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SF PERUSALS

Karlaboy

Steven Peros

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

SAMUELFRENCH.COM
SAMUELFRENCH-LONDON.CO.UK

ISBN 978-0-573-69724-1

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In an earlier version, ***KARLABOY*** was first presented by Love Swing Productions, in association with Hillwood Productions, Inc., at The Actors Circle Theatre, in West Hollywood, California, on October 20, 1994. It was directed by Steven Peros; the setting was by Jerry Shimer; the lighting by Chris Wasilauskas; the original music by Christopher Caliendo. The Line Producer was Jennifer Taylor Scott and the Stage Manager was Tracy Rowe. The cast was as follows:

HAROLD BACHMAN. . . . . .H.M. Wynant
KARLA DAVEN. . . . . Ellie Valleau
BILL LAUDER . . . . . James McManus
TONY . . . . . Dean Tarrolly
STUDIO BOSS. . . . . Morris Beers

The ENSEMBLE (Ellen Goldwasser, Henry Lide, Lawrence Maki) portrayed: **FIRST MALE VOICE, SECOND MALE VOICE, THIRD MALE VOICE, ASSISTANT, OLGA, OLGA'S PARTNERS, PARTY GUESTS, YES MAN #1, YES MAN #2, GOWNED ACTRESS, REPORTER #1, REPORTER #2, REPORTER #3, SYDNEY BACHMAN**

THE CHARACTERS

HAROLD BACHMAN – 65, a movie director and screenwriter, retired for over 35 years. In recall, he is in his 20s.

KARLA DAVEN – 20s, a lovely actress with star quality. Karla should not be costumed or made-up to recall any one specific famous movie star.

BILL LAUDER – 30s, a journalist.

TONY – 20s-30s, a good-looking movie star-in-training.

STUDIO BOSS – 40s-60s, head of the unnamed major studio to which Harold and Karla are under contract.

ENSEMBLE OF THREE – Made up of 2 men and 1 woman. The Ensemble plays the following roles: First Male Voice, Second Male Voice, Third Male Voice, Assistant, Olga, Olga's Partners, Super Mogul, Party Guests, Yes Man #1, Yes Man #2, Gowned Actress, Reporter #1, Reporter #2, Reporter #3, Sydney Bachman, Bill's Agent

A NOTE ON CASTING

KARLABOY was written to have the role of "Harold Bachman", young and old, portrayed by one actor, very much like "Salieri" – young and old – was played by one actor in the stage version of *Amadeus* by Peter Shaffer. The effect achieved is that the audience is never viewing pure flashback. Having the older actor portray himself as a younger man in flashbacks brings an inherent melancholy as well as a sense that what we are witnessing is not objective truth, but rather viewed through the complex prism of memory. However, since some theatre companies may not find an actor who can convincingly portray both older and younger versions, permission is granted to utilize two actors in the role if deemed absolutely necessary.

Similarly, the roles beyond the first five listed above were written to be portrayed by a three-actor ensemble. This, too, helps create on stage the "life of the mind", the sense that memories, images, and faces, often jumble together, and may even repeat. Again, what we are seeing is not always pure objective truth, but Harold's own personal truth, whether he realizes it or not.

TIME AND PLACE

The action of the play takes place in 1990 in Karlaboy, a Hollywood mansion built in 1952, and, in recall, 1950-1956 in and around Hollywood, California.

The play is divided into numbered scenes, indicating a change of time or locale or mood. The action, however, is continuous and must flow from scene to scene seamlessly.

The play should be performed with one intermission.

THE SET

The main set, the sitting room of Karlaboy, as described in I:2, should be designed in such a way as to allow all its component parts – chairs, end tables, dressers, fixed props, etc. – to be utilized in the flashback scenes to other locations (Harold's pre-Karlaboy bungalow, office of Studio Boss, Oscar Party, et al). This will aid in the seamless flow from scene to scene, without having to pause for new set elements.

The main set has a staircase, as indicated in I:2. In the inaugural production, a two-level set could not be achieved, thus, the center aisle of the theatre became the de facto staircase, which allowed for staircase scenes, entrances, and exits to be played in the aisle. Similarly, when gesturing to the staircase, Harold would indicate this same aisle. This solution is recommended for any theatre or theatre company that is unable to accommodate a staircase.

The 16mm projector indicated in I:2, can also be achieved via a flickering lighting effect behind a cut-out in the rear flat, as if the projector described were contained within a projection booth or closet.

The "neon light design" indicated in II:2 was created via a simple stencil colored lighting effect. It faded up during all scenes set in Karlaboy of the past and faded out during all scenes set in the present, indicating that it is presently burnt-out.

ACT ONE

Scene One

(We begin in darkness when suddenly perfect lighting illuminates **KARLA DAVEN***, a beautiful young actress in her twenties.)*

(We are witnessing the final moments of her 1950 screen test. **KARLA** *is confident, assured, charming.)*

*(***TWO MALE VOICES** *address her from off.)*

FIRST MALE VOICE. Perfect.

