

NOTES FROM HELL'S KITCHEN

BY

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WGA registered

NOTES FROM HELL'S KITCHEN, ACT I

INT. JOHANNA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A man with a beard (BARNEY) and woman sit on the couch in the dark, in a spacious modern condo illuminated only by a TV screen. The woman channel surfs using the remote. Lots of static.

ACTOR IN BLACK AND WHITE MOVIE (V.O.)
. . . Darling. The minute I get out
of prison . . .

SPORTS COMMENTATOR (V.O.)
. . . Sox had a solid lead, but
gave it up big time to the . . .

WEATHER WOMAN (V.O.)
. . . Hurricane may go out to sea,
or may whip through Cape Cod . . .

He hands her a bowl of popcorn. She waves it away, clicks off the TV, and throws the remote onto the couch.

JOHANNA
Guess there's nothing on.

BARNEY
I didn't come over to watch TV
anyway.

JOHANNA
Did you ever notice how we have all
these new gadgets, but TV is
basically the same as always?

BARNEY
No.

He sweeps her hair from her face and begins kissing her cheeks, then her neck. She is deep in thought.

JOHANNA
Don't. You should go. I have to get
up early.

BARNEY, looking dejected, hoists himself up and leaves.

INT. CELESTIAL PUBLISHER/FOYER - DAY

Advertising posters for some of the company's most successful shows/products are displayed on the walls. Media awards

(plaques, statuettes) are displayed on built-in shelves. Executives, mostly men, meet around a large, high-gloss table.

DR. JOHANNA LUCKY, a cute, plump, flamboyant woman, pushing forty in a charcoal business suit is speaking to SUITS. Her expression is hopeful.

SUITS check their e-mail messages on cell phones or stare out the window while Johanna gives her PowerPoint presentation.

CLINTON FRASER, every inch the captain of industry, Brahmin bearing, Boston accent, leans back and jingles his pocket change.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

What makes "Thrill TV" exciting, what will distinguish it in the marketplace . . .

CLINTON

Errr. How much longer is this going to take? I've got a 1:00 appointment with my cardiologist.

Johanna telegraphs an exasperated glance to LAQUITA JAMES, African American, right-hand-woman and fashionista. Laquita shoots back a look of annoyance at Clinton and the Suits.

JOHANNA

(high-pitched, nervous voice)

Clinton, please hear me out. "Thrill TV" will completely revolutionize the way we watch TV. Picture it. Tiny sensors instantly sense your mood and. . .

CLINTON

But. . .

JOHANNA

Wait. The sensors. They ultimately deliver whatever it is you most desire--comedy, drama, soothing music!

SUIT #1

Impossible. With all due respect.

SUIT #2

When did you become so out there? Have you been getting messages from aliens?

Johanna'S POV - SUITS

Each evinces emptiness and lack of any inner life.

RETURN TO SCENE

NIGEL REID strides into the boardroom. He is a good-looking, British journalist in a bespoke suit.

INSERT - POWERPOINT SLIDE

"Cross-Section of Human Brain" illustrated with a diagram from a medical textbook.

RETURN TO SCENE

Johanna aims a laser pointer at the slide.

JOHANNA

But it's based on research. Ever heard of a dopamine rush? It takes place in the insular cortex of the brain--See, you place your thumb here to turn on "Thrill TV"--

CLINTON

Trust me. We'd like to hear more but. . . Another time. Wouldn't you agree, Nigel?

Nigel squints at the slide and picks up on the vibe in the room. He replies in a rich baritone, with a British accent.

NIGEL

Has anyone focus tested "Thrill TV"? Probably not, since it can't possibly work. Monitor your emotions? Elevate your mood? It's not insanely great. It's insane.

CLINTON

Precisely!

Johanna hyperventilates.

JOHANNA

(voice pitched even higher)

You're all wrong. I'm working with someone at the MIT Media Lab. We think it can be created.

Nigel holds up his cell phone.

NIGEL

That's the beauty of my idea.
Simple. Straightforward. Just tap
your cellphone to stream soccer
games from anywhere in the world.
Anytime.

SUIT 1

Right. Let's not further confuse
the media-saturated public.

JOHANNA

God, when did we get to be so
freakin' boring around here? So . .
. risk averse?

LAQUITA

I vote that we schedule another
meeting to hear Johanna out.

Johanna, deflated, hastily gathers up her messy stack of
papers. The Suits file out, shaking their heads.

Clinton starts to leave then turns back.

CLINTON

It's not that your idea isn't
intriguing, Johanna. But it does
strain credulity.

Johanna keeps walking, brushes past Clinton, blinks back
tears.

INT. CELESTIAL PUBLISHER/JOHANNA'S OFFICE - DAY

Johanna's office is corporate-style with a bay window in a
renovated brownstone overlooking Boston Public Garden. Built-
in shelves are crammed with books and two Mega-Media
Entertainment (MME) statuettes.

Her framed Ph.D. in Media Studies hangs on the wall.

Johanna motions for Laquita to come in, then closes her
office door. Johanna fumes, pacing back and forth.

JOHANNA

Christ! Remember when Clinton used
to act like I walked on water. Now
it's Nigel this and Nigel that--

LAQUITA

Right. Nigel knows everything about George Harrison. Even bought two of his ukuleles.

JOHANNA

Nigel actually keeps appointments with his personal trainer.

LAQUITA

Clinton thinks he walks on water. But Nigel's such a phoney. It's like he's running for office.

Johanna opens a window. Then she grabs a pack of cigarettes from her desk draw. She offers one to Laquita, who accepts. Johanna lights both cigarettes. They take a few deep drags.

JOHANNA

I felt invisible in there. Did you see how they ignored my idea and fawned over Nigel?

LAQUITA

Yeah. I thought this type of sexist behavior was "so over." So sixties.

Johanna laughs bitterly.

JOHANNA

It's so not over. Don't believe it.

LAQUITA

Did you hear the latest gossip about Clinton?

JOHANNA

No. What?

LAQUITA

His heart's in danger. Since his bypass. His doctor came down hard on him on to quit smoking. Wants him to give up drinking too.

JOHANNA

Poor guy. I feel for him. But still!

WAGNER JONES, Johanna's assistant, 30-ish punk rocker with swagger and sweet smile, cracks open the door of Johanna's office and clears his throat conspicuously.

WAGNER

Ahem. Ladies. Thought I'd remind you. Friday night? The awards ceremony. The Mega-Media Entertainment Award. Or should we say the MME?

LAQUITA

Right! That's how you'll get back at them, Johanna. You're bound to win in the innovation category.

Johanna puffs herself back up.

JOHANNA

(trance-like)

Nigel could win a MME in the Best New TV Show category, but who needs a show about angels you can't see that you keep bumping into for God's sake?

LAQUITA

You have a killer dress to wear. Don't forget that. Let's go get facials tomorrow. My treat.

JOHANNA

That's so sweet, Laquita. But I have a date with GI Jane at a Pilates class.

Johanna's cellphone rings.

INT. "BOSTON GLOBE"/BARNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

BARNEY MURPHY, 40's, boyishly disheveled, always up for a good joke.

Barney sits with his feet up on his desk. He works in an old-fashioned newspaper office with venetian blinds and 1970's furniture. Celtics swag clutters surfaces.

JOHANNA

(into phone)

Hey Barney.

INTERCUT AS APPROPRIATE WITH BARNEY'S OFFICE.

BARNEY

(into phone)

Hey babe. Bad news. I might not be able to make your awards ceremony.

(MORE)

BARNEY (CONT'D)

I may need to go to Buffalo. Of all
the gastronomic hinterlands.

JOHANNA

(into phone)

You're kidding me. I need you! Even
though my submission is like ten
ideas ago, I have a good shot.

BARNEY

(into phone)

Let me try to get out of it. I'll
let you know.

RETURN TO SCENE

Johanna hangs up and turns to Laquita.

JOHANNA

Barney may not be George Clooney
but he makes me laugh. And he has a
great bullshit detector. Wish I
could say the same.

LAQUITA

Just what we could use in this
business.

INT. TAXI IN DOWNTOWN BOSTON - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Johanna is in the back seat, shawl on her lap. She fiddles
with a shiny barrette that's holding back her bangs. Her
cellphone rings.

