLY. You can't tell from the Polaroids, Ed. We have to go over there. It'll take ten minutes—

ED. I told you; I don't care what they wear.

SALLY. You say that, and then on show night all of a sudden nobody looks right—

CLARA. The numbers came in. (*SHE hands sheets to Sally and Ed.*)

SALLY. Oh, no. We fell four points off our lead.

STEVE. That fucking black show is a piece of shit, and then they blame us because everybody turns it off in the middle.

ED. It doesn't matter. Those assholes at the network will do whatever they want anyway. You have to ignore this shit. Is there coffee?

CLARA. What's the magic word?

ED. Clara, my love, is there coffee?

CLARA. Ed, sweetie, for you, there's always coffee. (*SHE goes to get it.*)

SALLY. I love your shirt, Ren. That's a terrific color on you.

REN. Thanks.

SALLY. All right, I'm going to wardrobe. I'll be back in ten minutes; don't start without me. (*SHE goes.*)

BELINDA. (*Still trying to figure it out.*) This number is the percentage of what?...

ED. You can't pay any attention to them. Jesus, these numbers are for shit. Steve, look at what *Empty Nest* did, and that's a fucking hit.

STEVE. Back in the eighties, no one could stay on with these numbers.

ED. The networks are going down. Fuck 'em, they deserve to; they're as bad as the car companies. They put shit on year after year, it serves them right that people finally won't watch it. Shit, I don't want to talk about the numbers. Belinda, how's your script coming?

BELINDA. I'm proofing it over lunch. You'll have it this afternoon.

ED. Great. Did you put in that stuff we talked about? About Dave interfering with Sissy's boyfriends?

BELINDA. Yeah. It's a little creepy, but I think I figured out how to make it work.

ED. Creepy?

BELINDA. Ed, she's twenty-nine years old and her father won't let her date.

ED. So, what's your point? (*HE laughs.*)

BELINDA. Right. So, I put that in and moved the dog food run to the top of the D scene; it's much hotter there—

ED. Great—

BELINDA. And I cut four pages out of the second act and reconceived Jimmy.

ED. Jimmy? I liked Jimmy.

BELINDA. He wasn't funny enough.

ED. Is he funny now?

BELINDA. This guy is so funny, he makes Robin Williams look like a big bore.

ED. You think Williams is funny?

BELINDA. Not as funny as you, Ed.

ED. I love this girl.

BELINDA. Yeah, yeah, yeah ... (*SHE goes.*)

ED. (*To Ren.*) She's great, isn't she? She's a machine. How's your new script coming?

REN. Great. You'll have it by the end of the week.

ED. She's gaining on you.

(ED laughs. REN laughs with him, sort of.)

STEVE. Ed, I probably should get going on a second script, too. I mean, I haven't really done much since that first script and I have a couple ideas.

ED. Oh, well, yeah, sure Steve. Put them together and we'll talk.

STEVE. Well, is now a good time? I could pitch 'em now. It shouldn't take too long.

ED. (*Looking at the sheets again.*) No, why don't you hold onto them for a few days. Now is not really a great time.

STEVE. Oh. Okay.

ED. Fucking numbers. Ren, you want to go do some editing?

REN. Sure.

ED. Your episode is looking phenomenal. We just have to get another thirty seconds out of it.

REN. Great.

(THEY go. STEVE sits alone for a long moment. SALLY enters. SHE looks around.)

SALLY. Where is everybody? I thought we were working.

(STEVE looks at her. LIGHTS change.)

Scene 9

Sally: THE BEST PLACE TO WORK IN HOLLYWOOD

SALLY arranges flowers on her desk. There is also a teapot and cups. BELINDA looks around.

BELINDA. What a lovely office.

SALLY. Thank you. I like to keep it pretty, so there's at least one place on the lot I can come to for a little—comfort, I suppose. Would you like some tea?

BELINDA. Oh, sure, that'd be great.

(SALLY pours and hands her a cup.)

SALLY. So, how are you liking it here?

BELINDA. Well, you know, it's great, I just, a lot, it's real different.

SALLY. From the university?

BELINDA. Well, from anything, as far as I can tell. (*Pause.*) I didn't know you knew about the whole ... university thing.

SALLY. Oh, I'm sorry. Was it a secret?

BELINDA. No, of course not. I just—actually, I did ask Ed not to mention it. He found out about it through my agent, I didn't—

SALLY. Oh, Ed's telling everyone. You should be proud. It's quite an accomplishment.

BELINDA. Thank you. I just didn't want people to think I was an intellectual snob, or anything.

SALLY. Not at all. Well. A drug phase and a Ph.D. You're a very interesting person, aren't you?

BELINDA. It was a very small drug phase, I don't know why I even—

SALLY. You must miss teaching. (*SHE hands her a cup of tea.*)

BELINDA. Well, yeah, I guess I do. There actually was something really comforting about discussing Victorian novels for twelve hours a day.