SECOND MALE VOICE. Tail Slate.

(An **ASSISTANT** *rushes in and holds an upside-down movie slate in front of* **KARLA***'s face.)*

ASSISTANT. Karla Daven! Screen Test! Take One!

(The **ASSISTANT** *claps the slate and exits.)*

FIRST MALE VOICE. Hold on. Keep it rolling.

KARLA. What's next, gentlemen?

SECOND MALE VOICE. We don't have to do the scene a second time, that's for sure.

*(***KARLA** *smiles at the vote of approval.)*

FIRST MALE VOICE. Recite something for us.

SECOND MALE VOICE. Yeah. A little Shakespeare.

(There is laughter from the unseen voices.)

KARLA. Don't laugh. I was Desdemona up in Pasadena last Spring. "Men's natures wrangle with inferior things, though great ones are their object. For let our finger ache, and it endues our other healthful members to that sense of pain. Nay, we must – "

(An interruption from the voices.)

FIRST MALE VOICE. Great, Karla, now turn right. We want to check out your profile.

*(***KARLA** *turns her formidable physique, but then playfully looks back towards the voices in the dark.)*

KARLA. How's this?

FIRST MALE VOICE. That's fine, doll, but turn your face to the right, too.

*(***KARLA** *smiles, obeying the simple request.)*

SECOND MALE VOICE. *(admiringly)* What a side view.

KARLA. *(loving it)* Fresh.

SECOND MALE VOICE. Camera's heading for a run-out.

FIRST MALE VOICE. Okay. Let's wrap this up. Karla, give us a kiss, you know, right to the camera. Play a little.

(What a show **KARLA** *gives. In the tilt of her head, the seductiveness of her bedroom eyes, the pucker of her lips, there is enough sex appeal to set several thousand movie screens on fire.)*

KARLA. How's that? Should I do it again?

(The voices in the dark are silent with admiration.)

(There are several bright flashes of light and then Blackout.)

(In the darkness:)

HAROLD. Beautiful, isn't she?

BILL. Yes. She was.

Scene Two

(Lights come up on the Main Sitting Room of Karlaboy. Present.)

(This is a two-story mansion built in the early 1950s. Once immaculate, it is now a bit unkempt and musty. Neat piles of newspapers and magazines can be found behind furniture and along walls, unrecycled.)

(There is a staircase, leading to rooms above. Two men are the only occupants.)

*(***HAROLD BACHMAN***, 65, he is a white-haired, well-composed man of fierce intellect. He is wearing an elegant silk smoking jacket, white button shirt, and casually tied ascot of subtle color.)*

(The other is – **BILL LAUDER***, 30s, intelligent, eager, recently-awoken.)*

(They sit side by side, looking out at us, having just watched the screen test. Upstage, a 16mm projector projects empty light above the heads of the audience.)

BILL. Right there. One angle. No cuts. It's like seeing the "Mona Lisa" for the first time.

HAROLD. *(dismissive)* "Mona Lisa" was a cow. Now Karla Daven – she was the golden calf.

BILL. *(still in awe)* It's so clear, isn't it?

HAROLD. It's really your first time?

BILL. Well, yeah, considering you stole the only copy before I was born.

HAROLD. *(unamused)* I told you: I didn't steal it – I saved it. It was dying in a vault from malnutrition.

BILL. I was just kidding.

HAROLD. I see. *(a beat)* Forgive me. I wasn't prepared for the subtlety of your razor wit.

BILL. That was an insult, right? I mean, just so I'm clear.

HAROLD. Nothing flies under your radar, does it, Billy old boy?

BILL. You know, as thrilled as I am to finally meet you, it's beginning to border on masochism.

HAROLD. I show you the only known print of Karla Daven's screen test and you talk about masochism?

BILL. I'm not talking about Karla right now.

HAROLD. Well someone had better – and fast.

BILL. That would be you, Mr. Bachman. I've said all I have to say.

*(***HAROLD** *gestures to a display case of Karla Daven memorabilia.)*

HAROLD. You know, there isn't a single country you can go to where that one word doesn't bring about instant recognition. Karla. Posters, t-shirts, buttons – *(picks one up:)* "Karla Died For Our Sins" *(tosses it back)* A popular one for the feminist groups in the sixties. She was their martyr for every innocent virgin corrupted into a whore by a man's world.

*(***HAROLD** *returns to* **BILL**.*)*

HAROLD. Did you know that in the Korean War, when the girls wrote to their soldiers, they used to sign off, "Love, Kisses and Tears"?

BILL. Of course I know that.

HAROLD. Right. Of course you do.

*(***HAROLD** *finally notices the "on" projector and moves to turn it off.)*

BILL. You know, this isn't what I expected.

HAROLD. Sorry. I gave my cleaning lady off for two decades.

BILL. No, not Karlaboy. You. I mean, after Karla died, you never made another film. You refuse all interviews. Only a handful of photographers have managed to catch you in over thirty years.

HAROLD. I know who I am, Bill.