INSERT - TEXT MESSAGE SCREEN ON CELLPHONE

"Babe, at Logan. Can't make it. Sorry. Your smokin' hot
lover, B"

RETURN TO SCENE

Johanna, looking disappointed, adjusts her boobs for maximum
cleavage in her dress. She looks at her watch and gasps.

JOHANNA

Let me out here, okay? Running
late.

Johanna hands the driver a \$20 dollar bill, exits the taxi,
and begins walking, teetering in her spike heels.

She sees an arty HOMELESS WOMAN on the curb, shivering, who holds up a sign that reads "hungry." Johanna keeps walking, then spots a fast food restaurant across the street. She spins around, and runs across (the best she can in heels).

INT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Johanna orders dinner and coffee. She hastily pays and grabs the bag of food.

EXT. COPLEY SQUARE - NIGHT

Johanna walks over to the woman and hands her the bag.

JOHANNA

Thought you might like some chicken nuggets. With sauce on the side. Fries too.

HOMELESS WOMAN

(digging into meal)
Thanks. Wouldn't mind having your shoes.

Johanna pulls the sparkly barrette out of her hair, hands it to the woman. The woman turns it over in her hands, puts it in her hair, and cracks a smile.

JOHANNA

Looks good on you.

Johanna rushes off to her event.

INT. COPLEY HOTEL/BALLROOM - NIGHT

Formally attired local celebrities nibble on hors d'oeuvres as they work the room. The Awards Ceremony is in progress; The EMCEE performs on the stage.

Photographers and cameramen capture the scene as waiters pass around glasses of Champagne on silver trays.

Johanna, LAQUITA, WAGNER, and others from Celestial Publisher talk and laugh as they sip cocktails.

LAQUITA

(to Johanna)
You look amazing.

Johanna is suffocating in her too-tight dress and too-high heels.

JOHANNA

So do you. I must have put on a few pounds since I bought this dress. I had to get my next-door neighbor to zip me in.

She sucks in her stomach and lifts her chest.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

I can't eat a bite.

INT. BALLROOM/SOCIALIZING AREA - NIGHT

Nervously, Johanna works the room freely helping herself to a glass of champagne and wolfing down canapes all the while tugging at her dress.

Johanna glides over to the raw bar, douses several raw oysters with red cocktail sauce, and slurps them down.

Johanna approaches SUIT #2 while dabbing at splotches of cocktail sauce on her lips and chin.

JOHANNA

I love-hate these events. How 'bout you?

SUIT #1

(checking out a waitress)

I'm kinda neutral since I'm not up for an award. Wines are pretty decent, though. Good luck.

The lights dim. Johanna slides into her assigned place at the table.

EMCEE

It's time to announce the nominees in the Innovation category. . . Seeta Nair for the "Wireless Imaginary Friends" App. Mitch Marshall for the "Thursday Night is Beauty Makeover Party" DVD. Dennis Cox for "Pilates for People Who Hate to Exercise" DVD. And Johanna Lucky for the "Dopamine Rush Broadcasting" App. And the winner is. . .

A couple of beats while the Emcee tears open the envelope.

EMCEE (CONT'D)
Mitch Marshall for the "Thursday
Night Is Beauty Makeover Party"
DVD!

MITCH, a lifestyle guru type who looks more LA than Boston, rushes to the stage to collect his MME and make a speech. He drones on in the background.

Laquita and Wagner notice that Johanna's face is set in a frozen smile.

JOHANNA
I think I'm going to toss my
cookies.

WAGNER
C'mon. I'll drive you home.

JOHANNA
I'm gonna stick it out. I'll be
fine.

Several other awards are presented. Johanna tries to suppress a case of hiccups.

EMCEE
Now for the Award for the Best New
TV Show. The nominees are: Tracy
Mazurski for "Sin City Cincinnati."
Jonas Gray for "I'm So Over You."
Nigel Reed for "Angels Incognito."
And Barry Liebling for "Lovers and
Other Annoying People."

The crowd murmurs. A few people slap Nigel on the back encouragingly. Johanna bends forward to get a closer look at his date, GIGI HEPPLWHITE-JONES, who is impossibly young and tall. Gigi wears a filmy dress with a plunging neckline.

EMCEE (CONT'D)
And the winner is. . . (beat)

EMCEE (CONT'D)
Nigel Reed for "Angels Incognito"!

The room erupts into applause. Nigel sprints up to the stage to collect his award.

Clinton is on his feet clapping. His WIFE, MARGERY FRASIER, a preppy garden club type, casually hands Clinton's still-full cocktail glass to a waiter.

Johanna tries to smile but is too stunned. She stands up to get a better look and accidentally knocks over a few glasses. Champagne spills all over the table and floor.

Wagner and Laquita smile and applaud loudly. Johanna glares at them and they tone it down.

NIGEL

Wow! What an honor! I can't believe it!

Nigel waves the MME statuette in the air and exits the stage. A scrum of media types close in on him, taking pictures and vying for sound bites.

Nigel tries to catch Johanna's eye. She avoids his gaze.

Once out of the spotlight, Nigel and Gigi walk over to Johanna's table, holding hands. Nigel, beaming, has tucked the MME award under one arm. He bends down and gives Johanna a kiss on the cheek.

NIGEL (CONT'D)

(whispers to Johanna)

You should have won. I mean it.

Gigi scans the room to see if anyone is looking at her.

JOHANNA

Congratulations, Nigel. Your angels have served you well. Perhaps even pulled strings for you.

NIGEL

How 'bout a truce? To old friends?

JOHANNA

Whoa-ho! I'm not one of your 24-year-old airhead models, Nigel. You have a long way to go before we'll be ordering up a dozen white doves.

Nigel sighs, straightens up. Gigi gives Johanna the once-over and curls her lip.

Johanna'S POV - NIGEL'S CUFF LINKS

Nigel wears French cuffs with cufflinks, a small gold bull on one cuff, a small gold bear on the other.

RETURN TO SCENE

Gigi rushes over to Nigel, grabs his hand and draws him into the fray.

NIGEL

Just as long as I don't find a
horse's head in my bed tonight.
Let's have lunch next week.

Nigel looks at Johanna over his shoulder as he walks off with Gigi.

Johanna reaches for a chocolate-covered strawberry sitting on a tray on the middle of the table. She withdraws her hand, then goes for it. Her dress rips apart up the back.

Embarrassed, Johanna throws on her shawl and races toward the exit.

INT. JOHANNA'S CONDO/FOYER - NIGHT

A modern, sparsely furnished condo on Rowes Wharf, with huge abstract paintings on the walls. Johanna flips on the light and throws down her purse and keys. Her footsteps echo as she walks into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The light on the answering machine flashes. Johanna opens the fridge, feeds the cat, SATCHMO, then presses PLAY.

INTERCUT RECORDED MESSAGES AS APPROPRIATE WITH JOHANNA'S ACTIONS

Johanna walks down a hallway.

INT. JOHANNA'S CONDO/BATHROOM - NIGHT

Johanna fills the bathtub with water and adds bubble bath as she listens to her messages. She undresses, holding up her dress to inspect the damage.

MOTHER (V.O.)

(filtered)

Hello dearie. How'd it go tonight?
Your father and I are throwing a
little wine and cheese soiree on
Sunday. Maybe you and Barney can
come. As a couple.

Johanna stuffs her dress into a wastebasket.

BARNEY (V.O.)

(filtered)

Johanna! It's me! Here in Buffalo.
(MORE)

BARNEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
On a quest for authentic Buffalo wings. No luck. But hey! How'd it go tonight? Call me!

CLINTON (V.O.)
(filtered)
Johanna. Just a quick call for moral support. You should have won tonight. But maybe it's a sign that your thinking has become too, well, avant garde. Maybe you should work on Nigel's soccer on-demand project. Lend a hand.

INT. JOHANNA'S CONDO/BATHROOM - NIGHT

Johanna, seeking refuge in the bathtub, holds a cigarette in one hand and her cell phone in the other. A glass of Alka-Seltzer fizzes in the hanging soap dish. Satchmo sleeps in the sink opposite the tub.