SALLY. I'm sure it was a much more intellectual environment.

BELINDA. Oh, no—I mean, yes, of course, but—

SALLY. We read too.

BELINDA. Oh, I know. I didn't—I really don't miss it that much. I was constantly broke and the politics—I didn't actually fit in.

SALLY. Oh, no. You're lovely! I'm sure you fit in everywhere you go.

BELINDA. Well, thank you. But I never actually felt comfortable as an academic. I mean, I loved teaching, but the faculty ... I felt like this populist in elitist heaven. I prefer Dickens to Henry James.

SALLY. Really.

BELINDA. Yeah. And I just thought, writing for television, if Dickens were alive today, that's where he'd be, so—

SALLY. Well, you're very lucky to be with us on your first show. This is one of the best places to work in Hollywood. Ed is one of the few truly decent and supportive people in the industry, and he really does want you to consider this a home. You're lucky.

BELINDA. (*Cautious.*) Everyone's been great. And I really am thrilled to be here.

SALLY. Well, good.

BELINDA. Of course, it's pretty different than I thought it would be. I guess I thought it was going to be sort of like the *Dick Van Dyke Show*, and, you know, it's really not.

SALLY. It does get a little rough sometimes. You must find that hard, coming from your ivory tower.

BELINDA. Oh, no. I love three hours of fist up the ass jokes. We used to kid about that all the time back at the old ivory tower. In between all the drugs we did.

(SALLY looks at her. BELINDA laughs. After a moment, SALLY laughs back.)

SALLY. My first job, on *Happy Days*, the first day I was there, one of the other writers unzipped his pants, put his cock on the table and told me to suck it.

(Pause.)

BELINDA. You're kidding.

SALLY. I was the only woman in a room of ten. They all thought it was hilarious, of course. I was twenty-four years old.

BELINDA. What did you do?

SALLY. Well, I certainly didn't oblige him. I laughed in a slightly uncomfortable way. (*SHE demonstrates.*) After a month or so the joke wore thin and he went on to something else. The whole trick is going along with it, but not really. You know.

BELINDA. I don't think I do.

SALLY. You can't protest, because that would get in the way of the room's energy, but you also can't just pretend that you're one of them. Because, we're not. Are we?

BELINDA. Apparently not.

SALLY. Anyway, you don't have to worry about the really overt stuff here. Ed wouldn't tolerate it.

BELINDA. He wouldn't.

SALLY. Absolutely not. He's actually rather traditional.

BELINDA. Traditional?

SALLY. On the last season of *Family Business*, we had a staff writer, a woman, who told the filthiest jokes in the room. She also tried to play basketball with them in one of their pickup games. She didn't last the season.

BELINDA. (*Pause.*) Are you warning me about something?

SALLY. I'm just trying to help. Ed is a complicated person. I hope you understand that.

BELINDA. You're kind of complicated yourself, aren't you?

SALLY. Not really. All I want out of life is to make a lot of money. More money than I can count. So much money that everyone will have to kiss up to me, and I can treat anyone I want like dirt. *(SHE laughs.)* More tea? *(SHE pours.)*

(LIGHTS change.)

Scene 10

Belinda: THE FAMILY OF MANN II

SISSY and BUDDY are reading a newspaper. SISSY is circling items. GINNY bustles about the kitchen.

SISSY. (*Wistful.*) I miss Benny.

BUDDY. Benny? The guy who chained you to the kitchen counter until you learned how to make a pie crust?

SISSY. That wasn't what it looked like.

BUDDY. It looked like about sixty pounds of wrought iron.

(Laugh track.)

SISSY. You never liked him.

BUDDY. Well, no I didn't. And now that I find out he's been married to another woman the whole time he was married to you, I like him even less.

SISSY. Nobody's perfect!

(More laughter.)

BUDDY. I know nobody's perfect, but Benny isn't even in the ball park! Why are you defending him?

SISSY. I just think that everyone has a good side, that's all.

BUDDY. Yeah, well, Benny's good side belongs in a federal penitentiary.

(More laughter.)

SISSY. What do you know about it?

(THEY start to argue. GINNY laughs.)

GINNY. Okay, you two! I don't want to have to separate you! (*Smiling.*) Kids ...

(More laughter. UNCLE WILLY and DAVE enter.)

DAVE. Hey! Look who I found!

SISSY. Uncle Willy!

UNCLE WILLY. I was in the neighborhood, thought I'd stop by, visit my favorite brother and his gorgeous wife. You look fabulous, Ginny.

GINNY. Thanks, Willy. Have you had lunch?

UNCLE WILLY. Lunch! That would be terrific. Lunch, dinner, whatever. Breakfast. A chance to visit with my favorite niece and nephew for a few hours. A couple of days, weeks, months. Whatever! I'll just settle in a corner somewhere; you can throw me a bone once in a while. Sissy! You look fabulous.

(Laughter.)