*(***HAROLD** *turns off the projector.)*

BILL. I guess like everyone else, I wasn't sure if you were still…

HAROLD. Functioning?

BILL. In a word.

HAROLD. Parts of me are. Parts of me aren't.

BILL. Then I'll take the insults, considering the alternative.

HAROLD. What alternative is that?

BILL. I thought I was going to walk in here tonight and find you charging across the room, swinging an ice pick at me.

HAROLD. Now why would I do that?

BILL. Because my publisher sent you a copy of the book.

HAROLD. Yes. The book.

*(***HAROLD** *picks up a thick manuscript, which lies upon a nearby table.)*

HAROLD. "Karla, Oh Boy! The Secret Life of Karla Daven, by Bill Lauder." Your revisionist testament that my wife was not an innocent girl corrupted by Hollywood, but rather – a shameless whore who self-destructed.

(He throws the manuscript back down on the table with a slam.)

HAROLD. Now why on Earth would I let a little thing like that bring me to violence?

BILL. *(after letting the above register)* Mr. Bachman, can I be straight with you?

HAROLD. Of course, Bill.

BILL. Well, I'm just barely getting over the shock of your call and driver and seeing that it really is Karlaboy I've been driven to. I mean, it's all a bit overwhelming.

HAROLD. That's very flattering.

BILL. Flattery aside, I'd really appreciate it if you could be straight with me.

HAROLD. You want me to be straight? Stop referring to this goddamn mausoleum as "Karlaboy." *(mimicking him cruelly)* "I've never been to *Karlaboy*" – "I can't believe I'm really in *Karlaboy*."

BILL. Fine, fine, sorry. I didn't know.

HAROLD. Well now you do.

*(***HAROLD** *rises and leans against the fireplace, upon which sits a single Academy Award®.)*

HAROLD. Time's a' wastin', Bill, so I'll get right to the point: It is now one-forty a.m. Unless we come to terms, I will be dead by three-fifteen.

BILL. That line didn't play any better an hour ago on the phone.

HAROLD. Given the caliber of your own writing, I thought you'd enjoy it.

BILL. Another dig, right? Just keeping score.

HAROLD. Listen to me clearly: unless you instruct your publishers to keep those delivery trucks in their garages, Karla is going to walk down those stairs at three-fifteen a.m. and shoot me through the forehead.

*(***BILL** *looks at* **HAROLD***, then at the stairs, then back at* **HAROLD***.)*

BILL. Karla Daven?

HAROLD. Her ghost if you want to get technical.

*(***BILL** *doesn't know whether to laugh or run for the door. He chooses neither.)*

BILL. Karla Daven's ghost…is going to show up tonight?

HAROLD. Am I going to have to keep repeating things to you all night? Yes. Her ghost is not only going to show up tonight, but has shown up yearly since her death on Oscar Eve, 1953.

BILL. Here?

HAROLD. Yes – *here.* Where the hell else would it be?

*(***HAROLD** *looks up to the darkened staircase.)*

HAROLD. She just stands up there and stares at me. Like the first time…

Scene Three

(It is 1954. **YOUNG HAROLD** *is twenty-nine and every bit the man he is today. Only younger.)*

(His eyes are fixed on the top of the stairs.)

*(***KARLA'S GHOST** *is standing there. Nothing but darkness behind her. Wordless. Expressionless. Her gaze locked on the trembling* **HAROLD***.)*

YOUNG HAROLD. K - K - Karla?

(She says nothing.)

YOUNG HAROLD. What do you want?

(Again, no reply. No change of expression.)

YOUNG HAROLD. Answer me!

Scene Four

(Karlaboy, The Present. **HAROLD** *still has his eyes fixed on the top of the stairs.)*

BILL. Did she?

HAROLD. Not a word. Not then and not since. She stood there until six-twenty-two a.m. – how 'bout that?

BILL. How 'bout what?

HAROLD. Some biographer. That's when they dragged her carcass out of here. Six-twenty-two on the morning of the Oscars. She died at three-fifteen, they hauled her out at six-twenty-two.

BILL. Uh-huh. *(a pause)* So you just sort of…"figure" she wants to kill you tonight?

HAROLD. Oh, no, no, no. She told me she's going to kill me.

BILL. I thought she never said a word?

HAROLD. She never did, until your goddamned book showed its face here!

*(***HAROLD** *picks up the manuscript and flips to the last page.)*

HAROLD. After putting it off as long as I could, I decided to read your abomination yesterday.

Scene Five

(Karlaboy, Yesterday. **HAROLD** *reads aloud:)*

HAROLD. "Harold was absent from her flower-filled funeral. It has always been romantically believed that Harold

stayed away out of unbearable grief. But in harsh reality, he stayed away because eulogies are a time for truth, and Harold couldn't stand to tell the world the truth about Karla, the wife he loved and nurtured who paid him back only with heartache. A woman who took from her husband and the world until there was no more for her to claim. And so, finally, she took something from herself. Her life."

KARLA'S GHOST. That book is a lie.