JOHANNA
(to Satchmo)
Maybe I should call Nigel. Who cares if he's in bed with that scrawny model? Barney? Nah, he might figure out that I'm a little drunk. And he'll be so sad when I tell him I didn't win.

Johanna dries off her hand and picks up the phone.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Hi Mom. Were you asleep?

MOTHER (V.O.)
(filtered)
Nah. But it's 1:30! What's wrong?

MOTHER is sweet and comfortable. Not much has changed for her since her salad days in the 1970s.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Sorry. I just needed to hear your voice. I didn't win the MME tonight.

MOTHER (V.O.)
(filtered)
Oh no. I know how you've always dreamed of becoming a media diva.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
One of these days I am going to be
the media diva. Wait and see.

Johanna adorns herself with handfuls of bubbles.

MOTHER (V.O.)
(filtered)
Did Nigel win a MME? Mr. Hubris
himself?

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Yeah. But he probably deserved it.

Johanna uses her toes to turn on the hot water faucet.

MOTHER (V.O.)
(filtered)
Look, you'll win one next time. You
always were the most creative one
in the family.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Too bad I got drunk and burst out
of my too-little black dress.

MOTHER (V.O.)
(filtered)
Did you ever think of working in a
different field? Something less
cutthroat?

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Yeah. But I'd have to start at the
bottom. Claw my way up. I've got to
do whatever it takes to make a go
of this.

MOTHER (V.O.)
(filtered)
Lots of people have nice, sane
jobs. Like being a teller in a
bank. Or an English teacher.

Johanna gets out of the tub and wraps a towel around herself.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
I just long for more, Mom. I always
have.

MOTHER (V.O.)
(filtered)
You could just settle down. Like
your friends from high school.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Gotta go, Mom. G'night.

INT. CELESTIAL PUBLISHER/JOHANNA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Johanna hunches over her computer revising her "Thrill TV" proposal. Her office is littered with cardboard coffee cups and take-out containers. She is disheveled. Her eyes are at half-mast. Wagner enters.

WAGNER
Can I get you anything? Red Bull?
Green tea? Hemlock?

JOHANNA
What time is it?

WAGNER
8:15. P.M.

JOHANNA
Okay. Have a good night, doing
whatever it is you punk rockers do.
I'll be another hour. These damned
neurotransmitters are a bitch.

INT. CELESTIAL PUBLISHER/KITCHENETTE - DAY

Two of the Suits from the board help themselves to a cup of coffee from a communal pot. They look around to make sure no one is listening.

SUIT #1
Could you believe what just
happened, man? It's like she's on
Mars with that "Thrill TV" shit.

He eyes Johanna's office, looking territorial, as though he'd like to take it over.

SUIT #2
I know! As if. An MIT scientist.
Big fucking deal. I used to think
she was hot in an opera singer kind
of way. But now I think she's
fucking lost it.

SUIT #1

Yeah, the old man would agree with you. He couldn't shut her up fast enough. So racquetball tonight? Downtown?

SUIT #2

Yeah. See ya.

Johanna, who has been eavesdropping, flattens her back against the wall to hide from Suits #1 and #2. Her face betrays her anger and frustration.

INT. CELESTIAL PUBLISHER/CLINTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Johanna bustles into Clinton's office carrying a thick report. She projects energy and confidence.

JOHANNA

So here it is, Clinton. My vastly improved proposal for "Thrill TV."

Johanna places the report in front of Clinton. She flips through, pointing out particular sections.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Here's where I describe the behind-the-scenes technology for the thumb activation phenomenon. And here. How tiny sensors help determine whether watching a drama, cop show, or sitcom will give the viewer the greatest dopamine rush.

CLINTON

Yes, however. . .

Johanna pulls a special PDA out of the pocket of her suit jacket. It's glitchy. She has to keep pressing the same button to call up a screen.

JOHANNA

Check it out! This alpha version of "Thrill TV" shows how sensors monitor your mood while you watch the program. Look. (points to diagram) If your mood stays flat, or goes into a downward spiral, "Thrill TV" automatically shifts into another mode designed to elevate your mood.

CLINTON

Seems kind of-

JOHANNA

The sensors also understand thumbs-up and thumbs-down gestures. These thumb gestures will give us valuable data points for customizing the viewing experience. I have a few details to work out but. . .

CLINTON

Look, Johanna. I pride myself on being a visionary. But frankly it all sounds like poppycock!

JOHANNA

It can happen. Some start-up companies are already-

CLINTON

Enough, Johanna. I have an investors meeting in five minutes. I'm not looking for some Utopian idea. I'm looking for more down-to-earth ideas like Nigel's.

Johanna sucks in her stomach, pushes out her chest, and moves closer to Clinton.

JOHANNA

Clinton? Remember when we flew to Nantucket for lunch? Then stayed in that sweet little inn near the Harbor? And that bottle of Chateauneuf du Pape? And how-

CLINTON

(refusing to meet her gaze) Shhh. We're in the office. Decorum!

Clinton leads her to the door. Johanna moves in closer to Clinton.

JOHANNA

I miss you, Clinton. And I miss our intimate chats. Why don't I make dinner for you some night when Margery's at the beach house?

Johanna puts her arms around Clinton's neck. He removes them.

CLINTON
It's over, Johanna. Fini! Let's
stick to business.

The intercom buzzes. Clinton presses a button.

CLINTON (CONT'D)
(into speaker)
Coming, Georgina.

JOHANNA
I'm leaving. But if I were you I'd
take my idea more seriously. After
all, I could go somewhere else. I
met Steve Jobs once. Maybe I should
talk to him.

Clinton, sighs then listens while jingling change in his
pants pocket.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
And for Christ's sake stop jingling
your change when I'm talking to
you!

Johanna leaves, slamming the door behind her. Clinton sighs,
takes an antacid, admires his reflection in an office window
and exits.

INT. CELESTIAL PUBLISHER/JOHANNA'S OFFICE - DAY

Johanna works at her computer.

Wagner enters, places a mug of coffee on her desk, and hands
her design boards to initial.

JOHANNA
What's on for today?

WAGNER
The usual. You're schmoozing with a
few authors. Lunch at Stephanie's.
Then two hours of lock-down time
for you to work on "Thrill TV."

JOHANNA
Okay. Please get me Liz at "Vanity
Fair." I could use some good press
right now.

WAGNER
Oh, and Nigel stopped by. He wants
to have "a word."

JOHANNA
Yeah, okay. Whatever.

Wagner exits.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Hey, Liz. How are you doin'?

LIZ MCBRIDE is a 50-something publicist with dyed pink plumes in her platinum hair. Liz sits on a couch with two male colleagues in a slick office in Soho, NY.

LIZ
(into phone)
I'm frantic. What's going on up there in the northern provinces?

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Need to ask a favor. Any chance you could run a feature story about me? A woman making it in the hard-line, testosterone-fueled world of multimedia? How I worked my way up the food chain?

LIZ
(into phone)
Love to. But the timing's just off.

Liz rolls her eyes at her two colleagues and makes a "yak, yak" hand gesture.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
This is about my not having won the MME Award, right?

LIZ
(into phone)
Right. And even though I'd be willing to run with it, I'd never get it past the dragon lady upstairs.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
But the fact that I didn't win the MME is the whole point. Otherwise I'd be swatting away journalists.

LIZ
(into phone)
Sorry, Johanna! If it makes you
feel any better, we will be doing a
profile on Nigel Reed. I'll make
sure you get a mention.

Johanna's face turns red.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Thanks. Let's have lunch the next
time I'm in New York.

LIZ
(into phone)
Yeah. Gimme a call.

Johanna, furious, pulls a bag of M&Ms out of her desk drawer
and downs a fistful.

INT. BACK BAY, BOSTON/RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Johanna and Barney are dining by candlelight at a table for
two. Barney is animated; Johanna is sullen and distracted.

BARNEY
. . . So then, this guy, who has
absolutely no idea that we're
reporters, even though we told him
a dozen times, who starts spilling
his guts about the Governor's
campaign and how they tried to
downplay the donor's tremendous
personal wealth. . . ordering
Budweiser for the party on his
yacht and stashing all the imported
stuff on the dinghy. Then the
Mayor. . .