DAVE. (*Threatening.*) Willy ...

UNCLE WILLY. (*Begging.*) Just for a little while, Dave, till my trail cools off. I mean, till I get back on my feet!

DAVE. Alright. Everybody out! Not you, Willy!

(The OTHERS go. WILLY turns, desperate, to Dave.)

UNCLE WILLY. Dave. Dave, don't hit me, Dave. I'm not in a lot of trouble. A little, tiny misunderstanding with a loan shark.

DAVE. I'm sick, Willy. I just found out. I may be dying.

UNCLE WILLY. (*Pause.*) What?

DAVE. I don't know how to tell Ginny, or the kids. I know we haven't always gotten along, but—you are my brother. Can you help me?

(THEY hug. BLACKOUT.)

Scene 11

Ren: REAL MONEY

The writers' room. Exhausted, REN and BELINDA are going through a mass of orange pages, copy editing with a pencil. Periodically, THEY pass pages back and forth. THEY keep reading as THEY talk.

BELINDA. What time is it?

REN. It's a little after two.

BELINDA. Oh, fuck. Jesus, fuck me. Where's the rest of this scene? (*SHE paws dully through the pages.*)

REN. What is it?

BELINDA. G. G. G, G, G. I only have half of it.

REN. That's the whole scene.

BELINDA. It's not the whole scene. What happened to the part where he tells them he's not dying?

REN. That's there.

BELINDA. No, it's not.

(SHE hands the pages to him. REN reads.)

REN. Oh, shit. Did we cut that? (*HE starts pawing through the pages.*)

BELINDA. How could we cut it? The whole episode is about whether he's dying or not.

REN. Where is the old draft?

(THEY both are pawing through white pages by now.)

BELINDA. Fuck. Fuck me. We're going to be here all night. It's a good thing they pay us a fortune.

REN. My deal is fucked. I have a terrible deal. Ed is—I mean, he's a great guy, he's been great to me, but he's—you know, he's made a lot of promises that he doesn't keep. I was supposed to be a producer on this show.

BELINDA. Oh, yeah? And instead you're just a shitty little story editor like me.

REN. No, I mean, it's great being here, I'm just saying. I'm never going to make any real money here.

BELINDA. We're making four thousand dollars a week. That's not real money? What's real money?

REN. Four thousand dollars a week is not real money.

BELINDA. How did you end up here, anyway?

REN. My sister-in-law was a regular on *Family Business* the last season. She played the nun who tried to teach the twins to tap dance.

BELINDA. Oh, right. I missed that.

REN. So Ed and I got to know each other. We started playing basketball together.

BELINDA. Then you never did this before.

REN. Well, you know, I had a couple guest spots on *Who's the Boss?* and *Full House*. Here it is. Is this it? (*HE reads off of some pages.*) Dave says, "I just sat there and heard the doctor say, you don't have cancer. It's nothing. And then I thought, if it's nothing, how come you're charging me an arm and a leg?"

BELINDA. Oh, God, did we leave that terrible joke in there?

REN. Hey. I wrote that terrible joke.

BELINDA. Oh. I'm sorry—

REN. It's okay. It is a terrible joke. But it's two fifteen, and it's all we got. Where's the first half of the scene?

BELINDA. No, come on, we gotta fix it. I mean, there's got to be a way to fix this. (*SHE takes the page and stares at it.*)

REN. Belinda—

BELINDA. How about if we just take it out?

REN. Belinda.

BELINDA. (*Preoccupied, looking at the page.*) That'll work. Actually, this is a moment that should not have a joke at all, rhythmically it doesn't— He's facing his mortality, I don't want to hear one-liners ... (*SHE starts to block out a cut on the page.*)

REN. We can't just change the script on our own! Ed is going to throw a fit—

BELINDA. Ed is gonna love this. Look, it clears out a moment for the two of them, and, you know, if we don't build an emotional context—

REN. An emotional *what*?

BELINDA. Look, just because it's a sitcom doesn't mean it has to be shit. This will make it better, so what's your problem?

REN. Well, excuse me. I mean, it's just my script. What would *I* know about it?

BELINDA. Ren, you said yourself it's a bad joke! Why are you fighting for it?

REN. Why are you fighting against it? It's two in the fucking morning!

CLARA. (*Staggers in.*) Are you guys okay?

BELINDA. Yeah.

CLARA. Are you almost done?

REN. Yes.

BELINDA. No.

CLARA. You know, we're not writing *The Brothers Karamazov* in here.

BELINDA. We're just working on a few ...

CLARA. Great. I'm gonna be here till three.

(SHE goes. REN stares at the pages, grim and exhausted.)

BELINDA. I'm sorry. I just, I taught writing for so long, you know, freshman comp, I spent so many years telling undergrads how important good writing is, and so many people watch television, I just keep having this vision in my head of all these people gathered around it like a campfire and we're the storytellers, and ... (*Pause.*) Never mind. We'll just leave it.

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