(A startled **HAROLD** *looks to the top of the stairs)*

HAROLD. It'll be on the shelves in two days.

KARLA'S GHOST. You will die if the first copy touches the first shelf.

HAROLD. There's nothing I can do!

KARLA'S GHOST. You'll think of something.

HAROLD. It's out of my control!

KARLA'S GHOST. Then you will die.

Scene Six

(Karlaboy, The Present. **HAROLD** *tosses the book back on the lamp table and cozies into his chair, taking a silver cigarette case from the drawer as he speaks.)*

HAROLD. So you see, we really have no choice in the matter. You'll just have to call up your publishers, tell them there are too many embarrassing errors, and call the whole thing off.

(Without missing a beat, **HAROLD** *holds out the cigarette case.)*

HAROLD. Cigarette?

*(***BILL** *does not respond to the offer.)*

BILL. Mr. Bachman, do I look like an idiot to you?

*(***HAROLD** *leans in, studying* **BILL***'s face.)*

HAROLD. Just a bit. Around the eyes.

BILL. *(ignoring the dig)* This book has been in the works for three years. I've tried to meet with you for two of them, and you've had the final galleys for six weeks. Do you actually think you can just send over a limo, offer me a drink, and casually tell me that unless I get my publishers to cancel a multi-million dollar operation that's gonna start in six hours, a ghost is gonna kill you?

HAROLD. Why else would I have waited this long?!

BILL. But why kill you? I wrote the book.

HAROLD. And I was here the night she killed herself.

*(***BILL** *takes pause, realizing he's treading on sensitive ground.)*

BILL. Karla Daven took her own life. Her suicide note made it clear she blamed only herself. I mean, Mr. Bachman, if she really has been haunting you all these years, I don't see why.

HAROLD. Neither do I! Regardless, she's furious about the lies you've written and unless this book is stopped, she will kill me tonight at 3:15 on the dot.

BILL. You're still not gonna let up on this ghost thing?

HAROLD. This Ghost Thing is the goddamned truth!

BILL. Well, I'm a writer, Mr. Bachman, not a medium.

HAROLD. A medium won't work. I've tried three already.

(A moment as **BILL** *reacts to this surprising statement. Eager to hear more.)*

BILL. Really?

HAROLD. *(with a nod)* Oh yes. The first time was in '56, that was after she had appeared for two consecutive years.

Scene Seven

(Karlaboy, 1956. Young **HAROLD** *is sitting on the floor along with* **OLGA**, *a sixty-year-old medium, and her* **TWO PARTNERS**. *The foursome is sitting cross-legged, holding hands.)*

HAROLD. It was obvious that she intended to create a routine, so I wanted someone here to deal with her on her third performance.

*(***OLGA** *speaks, her eyes opened but dazed, entranced.)*

OLGA. Karla…Karla…Why are you not at rest?…Why are you not at peace?…Speak to us…Show us your sorrow…Show us your sorrow and leave this place…

*(***KARLA'S GHOST** *appears at the top of the stairs.)*

YOUNG HAROLD. There she is! *(He turns to one of* **OLGA***'s partners.)* Do you see her? At the top of the stairs!

PARTNER #1. Please, Mr. Bachman. You must let Olga continue in silence.

OLGA. What do you want, Karla?…What do you want?

*(***KARLA'S GHOST** *begins to descend the stairs.* **HAROLD** *is frightened. He trembles, but tries not to break the link of hands.)*

OLGA. What do you want?…How can we help you?…

*(***KARLA** *is now at the foot of the stairs. She is approaching* **HAROLD**. *He is intensely frightened.)*

OLGA. Show us what you want, Karla…

*(***KARLA** *reaches her hand out towards* **HAROLD**. *He can stand it no longer and leaps away.)*

*(***KARLA** *continues reaching forward and grabs – The Sports section of the newspaper from a pile nearby.)*

(She sits down at the foot of the stairs and begins to read the paper.)

(Young **HAROLD** *stares down at her in disbelief.)*

Scene Eight

(Karlaboy, the Present)

HAROLD. She sat there on that step and read the goddamned Sports Page until six-twenty-two in the morning. Then she disappeared.

BILL. And the others?

HAROLD. No one saw a thing. They thought I was a raving lunatic. She sat there laughing at me. The other two séances went more or less the same way.

BILL. Okay. If you can't evict Karla, why don't you just get the hell out.

*(***HAROLD** *responds as if this is the strangest question he's ever been asked.)*

HAROLD. Out? Out of here? Karla doesn't haunt these walls, she haunts me.

BILL. How can you be so sure?

HAROLD. In 1972, that phone actually rang –

(A 1970s **SUPER MOGUL** *appears, wrapped in a plush robe and talking on his phone. Think Bob Evans or any of the "Easy Riders, Raging Bulls" crowd. He could be smoking a joint.)*

SUPER MOGUL. Isn't there any way I can get you to come? I mean, it's The Oscars, man.

HAROLD. *(addressing the mogul)* How did you get this number?