Johanna laughs halfheartedly.

JOHANNA
Sounds like a riot.

BARNEY
Johanna, what's going on?

JOHANNA
In the end, I just want to be
heard. Respected. I want that
swivel effect.

BARNEY

What the hell are you talking about?

JOHANNA

You know. When all the heads in the room swivel around to get a better look at you. When what you say is perceived as important.

BARNEY

Right. I get it. But I don't think you've heard a word I've said all evening.

JOHANNA

I'm sorry. Come back to my place?

Barney can't shoo away the dessert menus fast enough. He grabs the check.

Mozart's "Clarinet Concerto in A" wafts through the restaurant.

BARNEY

Listen. It's our favorite.

Johanna's face softens. She reaches for his hand.

INT. JOHANNA'S CONDO/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Johanna and Barney make love in Johanna's king-size bed. Barney, on top of Johanna, rolls off to one side and exhales.

BARNEY

Wow. That was fantastic, babe.

JOHANNA

I'll get us a little brandy.

Johanna discretely puts on her robe, which she had arranged at the foot of the bed so Barney won't see her naked. She returns with two snifters and stares into her glass.

BARNEY

Still brooding?

JOHANNA

Yeah. Hey, do you think your buddy at the "Globe Mag" would be up for writing a profile about me?

Barney is taken aback by Johanna's relentless ambition--even now.

BARNEY

Maybe.

JOHANNA

It would be exactly the boost I need right now.

BARNEY

I've got a little boost for you.

Barney makes an overture to embrace, but they end up clinging to opposite corners of the oversized bed.

Barney opens one eye, gets out of bed to retrieve the sports page and a handful of peanuts (OS), props himself up and consoles himself by reading and munching, the lamp set low.

EXT. PUBLIC GARDEN/PARK BENCH - DAY

Johanna and Laquita eat lunch.

JOHANNA

Barney's helped me see how obsessive I've become.

LAQUITA

(mock surprise)
You? Obsessive?

JOHANNA

See? Yes. From now on I'm going to close my office door and concentrate on figuring out how to build this thing.

LAQUITA

Doesn't sound like you. But okay.

Johanna walks over to a pantomime artist (a bronze angel) and adds a dollar bill to the money box at her feet.

JOHANNA

The suits have worn me down. I can't go on fighting gender politics like Joan of Arc of Beacon Hill. Barney's right. If I can just get "Thrill TV" figured out I'll inevitably rise to the Media Diva role that I deserve.

Johanna and Laquita approach the office. A man and woman walk past. She whispers something in his ear and he laughs.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Are you still seeing that guy from Rome?

LAQUITA

No. I'm gonna focus on learning the business so I can work for myself. I'm hoping not to meet an available guy -- because then I'd have to figure out what to do with him!

Laquita's cell phone rings. Johanna walks over to the pond and feeds leftover crusts from her sandwich to the swans.

INSERT - CALLER ID ON CELLPHONE

"Nigel"

RETURN TO SCENE

LAQUITA (CONT'D)

(into phone)

This isn't a good time. Johanna and I are on our way back to the office. Later.

Johanna and Laquita take the revolving door into the office and walk toward the elevators.

JOHANNA

Who was that?

LAQUITA

No one. Just some guy who thinks he's all that and a pot of beans.

JOHANNA

You know something? I always feel we can tell each other everything. No dark secrets.

Johanna throws an arm around Laquita's shoulder as they walk up Beacon Hill.

INT. CELESTIAL PUBLISHER/JOHANNA'S OFFICE - DAY

Wagner enters, gives Johanna a copy of an indie music magazine, and places it on her desk with a flourish.

INSERT - NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

"Wagner Jones, front man for the band River Styx, kills at T.T. the Bear's. His guitar riffs could some day, soon even, rival those of local talent, Tom Scholz of that legendary band, 'Boston,' . . ."

RETURN TO SCENE

WAGNER

See. I'm not just another pretty face.

JOHANNA

No, I wouldn't say so.

Johanna skims the article.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

An amazing review, Wagner. Bravo!

WAGNER

Well, some national publicity won't hurt. Got some stuff lined up. And BTW, the big boss wants to see you.

JOHANNA

Ugh.

Wagner abruptly closes the door behind him. He sits on the edge of Johanna's desk and speaks conspiratorially.

WAGNER

Hey boss. You seem pretty down. The way the Suits treat you sucks. And then --just to add insult to injury -- not winning a MME!

JOHANNA

I'll get over it. You should get back to work. Why don't you help me hang this photograph? I get butterflies just climbing a stepladder.

From behind her desk, Johanna pulls out a framed photograph of Steve Jobs holding up the first iPod. Wagner comes back with a stepladder, hammer, and nail. He hangs the photo.

WAGNER

(whispers)

Look. The sudden success of my band? The new gigs I've got lined up that I haven't even mentioned? The recording deal? All pretty awesome, right?

JOHANNA

Yeah. So what? (points to clutter on her desk) I'm a little swamped right now.

WAGNER

I know a guy. In New York. He can set you up with someone who can drastically help you.

JOHANNA

Why do I think this is illegal?

WAGNER

Just go talk to him. I'm pretty sure I can get you in. He's freakin' amazing.

Wagner scribbles down a number on a piece of paper.

JOHANNA

Freakin' amazing? Right.

Wagner exits. Johanna crumples up the scrap of paper and throws it in the trash.

She picks up her iPad and begins reading the "Wall Street Journal."

INSERT DIGITAL ARTICLE

"Geneva. Internationally-famous scientist Rainer Dressler is rumored to be working on a revolutionary way to view--and experience--television. You heard me. Television. 'I'm trying to capitalize on the pleasure center of the brain to control media. It's very exciting work based on the idea that everyday gadgets can sense our moods,' Dr. Dressler remarked at a recent convention."

RETURN TO SCENE

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Damn him! This Rainer Dressler, whoever the hell he is! I'll get there first!

The phone rings.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

(into phone)
Hello.

HOWARD (V.O.)
(filtered)
Got some bad news. We've had some
technical issues. Not the end of
the world, but I need more time.

JOHANNA
(into phone, reaching for
M&Ms)
How much longer?

HOWARD (V.O.)
(filtered)
Couple of months. Tops.

JOHANNA
(into phone; deep exhale)
Is this code for saying it's
impossible?

HOWARD (V.O.)
(filtered)
I'll be honest. In a fit of hubris
I underestimated the whole
endeavor.

Johanna hangs up, stares out the window, then rescues the
scrap of paper from the trash. She picks up the phone and
dials.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Hello. This is Dr. Lucky. Celestial
Media. A colleague of Wagner Jones.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE (V.O.)
(filtered)
I'm listening.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
What is it you do anyway? Just
curious.

INT. NEWBURY STREET/NAIL SALON - DAY

(Female power sound track, like Aretha Franklin)

Johanna has a manicure and pedicure. She chooses a deep red
shade of polish.

INT. SAKS FIFTH AVENUE - DAY

Johanna tries on a bright red dress, walks to the cash register, and gives the saleswoman her credit card.

EXT. HELL'S KITCHEN/PEDICAB - DAY - TRAVELING

Johanna, dressed in her new red dress onto which she has pinned a ruby broach, rides in a pedicab. She clutches an address written on a scrap of paper and scowls at her watch.

JOHANNA

Zero zero zero 7th Ave. Down near
23rd Street. Hell's Kitchen.

The driver whips around the same block twice, passing fruit stands and Chinese fast food restaurants.

TAXI DRIVER

No such address, lady. Someone's
punkin' you.

JOHANNA

Just let me out here. Pull up in
front of the Chelsea Hotel.

Johanna pays the driver then dodges traffic as she crosses the street. Finally she locates the address.

EXT. M. DEVIL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Two black and white Pit bulls stand guard on either side of a red doorway at the bottom of a flight of stairs.

Johanna, shaking, reaches inside her purse and pulls out a cookie. She breaks it in half and apprehensively gives a piece to each dog. She pulls her hand away quickly.

JOHANNA

Here you go, boys. Good doggies!

Both dogs bark and growl at Johanna. She is terrified. While the dogs are distracted she reaches for the pitchfork-shaped knocker and raps three times. No answer.

EXT. SIDE OF M. DEVIL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Johanna (dogs growling in background) walks around to the side of the building. Her high heels sink into the wet grass. She trips, picks herself up, and tries to brush herself off.

She peers into a basement window. She sees M. DEVIL, a short, stout man with a shock of salt-and-pepper hair slicked back with pomade. He is listening to opera and singing along.

Johanna raps on the window. Nervous, she pulls a silver flask from her purse and takes a swig. Just then M. Devil looks outside, takes off his apron, opens the door and lets her in.

INT. M. DEVIL'S CONDO/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Johanna enters, tentatively, giving the dogs wide berth and popping a breath mint.

M. DEVIL

Come in. You're late! I'm Monsieur Devil. Please call me that--not Satan. Not Mephistopheles. I've just baked us a cake. Take a wild guess what flavor.

M. Devil gestures toward a black miniature poodle.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

This is Dante. Come in. Have a seat.

Johanna is shocked to find a Franklin stove radiating heat on a hot day. Candles blaze in candelabras that are spotted around the apartment--very film noir.

While M. Devil goes to the kitchen to frost the cake (O.S.), Johanna looks around. The first floor is cozy, filled with caricatures of nefarious celebrities throughout history (John Wilkes Booth, Lizzie Borden, Henry VIII, an Enron CEO, assorted politicians) and bric-a-brac.

Over the mantle hangs a painting of Dante (the writer, not the dog), backlit by white-hot flames.

Johanna walks over to a red spiral staircase that leads upward to a loft filled with law books. A similar staircase leads downward, into the depths of New York City. Johanna leans forward and hears the rumble of a subway car and faint, blood-curdling shrieks.

M. Devil enters the living room and hands Johanna a big slice of devil's food cake with pink frosting on a China plate.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

Here you are then. Please, have a seat. Sorry it's boiling hot down here. I can't bear temperatures above 95 degrees.

He hands Johanna a Chinese fan. She fans herself while taking small bites of cake.

JOHANNA

Delicious. The best devil's food cake ever..

M. DEVIL

What did you expect? I haven't got all day. What brings you down here?

He skims papers in a file folder and pulls out her resume.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

Dr. Lucky. All the way from Boston.

JOHANNA

Wagner told me about you. I'm very frustrated in my career. I have a brilliant idea for an invention. But nobody listens to me.

M. Devil lights two cigarettes and hands one to Johanna.

M. DEVIL

There, there. Let's start at the beginning. I was just pulling your leg about being busy. Business has been slow this summer.

DREAM-LIKE SEQUENCE WITH JUST HIGHLIGHTS

Johanna tells M. Devil her story. "Thrill TV." Clinton. Nigel. The suits. How she made it up the ladder the hard way. He listens and nods.

RETURN TO SCENE

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

It's rather a big step you know. Selling your soul. Do you think you're ready?

JOHANNA

Who says I still have a soul? (a bitter laugh) Eighteen years in the media business may have seen to that.

M. DEVIL

Oh, I assure you. You still do have a soul.

(MORE)

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

You wouldn't believe the people I deal with who still have a soul. In spite of their nefarious dealings.

M. Devil clears away the plates as the subway rumbles below. He pours Johanna a small glass of sherry. She mops her brow with a tissue. Her dress is drenched in sweat.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

The stories I could tell you! The people I've helped over the years! You know the lyric "Do do that voodoo that you do so well"? That was me! No mortal, not even Cole Porter, could have thought it up. Not to mention Tang. Or martinis. Or Lucky Strike cigarettes

JOHANNA

Do you have any experience helping someone like me make it to the top?

M. DEVIL

Indeed. And what most people think of as the top is really quite mediocre. Wish I could name names, but it's against the rules.

JOHANNA

How does it work exactly?

M. DEVIL

Here's the deal. In exchange for your soul, I will work my powers on your behalf. You will be in a position of power - a Media Diva if you like - for twenty-four years.

Johanna takes a gulp of sherry.

JOHANNA

I'm petrified that someone else will develop "Thrill TV" before I do. The technology is nearly there. But this has to be my vision. My triumph!

M. DEVIL

We can make a deal tonight. Now that you're here.

JOHANNA

I don't know. I'm afraid. But I'm desperate to be heard.

(MORE)

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

To have everyone in the room turn their head to listen to me. What I have to say.

M. DEVIL

Of course you do.

JOHANNA

You know what else? I always wanted to get married. What about finding a man?

M. Devil offers her a cigarette from an antique box. She declines. He lights up.

M. DEVIL

NO! Also against the rules.

Johanna moves to the couch and lies down, woozy from alcohol and the heat.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

I'm in the soul count business. God is my chief competitor. Obviously. I want your soul. Eventually you'll belong to me. You'll be in excellent company. You'll see.

He blows a few smoke rings. Johanna's eyes are closed.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

We'll get along famously if you follow my rules. The main one is that YOU. DO. NOT. FALL. IN. LOVE. Have all the sex you want, but DON'T EVEN THINK OF FALLING IN LOVE.

Johanna sits bolt upright.

JOHANNA

Why not? What have you got against it?

M. DEVIL

I despise being around people in love. Disgusting. I don't mind writing lyrics about it, but the real thing? Ghastly!

JOHANNA

Good thing I'm not in love with Barney. He's a great guy but he doesn't leave me breathless.

M. DEVIL

Good. See that you keep your guard up.

A frown plays across Johanna's brow. She rubs it away.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

Any other desires we should add to sweeten the deal?

M. Devil walks over to a desk and begins drafting a contract, writing in longhand on parchment paper.

JOHANNA

Well, I've always wanted to be thin. Willowy. And not have to starve myself or work out constantly.

M. DEVIL

Easy enough. A stroke of the pen and you'll turn into a sylph.

M. Devil brings the dazed Johanna the contract and a thin, silver stylus.

JOHANNA

What's the little silver thing?

M. DEVIL

Once you've signed in ink you'll need to sign again. In blood.

Johanna, trembling, signs the contract using a pen. Then she takes off her ruby broach, sterilizes the sharp, fastener side by running it through a the flame of a candle.

She pricks her thumb, then squeezes it to draw blood. She takes the stylus, dips it into the blood, and haltingly signs her name. A tear-shaped tattoo appears.

Suddenly the waistline of her dress is swimming on her. She runs her hands down the sides of her slender thighs.

JOHANNA

I feel different. Like me, but confident. Thin. Powerful.

She twirls around a few times and loses her balance.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

But my veins feel as though they have ice water coursing through them. Amazing. No one will be able to rattle me.

M. DEVIL

Quite so. (beat) One more thing.

M. Devil hands her a business card.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

I want you to take voice lessons with Marcel LaBlanc in the South End. You need to develop a more commanding speaking style.

Johanna leans back on the couch and fans herself.

JOHANNA

Whooooa. I'm feeling a little queasy.

M. DEVIL

And then! I'll attend your next Board meeting, incognito. Meantime, concentrate. And keep love at bay.

M. Devil walks Johanna to the door. As she walks to the street, sidestepping the dogs, she glances back over her shoulder.

JOHANNA

What if I change my mind?

M. DEVIL

Too late.

M. Devil smiles, waves the signed contract in the air, then disappears inside the apartment locking the red door behind him. The dogs howl in her wake.

ACT II

INT. VOICE COACH'S STUDIO, BOSTON'S SOUTH END - DAY

Victorian style apartment with a bay window overlooking Dartmouth Street, posters of Broadway shows, signed photos of actors, and other show-biz paraphernalia line the walls. MARCEL LABLANC, a flamboyant voice coach with dyed red hair, directs Johanna, as if conducting a symphony.

MARCEL

No, no, no. Breathe from the diaphragm. Like this.
"Out, damn'd spot! out, I say!—One;
two: why, then
'tis time to do't.—Hell is murky."

Johanna, fiddling nervously with a sheaf of papers, straightens her posture and takes a deep breath.

JOHANNA

"Out, damn'd spot! out, I say!—One;
two: why, then
'tis time to do't.—Hell is murky."

MARCEL

Not enough. Again. Deep. Powerful. Evil. The end of line 6, and. . .