SUPER MOGUL. Don't be uptight – I get everybody's number. Whataya say? Come on – for The Oscars.

HAROLD. I don't go to Oscar Parties.

SUPER MOGUL. People will fucking flip. And it'll be good for you. Show everyone you're not a ghost.

HAROLD. You know, in my day, no one of importance had Oscar Parties.

SUPER MOGUL. *(concerned)* They didn't?

HAROLD. No. They had "Night Before" Parties.

SUPER MOGUL. *(liking the sound of this)* Night Before?

HAROLD. Oh yes. Very chic. Shows you're above it all, completely unimpressed by the establishment. *(turning to* **BILL***)* So the imbecile held one.

(exit **SUPER MOGUL***)*

HAROLD. I, of course, was there solely for the purpose of my experiment.

BILL. And?

HAROLD. She was there. She came to this idiot's pathetically unimaginative bash…just to show me she could.

BILL. Sorry to be so blunt, Mr. Bachman, but this is really a bit…difficult, do you know what I'm saying? I mean, this is really kind of, uhm…difficult. I mean, you call me up at midnight, shouting "We must talk!" into my ear, and now I find myself listening to stories about a ghost reading the sports page and you getting shot at three-fifteen. I mean, if I understand you correctly, this is no game. You're really asking me to believe all this.

HAROLD. My life is counting on it.

BILL. I wrote the truth about Karla Daven. Hard and painful as it may be – it's the truth.

HAROLD. No it's not!

BILL. Then prove it to me.

HAROLD. How?

BILL. Show me where I was wrong. Give me the interview I've wanted for two years.

HAROLD. There's no time.

BILL. There's plenty of time. *(He looks at his watch.)* It's only two.

HAROLD. It's two?

BILL. A few minutes before.

*(***HAROLD** *picks up the rotary phone and holds it out to* **BILL** *pleadingly.)*

HAROLD. Please. Stop those trucks.

BILL. You'll have to tell me why. In detail.

HAROLD. I'm a private man, Bill. I made four films in my life and fewer friends. The whole publicity game was the studio's doing.

*(***BILL** *picks up his briefcase and coat.)*

BILL. Look, Mr. Bachman, I've heard you out. I've given you my offer, which is very reasonable. I mean, given what hell Karla put you through, I obviously have a lot of sympathy for you. But if you won't go into the details, I'm gonna have to say goodbye right now. You can call my publishers and hash it out with them in the morning.

HAROLD. All right, goddamn you! Sit back down.

(Having gotten what he wants, **BILL** *sits.)*

HAROLD. Fire away.

BILL. Not me, Mr. Bachman. You. You read the book – tell me where I was wrong.

HAROLD. Everywhere! Take the way you claim we met. I mean, the way you tell it, she aggressively latched on to me at an Oscar party, offering sexual favors for a role in my next film. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Scene Nine

*(***GUESTS** *suddenly fill the room as we are transported to a late night Oscar Party, 1950.)*

(Young **HAROLD** *is sitting on the sidelines, trying to have a moment with his martini.)*

HAROLD. It's true that I met Karla at an Oscar party the night I lost my first nomination. The loss meant nothing to me really. I was indifferent to the picture and the awards in general…

*(***KARLA** *enters, vivacious as ever in a stunning dress, is bumped by someone and lands on the arm of* **HAROLD***'s chair, nearly spilling his drink.)*

KARLA. Oh, excuse me.

YOUNG HAROLD. *(indifferent)* That's all right.

*(***KARLA** *doesn't rise. She's interested.)*

KARLA. How do you do, Mr. Bachman?

*(***HAROLD** *gives in reluctantly and shakes her hand.)*

YOUNG HAROLD. Fine, thank you.

KARLA. I'm Karla Daven and I loved your movie.

HAROLD. Thank you.

KARLA. I really mean it. I'll tell you the truth – I liked it a lot more than the picture that won.

(He really doesn't want to be reminded, but…)

YOUNG HAROLD. Thank you.

KARLA. I mean, all that crap about it being so much more substantial than your movie. You know, sometimes you just want fluff, and as long as it's good fluff – what's wrong with that?

YOUNG HAROLD. Yes…my film was absolutely meaningless, don't you think?

KARLA. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you –

YOUNG HAROLD. Offend me? Why no, Miss Whatever-your-name-is.

KARLA. It's Karla. And I happened to see you sitting here like someone who can't speak the language so I came over to help you lighten up.

YOUNG HAROLD. As I recall, you were bumped into my lap by a rather rude character actor.

KARLA. Well, I was going to come over here eventually, but –

YOUNG HAROLD. But what? Hadn't finished with the Winner's Circle? A few more laps to "accidentally" fall on prior to mine?

KARLA. You know, I should slap your face for that.

YOUNG HAROLD. Please do – this party is putting me to sleep.

KARLA. No thanks. I only slap winners. Nighty night.

(She rises, about to walk away. **HAROLD** *is impressed by her retort.)*

YOUNG HAROLD. Very nice. Would you like to take a real seat and have a real conversation?

*(**KARLA**, now a few feet away, with her back to **HAROLD**, is getting the "come hither" look by a **HANDSOME MAN**, holding an Oscar statuette.)*

*(She smiles at the man and then turns her back to him, returning to **HAROLD**.)*

KARLA. You're very strange, Harold.

YOUNG HAROLD. I'm aware of that. What is it you do, Miss Daven?

KARLA. I'm a model. I just did a screen test for the studio you're at. Rumor has it they liked it.

YOUNG HAROLD. Any particular part?

KARLA. No. They just wanted to see if I'm usable.

YOUNG HAROLD. Usable…

KARLA. "Is Karla Daven the latest fashion in cheesecake?"

YOUNG HAROLD. You're not as green as they usually come. A lot less than I was.

KARLA. But now you're wise, huh? All cynical and hardened at – how old are you anyway?

YOUNG HAROLD. I'm in that awkward age – too young for respect and too old for my mother's tit…well, almost.

KARLA. You know, I have a tough time matching-up this smart-ass with the guy who made "The Beverly Hills Affair." I mean, that picture was such a –

YOUNG HAROLD. "A frothy romantic frolic," L.A. Times. Yes, well, life doesn't always imitate art. At least that one didn't, thank God.

KARLA. So you got one that does? You know – the old "script in the drawer"?

YOUNG HAROLD. I do.

KARLA. Can I read it?

YOUNG HAROLD. It's not ready to leave my drawer.

KARLA. Then bring the girl to the script.

YOUNG HAROLD. I'll think about it. When can you come by?

KARLA. This party's a bust. How about now?

YOUNG HAROLD. Now? Be the first to leave the town's biggest Oscar bash? Together no less?! Karla, I'm beginning to like you more and more.

Scene Ten

(Harold's Pre-Karlaboy bungalow. He is fishing through a stack of scripts and paper for a copy of the script.)

YOUNG HAROLD. *(calling)* I'll be out in a minute.

(As he continues the search, he is unaware that **KARLA** *has entered and is moving closer. He finds the script and calls out:)*

YOUNG HAROLD. Here it – *(he turns and sees* **KARLA**, *lowering his voice)* …is.

(She takes the script, but keeps her eyes on **HAROLD**.*)*

KARLA. Thank you, Harold.

(She kisses **HAROLD** *on the lips. He seems a bit embarrassed, but silent. She continues kissing him.)*

YOUNG HAROLD. Karla?

KARLA. *(still kissing)* Yes…

YOUNG HAROLD. Stop Karla.

KARLA. *(continuing)* Yeah…

YOUNG HAROLD. No. I mean really stop.

*(***KARLA** *stops.)*

KARLA. What's the matter?

YOUNG HAROLD. I don't…it doesn't do anything for me.

KARLA. What…what do you mean?

(He is amused at her confusion.)

YOUNG HAROLD. What do you think I mean?

KARLA. Are you saying that you're…well, I mean… Are you queer?

YOUNG HAROLD. What if I said yes?

KARLA. I'd be shocked.

YOUNG HAROLD. Why?

KARLA. Well, you're very sexy, Harold.

YOUNG HAROLD. *(agreeing)* I am.

KARLA. "Am" what? Queer or sexy?

YOUNG HAROLD. I'd like to think both.

KARLA. So I don't do anything for you?

YOUNG HAROLD. Like the studio report indicates, you are indeed "one helluva tomato" – but still, I remain unaffected.

KARLA. So, you did know who I was tonight.

YOUNG HAROLD. Well…yes.

KARLA. "Miss Whatever-your-name-is." Your loss, Harry.

YOUNG HAROLD. Not entirely. I really want you to read this. There's a part in here you'd be ideal for.

KARLA. That's a line.

YOUNG HAROLD. I already told you, I'm not after your tomatoes. Although they are magnificent.

KARLA. Thanks…I guess.

(She begins flipping through the script.)

KARLA. What's it about?

YOUNG HAROLD. Well, the kinks haven't been worked out yet, but essentially, it's about a man fighting to maintain his integrity in the face of incredible opposing forces. Your role would be the woman by his side who thrives on his strength and commitment.

KARLA. Sort of like "The Fountainhead"?

YOUNG HAROLD. No, not quite that extreme.

*(***KARLA** *impulsively takes* **HAROLD** *and kisses him with everything she's got. As they come out of it –)*

KARLA. Nothing, huh?

*(***HAROLD** *shrugs.)*

KARLA. Damn.

(She picks up the script and taps **HAROLD** *in the chest with it.)*

KARLA. I'll read it and get back to ya.

YOUNG HAROLD. "I'll read it and get back to ya"? An Oscar-nominated director offers you a script that you didn't have to sleep with him for – something new young things on the lot wait their whole life for – and you say, "I'll read it and get back to ya"? *(a beat)* What brought a breath of clean air like you into this armpit of the Western World?