JOHANNA

Powerful. Right. I'm exhausted. This whole exercise is ridiculous. (struggling to deepen voice)
"What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our pow'r to accompt?—Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"

Marcel stands back, scratches his chin. Johanna looks beaten down.

MARCEL

Slow down! This is a nervous breakdown Lady M. is having here. Not a goddamned steeple chase.

Johanna, down but not out, tries again.

JOHANNA

"Out, damn'd spot! out, I say!—One;
two:"

MARCEL

Yes! That's it! Now you're channeling your inner Dame Judith fucking Dench. Who are you again?

Johanna hurls the script against the wall, causing Dante to bark.

JOHANNA

Dr. Lucky. Johanna. And you're
about to hear my name a lot. Soon.

M. Devil smiles from a director's chair in the corner. His relaxed posture shows he's been there all along, with Dante ready to protect him.

INT. CELESTIAL MEDIA/BOARDROOM - DAY

Johanna digs frantically through her purse, find what she wants, and pops a few M&Ms. Then she moves to the head of a table full of executives dressed in somber-colored suits, each wearing a glazed expression.

Clinton, sitting across from Johanna, folds his arm and drums his fingers on the table. Nigel, scowling, sneaks looks at his smart phone. Only Laquita looks interested.

M. Devil, dressed in all black, as if it's sub-zero indoors, is disguised as the caterer.

JOHANNA

(authoritative voice)

Ladies and gentlemen. I assume
you've all read my new proposal for
"Thrill TV."

CLINTON

Well! Looks like you've hit the
ball out of the park.

SUIT #1

(winks at her)

Completely awesome. Kudos, Johanna.
A very exciting idea.

NIGEL

(stands up)

Well, I still say it's too
ambitious. Really not convinced you
can pull it off.

SUIT #2

That's just shortsighted, Nigel.
Thought you were a big picture guy.

Johanna makes individual eye contact with everyone.

NIGEL

(sneering)

How does it even work?

JOHANNA

(Lady Macbeth voice)

Look. We still have a few details to work out, but we can definitely pull this off. With "Thrill TV" televisions will no longer be inanimate objects. They'll be completely sensitive to our emotional and physical needs and desires. A therapist, companion, and entertainment center all rolled into one.

Johanna perches on the edge of the table to show off her legs. Nigel realizes he looks ridiculous and sits back down.

NIGEL

Yeah, but. . .

JOHANNA

Using face recognition technology, the sensitive emotigrams built into "Thrill TV" will do the rest, monitoring your mood while you view a mystery, drama, comedy, whatever. If your mood goes flat, or dips into a downward spiral, "Thrill TV" will automatically shift into another mode. To elevate your mood.

Johanna stands, confident. The "suits" look awed.

CLINTON

Very sci-fi.

JOHANNA

We'll have to work fast. I just read about a guy in Geneva-- a scientist who's trying to create something similar. We need to run with it asap.

NIGEL

(giving the proposal a shove)

Is everyone certain they want to do this? More than *my* idea of streaming soccer games on your phone? There's a big market out there. . .

LAQUITA

(ignoring Nigel)

How about if I manage the project?

CLINTON

Excellent. Johanna, I'll support you 100 percent. And Nigel, consider yourself onboard.

Nigel looks like he's having a root canal.

JOHANNA

Who wants in?

Hands shoot up around the table. Nigel reluctantly raises his hand.

Johanna, triumphant, scans the room.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Okay. Let's do it!

EXT. MIT CAMPUS/KILLIAN COURTYARD - DAY

Johanna walks alongside PROFESSOR HOWARD SILVER, late 40's, nerdy, laser-focused.

JOHANNA

People say this can't be done, but I know you'll figure it out.

HOWARD

Look, there are always nay-sayers. Maybe trying to do the impossible is a form of madness. History shows that every other time we've tried to violate the uncertainty principle of quantum mechanics we've failed. Spectacularly. Not sure my ego can take it.

Johanna looks puzzled, out of her depth. She pulls a big bag of M&Ms out of her purse, offers some to Howard, then swallows a big handful.

JOHANNA

We've gotta do this. Eat some candy. Keep your strength up.

Johanna inhales more M&Ms, which give her manic energy. Howard just picks out the red ones and eats one or two.

HOWARD

I honestly don't see how this time will be any different.

They walk toward the Charles River. She is gesticulating wildly, on a roll.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I'm at the top of my game. I'd hate to become a laughing stock.

JOHANNA

Let's take it easy. One step at a time. What if we aim for a beta version by summer?

She's still guzzling candy, getting more excited.

HOWARD

(cautious)

I don't know. Transcending the uncertainty principle is a brain buster.

EXT. BOSTON'S CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS PARK - DAY

Johanna and Barney picnic near the Harbor. Sailboats dot the waterfront. Perfect summer day. Couples walk dogs, toddlers play in the grass, frisbees fly overhead.

Johanna and Barney are dressed casually; he wears a Celtics T-shirt. She wears a halter top and shorts. They sit on a blanket eating sandwiches while playing Scrabble.

Barney bites into a sandwich. A blob of egg salad leaks out and lands on the front of his shirt. He tries to wipe it off with a checkered cloth napkin but it leaves a grease stain.

BARNEY

I'm really not the picnic type. I like a table. To put my elbows on. Any beer left?

He reaches into a small cooler and pulls out a bottle of beer.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

Last one. Want to split it?

Johanna's cellphone rings. She reads the screen and takes the call. Barney rolls his eyes. She holds her index finger in the air.

JOHANNA

(into phone)

Hi. Oh no. . . .

(MORE)

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

What do you mean it won't work. Run it again! Whatever it takes!

BARNEY

Jesus. Who was that?

JOHANNA

Er. Can't say. Now where were we?

BARNEY

Your turn. Scrabble? Remember? Our championship. Enough already with the phone!

He hands her half a sandwich, encouraging her to eat it. Her phone rings again. She holds up her index finger again.

JOHANNA

(into phone)

This better be important. Un hunh. Mmm. . . Call Tony and let me know.

Johanna turns to Barney with a pleading look.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Sorry. Look. I know I'm ruining this beautiful picnic.

BARNEY

I'll forgive you if you just lay down the goddamn tiles.

Johanna makes a lame effort.

JOHANNA

Hmm. Eight points.

BARNEY

Get your head in the game, girl.

While Barney lays down his tiles and jots down his points, Johanna's phone rings again. She tries to ignore it but caves in.

JOHANNA

(into phone, turning away from Barney)

Howard! What's happening?
(beat) You're kidding. (beat) Be right there.

BARNEY

Right where? You're not paying any attention to this game.

Johanna looks at her tiles, takes a bite of a chocolate éclair, then lays down several tiles.

JOHANNA

Yeah? I used your snooze to make zoology. These double and triple scores really tip the scales.

Johanna jots down some numbers on the back of an envelope.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

That'll be. . . 76 points! I win!

Barney collapses backwards onto the grass.

BARNEY

Don't get a swelled head. I always make a comeback.

JOHANNA

I really hate to leave. But this news could be a real game changer for me. If it is, you'll get the first crack at covering it.

Barney licks away chocolate frosting from her lips and kisses her, lightly at first, then deepening into lust. He gently pushes her over and slides on top of her.

BARNEY

I can barely find you. You're so skinny these days. I want you.

JOHANNA

Come over later. 7:00. I've got a bottle of that Malbec you like.

Johanna kisses Barney passionately. They pack up all the picnic gear. He rushes after her as she heads for a taxi stand. Johanna, lugging the picnic basket and cooler, jumps into a cab. Barney watches after her forlornly, holding a blanket and two empty beer bottles.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Tonight!

Johanna hops inside a cab. Barney watches it disappear down Atlantic Avenue.

INT. MIT MEDIA LAB/HOWARD'S OFFICE - DAY

Howard's office is littered with empty coffee cups and balled up papers. His three sci-fi-ish computer screens glow, but the nearby offices and cubicles are deserted.

Howard sits behind one of the computers, disheveled and frenetic. He stands up and greets Johanna.

JOHANNA

What's happening?

HOWARD

I can hardly believe it. A real breakthrough, Johanna. Somehow we've overcome the technical problems that have plagued us.

Johanna unloads all her gear on a nearby chair and walks over to Howard's computer.