KARLA. Look, I gave it a shot 'cause I wanted to try it. Now that I tried it, I like it. So I'll keep at it until they don't want me anymore. But I mean I never expected this to go anywhere.

YOUNG HAROLD. The hell with that. I want and demand to go everywhere. None of the concessions I've made – this fluff I've been doing – is good enough. I refuse to be short-changed.

KARLA. Yeah, but sometimes you only realize you've been stiffed after you walk out of the store.

YOUNG HAROLD. I never walk out without counting my change. And I suggest you don't either, if you know what's good for you.

Scene Eleven

(Karlaboy, The Present)

HAROLD. Word got out about Karla's screen test and everyone wanted her. But I had her. The studio was not so keen about using my "script in the drawer" as her first picture. They decided for a more safe, commercial endeavor. So, we did "Girl in the Park" instead – a wonderfully weightless smash hit. *(a pause)* But that's the way we met, not the sordid calculated way you imagined. Contemptible little assumptions because we left together and I offered her a part in my film.

*(***BILL** *has no response.)*

HAROLD. So? What do you have to say to that?

BILL. Well, I'd heard all the stories about you…"experimenting a little in your youth." Practically everyone seemed to back then. But all my research indicates that your bisexual lifestyle stopped when you got involved with Karla.

HAROLD. I see. For lack of evidence to the contrary, you decided that I'd "gone straight." What sort of "research" did you do? Dust all the male rectums in Hollywood for my penis prints?

BILL. Karla married you knowing this? I mean, did you continue with that lifestyle during your marriage?

HAROLD. It would put an awful wrench in your thesis, wouldn't it? "The devoted husband waiting for his heartless, whoring wife to come home."

BILL. If you're telling the truth.

HAROLD. I AM NOT LYING!

BILL. All right, all right, Jesus, calm down.

(The two men calm for a moment.)

BILL. I still don't understand how it's remained such a secret. I mean, so tight that, that –

HAROLD. That even a shameless "over-turner of rocks" like you didn't find out.

*(***BILL** *chooses not to respond to this insult.)*

HAROLD. I took a hiatus. No, more like a forced retirement.

Scene Twelve

(The Office of the **STUDIO BOSS**. *He is flanked by* **TWO YES MEN**. **YOUNG HAROLD** *is before them. The set-up more than smacks of an interrogation.)*

STUDIO BOSS. How far are you planning to go with this queer thing, Harold?

YOUNG HAROLD. How far?

STUDIO BOSS. Yes. How far?

YOUNG HAROLD. I don't know. *(flirting)* How far would you like me to go?

STUDIO BOSS. Harold, you're good. Our very own "Boy Wonder" Bachman.

YOUNG HAROLD. For God's sake – I told you how much I hate that name.

STUDIO BOSS. And God has heard you, but He still likes it on the press releases.

(The **STUDIO BOSS** *lifts a script off the table.)*

STUDIO BOSS. Now. This script of yours. I don't like it. None of us do. It doesn't make any sense.

YES MAN #1. No sense at all.

STUDIO BOSS. It needs a lot of work.

YES MAN #2. A lot of work.

YOUNG HAROLD. What are you getting at?

STUDIO BOSS. We're not making the picture.

YOUNG HAROLD. But you agreed that after "Girl in the Park" –

STUDIO BOSS. It's depressing. And in the end, the two fruity guys become partners and dump the girl.

YOUNG HAROLD. They're friends, for Christ's sake! It's a film about the integrity that –

STUDIO BOSS. Even Hope and Crosby don't dump the girl, Harold, and they are great friends.

YES MAN #1. Great friends.

STUDIO BOSS. You're gonna do this one instead.

*(***HAROLD** *is handed a script by one of the* **YES MEN**. *A much thinner script than his own personal epic. The title:)*

YOUNG HAROLD. "Love Swing"?!?

*(***HAROLD** *throws it back at the* **YES MEN**.*)*

I won't do another one of these things!

STUDIO BOSS. You do them very well, Harold. If "Beverly Hills Affair" and "Girl in the Park" are any indication, the audience loves paying to see you do it. You will continue to make light –

YOUNG HAROLD. Fluffy romantic shit! I won't do it!

STUDIO BOSS. Listen, Harold, your contract is written in harder stone than the cement at Grauman's Chinese. I'm sure you also remember the moral's clause as well as our control over publicity. *(a pause)* This queer thing would be very negative for the studio and your career as a director of…how did he put it?

(Both **YES MEN** *rush to answer first.)*

BOTH YES MEN. Fluffy romantic shit.

STUDIO BOSS. Yes. Therefore, if you would rather be assigned dental hygiene films in New Jersey, I recommend that any mention of this queer thing not leave this room. Do we understand each other, Harold?

Scene Thirteen

(Karlaboy, the Present. **HAROLD** *is mixing himself a drink.)*

HAROLD. All right, perhaps my memory tends to overdramatize the past. But it was something like that and they did threaten me.

BILL. I read through all the studio memos relating to you and Karla. There was no mention of this topic.

HAROLD. Why should there be? I was married to the sexiest woman in Hollywood.

BILL. But what about the press? I've been through every fan magazine and society column. Again, no mention.

HAROLD. Well, Bill, if I was as deluded as most people in this town, I'd tell you that the press is sensitive towards homosexuals. That their liberal hearts "care" enough to respect their privacy. Unfortunately that's a crock

of dog shit. The silence of the press is motivated completely out of self-interest. If the press reported about every gay – eighty goddamned percent of the Hollywood community, by my estimates – Mr. and Mrs. Front Porch would keel over and never buy another entertainment magazine or newspaper again. You see, Bill, it's bad for the news business to make gay newsworthy. They will accept adultery and drug abuse from their idols, but they will not allow them to turn on them sexually. It's the biggest slap in the face imaginable. It's just not done…at least not while they're alive. *(a beat)* But why am I telling you this? You're the sort of writer who's well aware that Heterosexuality Sells Movie Tickets. Homosexuality Sells Posthumous Biographies.

BILL. You know who buys respectable, analytical film biographies? Movie Geeks. You know who buys biographies that name each and every one of their lovers? The same movie geeks plus everyone else. I didn't create the phenomenon.

HAROLD. No. You just take advantage of it but with a carefully placed tear in your eye for the human condition.

BILL. Oh I see. You've just gone ahead and put me down in that sewer where you put everyone else, huh?

HAROLD. Everyone. Except Karla.

BILL. Don't you think I have the same respect for Karla?

HAROLD. Respect?!?

*(***HAROLD** *suddenly begins to rifle through a bureau while* **BILL** *continues –)*

BILL. Yes. Respect. I loved Karla. I researched her life as a labor of that love.

*(***HAROLD** *pulls an eight-by-ten photo out of the bureau. Holds it right up to* **BILL***'s face. NOTE: We only see the photo from the rear.)*

HAROLD. And you express that love by printing this in your book?! Karla on the coroner's slab?! Her head blown wide open?!

BILL. Karla Daven's suicide has been glamorized and romanticized out of all proportion. I had to put that picture in there to smack people in the face with the pathetic grainy ugliness of her death.

HAROLD. How very philanthropic of you, Bill. I wish I could have been there when this photograph came in contact with your sweaty fingertips. I wish I could have seen that great thin-lipped, ear-to-ear smile slither across your face. I'm sure it was filled with images of "your great contribution to humanity." Or was it "humanity's contribution to your bank account"?

BILL. Very nice, Mr. Bachman. Talk like that is sure going to win me over at the grand old hour of two-twenty.

HAROLD. Two-twenty?! Bill, I need an answer! She is going to kill me tonight!

BILL. Your sweet innocent Karla Daven is planning a cold-blooded murder. Strangely inconsistent, wouldn't you say?

HAROLD. You've driven her to it! I'm telling you, she was an innocent when she came to this town! She didn't even know how to sign her own autograph, for Christ's sake!

Scene Fourteen

(Harold's Pre-Karlaboy bungalow, 1951. **KARLA** *is sitting on the floor with a stack of eight-by-ten glossies strewn before her. She signs her name to one and holds it up to* **YOUNG HAROLD**.*)*

KARLA. How about this?

YOUNG HAROLD. Awful. You sign like some little girl in grammar school penmanship class. It has to have flair, uniqueness, beauty. A fan sits by the mailbox for weeks waiting for this to arrive. Waiting for something sent down to them from that high pedestal they've built for you. What comes out of that envelope cannot disappoint. Give me one.

*(**KARLA** hands **HAROLD** a photo. He pauses a moment, looks at the photo, the pen in his hand. He signs it and hands it back to **KARLA**.)*

KARLA. That's great! Let me practice.

*(**KARLA** studies **HAROLD**'s autograph and takes a crack at it.)*

KARLA. How' this?

YOUNG HAROLD. Close. Keep trying. Give me some. I can help.

*(**KARLA** happily hands him a stack of photos.)*

YOUNG HAROLD. What are you signing?

KARLA. "Best wishes, Karla Daven"

YOUNG HAROLD. Good God No! "Love and Kisses, Karla Daven" Do you understand? From here on in.

KARLA. Yes sir.

*(They each sign for a moment or two. **KARLA** seems to have something to talk about, but is formulating the words in her head.)*

KARLA. Harold, have you ever been in love?

YOUNG HAROLD. The things that come out of your mouth.

KARLA. Have you?

YOUNG HAROLD. No.

KARLA. Never? Not even close?

YOUNG HAROLD. I've been infatuated. I've been in lust. I've been an idiot. But, no, I've never been in love. Have you? What is it exactly?

KARLA. Don't ask me. The last time I was really in love for sure, I was still wearing braces. *(a beat)* I just…well, I'm wondering, if you've never been in love with anyone, how do you know you're…well, you know.

YOUNG HAROLD. Am I really your first contact with a being from outer space?

*(**KARLA** glares at him. Clearly, she won't let him avoid answering.)*

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