JOHANNA

What do you mean? You're no longer stuck? Repeating the same procedures?

HOWARD

I was stuck. But this time the same exact procedure worked. Don't ask me how.

JOHANNA

Amazing.

HOWARD

Exactly. The design violates the uncertainty principle of quantum mechanics. Maybe I'm hallucinating.

JOHANNA

Well, I don't pretend to get it. But I'll take your word that it's incredible.

Johanna starts to hug him, but he looks so freaked out, she backs off.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Who knows? Maybe you'll win a Nobel Prize.

HOWARD

I can't think about that. Science
is all that's ever mattered to me.

JOHANNA

Let's go to beta, then.

Howard eyes are like pinballs. Johanna gives him a huge hug.

INT. CELESTIAL MEDIA/ANGIE'S OFFICE - DAY (SUMMER)

Johanna sits in front of a super-modern TV ("Thrill TV") set
up on her desk. Laquita, Nigel, Clinton, and Wagner huddle
around, keyed up. Johanna holds a sleek remote control unit
in one hand.

WAGNER

(rubbing his palms
together)
Small drum roll please.

JOHANNA

Nigel, you sit here, in the
driver's seat. We're going to do
the first beta test on you.

NIGEL

I don't know. . .

JOHANNA

Yes. I insist.

CLINTON

History in the making, Nigel.

JOHANNA

Okay. Here's the science. Professor
Silver is a genius. We've been
thwarted in the past by technical
glitches.

Nigel rolls his eyes, bored.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Bear with me, Nigel. In a nutshell
Howard's design for "Thrill TV"
represents a major breakthrough.
Nobel Prize material, I'm guessing.
Which means we now have face
recognition. Sensors that create an
all-encompassing 3-D experience for
the viewer.

LAQUITA

Brilliant.

JOHANNA

Plus. You can enhance the whole viewing experience by ordering whatever you want to go with it. Hot dogs for baseball games. Diet shakes for "Housewives of New Jersey." Scotch for David Mamet plays. You get the idea.

LAQUITA

And lovely clothes. And accessories.

JOHANNA

Right. Here we go.

Johanna positions Nigel's face in front of the remote control's small screen. The TV automatically scans his face and creates a yoga studio environment with pale blue walls, soothing music, and a simulated waterfall..

TV (V.O.)

(soothing female voice)

Nigel. Hello. You seem a little tense. What you need is a little yoga to get yourself centered.

People look at each other in shock. Nigel struggles to look unimpressed.

JOHANNA

Yep. Go on.

A YOGA INSTRUCTOR appears and begins demonstrating the first exercise.

YOGA TEACHER

Breathe. Long inhale. That's right. Hold it. (beat) Now exhale. (beat) Again!

Nigel, less resistant, follows the directions.

Johanna clicks on the screen. Product information pops up for yoga mats, relaxation tapes, and stretchy apparel.

Johanna clicks on a pleasure center icon. Delivery options appear: green tea and comfort food take-out items like meatloaf and mashed potatoes; rice pudding.

CLINTON

Look at that. Click on the meatloaf and mashed potatoes and see if they actually deliver.

NIGEL

Pretty slick, I've got to admit. But the hell with yoga. I'd be up for going to a Beatle's concert.

JOHANNA

You're on. But now that you seem to be feeling a dopamine rush, she'll ask you if I want to switch over to something more upbeat. A sports car race. Karaoke.

CLINTON

I think that's enough for today. Wagner?

Wagner exits and returns with a bottle of Champagne. He begins pouring and passing around glasses. Clinton raises his glass to Johanna.

CLINTON (CONT'D)

You've done a remarkable job, Johanna. It's all about perseverance.

Wagner gives Johanna a knowing glance.

A knock on the door. Wagner answers it. It's a CELEBRITY JOURNALIST for CNN. He wears a jacket and tie and has an entourage of stylists and techies carrying equipment.

M. Devil, disguised as a production assistant, catches their wave and sneaks in. Dante prances beside him.

Celebrity perches on a stool.

CELEBRITY

Dr. Lucky! Pleasure to meet you! The new media diva. How about a demo? Then we'll tape it for my show.

JOHANNA

Lovely. You've never seen anything like this, I promise you.

WAGNER

Okay, everyone, let's clear out.

Clinton, puffed up, shakes celebrity's hand. Then he pats Johanna on the back.

CLINTON
Well done, Johanna.

Wagner stays behind gawking. Then he sees Barney and his crew out of the corner of his eye. He nudges Johanna. She sees Barney too! Uh oh.

Johanna tries to hustle the CNN anchor and his crew off to a conference room down the hall.

Too late. Barney's in front of her office, with one lonely PRODUCTION ASSISTANT. He quickly figures it out: He's been double-crossed.

One look at Johanna's face and the CNN Celebrity realizes she's put him in an awkward position.

BARNEY
(to CNN anchor)
What are you doing here?

Everyone looks at Johanna. She panics.

JOHANNA
Uh. I can explain. CNN is going to do this little, tiny really, segment on their nightly news. But then the "Globe" has the next shot.

Johanna offers him a smile that's more of an apology.

BARNEY
That's not the deal we had.

JOHANNA
I know. . . I meant to tell you. CNN was very persistent. And well, it seemed like a great opportunity. Don't you think?

Johanna asks the makeup artist to stop, gets up and walks over to Barney, straightens his lopsided tie.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
And it's a big enough story for everyone.

Barney grabs his messenger bag in a huff and begins to leave.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
Call you later?

BARNEY

Don't bother.

JOHANNA

Are you still pissed about the 76 points?

BARNEY

This is not about the 76 points!

Barney throws Johanna a "how could you do this to me?" look over his shoulder.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

Anyone would think you didn't have a soul.

Barney and the PA exit, slamming the door behind them.

LAQUITA

(whispers to Johanna)

I can't believe he still carries a messenger bag.

M. Devil cocks an eyebrow at Johanna.

Everyone else tries to appear calm, but Johanna catches them trading snarky glances. Only Nigel perks up.

JOHANNA

What? (beat) Right then. Let me show you how it works.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Johanna, ecstatic, nearly gets trampled in her local electronics store while watching hordes of people purchase "Thrill TV."

Clinton, feet on desk, as he reads the "Wall Street Journal." The headline reads: "'Thrill TV,' the new darling of the High-Tech Trade, as featured on CNN. . . "

Nigel, sweating in the green room, but then charming, preening, as he's interviewed by the female host of a TV talk show. Laquita watches from home, turned on.

Suits at Celestial Media excitedly huddled around a spreadsheet on a computer screen. Close-up of graph of profits soaring. They look smug, high-five each other.

Close-up of a SUIT reading a headline online: "Cambridge has outdone Silicon Valley. What's next for that quaint town turned 'Thrill City'?"

Barney finally figures out how to work "Thrill TV." He watches a Celtics game as though he's at the Boston Garden. He wears a Paul Pierce "34" T-shirt and sips a beer.

M. Devil, wearing a top hat and white tie, sheds a nostalgic tear as he watches a Hollywood musical. A celluloid couple foxtrots around his apartment walls.

Laquita watching a romantic comedy while painfully exercising on her treadmill. She orders a health spa salad and carrot juice.

Johanna, dressed in high-end fashion, tours an expensive townhouse in Louisburg Square with a realtor. The realtor leads her to a rooftop garden with a beautiful view. Johanna's eyes pop at the price. What the hell? She signs the P&S.

EXT. WATERTOWN DINER - DAY

Johanna drives up in a flashy sports car. Barney parks his rusted heap in the spot next to hers. They walk into the diner together, wordlessly.

INT. WATERTOWN DINER - DAY

GABE (Archangel Gabriel) is an East Indian with a ponytail wearing a clean white apron. Has a transcendent quality. While grilling sausages, Gabe gestures toward an empty booth.

Barney and Johanna take a seat. You could catch an ice cream headache from them. They hide behind their menus.

JOHANNA

I didn't think you'd come.

BARNEY

I almost didn't.

They put down their menus. Gabe scribbles down their order, taking in their every word. Johanna catches Gabe staring at her tear-shaped tattoo.

JOHANNA

Coffee. Bacon and eggs with home fries. Please.

BARNEY

Same.

Barney looks out the window distractedly.

JOHANNA

This is hard for me.

BARNEY

It'd better be good. I'm in the middle of chasing a lead on the Bulger case.

JOHANNA

You don't know your lines. You're supposed to tell me I look gorgeous.

BARNEY

You look gorgeous. But how come you're such a string-bean when you put away food like a linebacker? You aren't taking those crazy Brazilian diet pills are you? They could kill you.

JOHANNA

No! I promise. No pills. Pilates. That's my secret.

Barney gives her a "yeah right" look.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Well. I miss you. I wonder. .. You know, if. . .

Barney places his hand over hers, on the Formica-top table. GABE glances their way as he cooks.

BARNEY

Johanna, don't do this. You're sorry. I know. I'm over it.

JOHANNA

Phew. God. So, that's it? We can get back together? Let's go to the Cape and stay overnight. One of those kitschy inns.

BARNEY

Johanna. I've been seeing someone.

JOHANNA

That photographer from "Rolling Stone." Right? That little slut with the --?

BARNEY

No. No sluts.

JOHANNA

Who then?

Gabe serves them breakfast. He lingers a second too long.

Barney's cell phone rings. He glances at the caller ID, signals that he'll just be a second, and walks away.

BARNEY (V.O.)

(into phone)

Hey, what'd you come up with?

Johanna, upset, notices Gabe's elaborate tattoos. My God! They're characters from a Greek myth. Daedalus and Icarus.

GABE

(whispers in an East Indian accent)

We need to talk. I know who you are. I know all about it. (points to her tear-shaped tattoo) M. Devil. Professor Silver. Everything.

JOHANNA

What?!

Barney puts his phone away and walks back to the table.

GABE

(whispers)

Your karma is not too good right now. I can help. Seriously.

He scribbles on a blank chit, tears it off the pad, and slides it toward her. It's a phone number.

Johanna tucks the chit into her bra.

Johanna notices that Gabe's tattoos are animated; they're acting out the myth. Gabe grins at her, flexes his muscles, then walks back to the grill.

Johanna face registers shock. Barney notices.

BARNEY
I know it's weird having this
conversation.

JOHANNA
You have no idea.

Johanna fights back tears.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
I don't want to know who she is.

BARNEY
You don't know her. We met at a
fund raiser. She's a kin--

JOHANNA
(Places hands over ears) Cease and
desist!

Johanna gets up to leave but not before grabbing a piece of
buttered toast off her plate.

Johanna exits the diner and runs to her convertible.

Barney takes a bite of breakfast as he watches her screech
out of the lot. He throws down his fork and begins recording
his voice into his smart phone.

BARNEY
For novel: Something about
misplaced pride and love gone awry.
How it feels to watch one you love
end up on a collision course.

Barney pays and exits, leaving the rest of his breakfast
behind.

INT. CELESTIAL MEDIA/CLINTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Clinton stands while Laquita, Nigel, and the suits sit on
chairs and the couch. Giddy excitement in the air.

CLINTON
The spreadsheets tell the story.
Revenues are way, way up.
Surpassing all of our wildest
dreams.

SUIT #1
It's remarkable. Unprecedented.

SUIT #2

Early market research shows nearly three out of four households in America have purchased at least one "Thrill TV" device!

CLINTON

Johanna, we ought to have listened to you sooner. You really are a visionary.

Suit #2 puts his arm around Johanna and gives her a squeeze. She looks a little surprised by his forwardness.

Nigel looks away, wincing with jealousy. Laquita beams pride toward Johanna.

SUIT #3

My kids and I have been glued to family room. Baseball. Basketball. Movies. My wife ordered a black dress exactly like the one some starlet wore in a movie. Forty-five minutes later she was wearing it. We're hooked.

CLINTON

Everyone needs to be hooked. Show them Nigel.

Nigel and TWO UNDERLINGS show a mock-up of an advertising poster for "Thrill TV." It shows a split screen. On the left side a woman and man watch baseball while eating hot dogs in the sun, amid a simulated, cheering crowd, as if they're at the stadium.

On the right side is a young man on a stage singing into a microphone, alongside back-up singers, in front of a simulated, adoring crowd, as if he's on reality TV.

The tag line reads "One Device: Two Realities. Unlimited Possibilities. Order your 'Thrill TV' today."

CLINTON (CONT'D)

Great, huh? Am I right?

Johanna beams from the sidelines.

CLINTON (CONT'D)

To thank everyone for their dedication and long hours, the shareholders are giving you a bonus.

Wagner passes out envelopes. Laquita opens hers. Her eyes grow wide and she nearly faints. So does everyone else, one by one.

CLINTON (CONT'D)
You'll also be receiving a prorated
number of shares in Celestial
Media's stock.

UNDERLING brings in a tray of Champagne glasses and passes them around. People toast each other.

CLINTON (CONT'D)
To Johanna! Our Media Diva!

EVERYONE
Hear, hear!

JOHANNA
Thank you everyone. (False modesty)
You're too kind.

Everyone takes a sip of Champagne.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
This seems an auspicious time to
tell you my news. I'll be traveling
to London. Then Sydney. Then
Beijing. To tell the world about
"Thrill TV"!

More general excitement and tributes to Johanna.

Laquita and Nigel catch each other's eye and slip out.

EXT. CELESTIAL PUBLISHING HOUSE/FIRE ESCAPE - DAY

Laquita and Nigel are locked in a passionate embrace. She's taken one shoe off and is fondling his leg with her foot.

EXT. BROADWAY THEATER - NIGHT

The marquee reads: "Best Revival! Noel Coward. 'Private Lives.'" Johanna and M. Devil hop out of a limo and rush toward the front doors, which are about to close.

Johanna is dressed in a high-end evening gown and glittery jewelry. M. Devil is dressed like a 1940's dandy with a top hat and spats.

INT. BROADWAY THEATER - BOX SEATS

M. Devil and Johanna watch the play together as if they're old friends.

M. DEVIL
This dialogue absolutely sparkles,
if I do say so myself.

JOHANNA
You wrote it?

M. DEVIL
Who else, dear one?

JOHANNA
Love the costumes!

Johanna reaches over to borrow M. Devil's opera glasses. She holds them up to her eyes and trains them on the actors. Then she pans the audience and stops cold.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
It's him! Barney. He's with a
woman. Oh God.

M. DEVIL
Shush. You're ruining it.

INT. BROADWAY THEATER/BAR - NIGHT

M. Devil and Johanna stand at the bar. Johanna looks crestfallen. M. Devil doesn't bother standing in the queue. A waiter, through some unseen signal, delivers them each a martini.

M. DEVIL
Yes, Noel would stop by on his way
home whenever he needed a juicy
plot twist. For this play I had to
travel to Shanghai where he was
recovering from influenza. Oh, the
times we used to have with Gertrude
Lawrence playing the lead. I was
very sorry to see Noel leave this
world and go upstairs.

He rolls his eyes upwards toward the heavens.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)
He had a really big heart, you see.

JOHANNA

Sounds like great times. Sorry to have gotten upset there for a --

Barney and PEPITA, a young fresh-faced woman, sweep by. She's guffawing at one of his jokes. Barney wears a well-tailored suit (!) and looks like he's been working out.

M. DEVIL

What? I thought you didn't care about him.

JOHANNA

(faking it)

I don't. Just indulging in evil thoughts toward his new girlfriend.

M. DEVIL

Good girl. You're learning. And my, you're looking svelte in that dress.

He sweeps his index finger over his nose, Cockney-style.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

You must be working out like mad.

Johanna, flattered, waves at a few acquaintances. She tosses back her wine as the house lights flick on and off.

JOHANNA

You didn't have Barney show up here with that harlot on purpose, did you?

M. DEVIL

Does that sound like me? And I don't believe she's a harlot.

Johanna is about to retort when a man walks past her flirtatiously.

JOHANNA

What's up with guys these days? Men who used to see right past me are suddenly hitting on me.

M. DEVIL

Oh, that's just a little bonus I threw into the package. The catnip clause.

JOHANNA

No. You're pulling my leg.

M. DEVIL

I am. It's you, my dear. Confidence
is always sexy as hell.

They disappear inside the dimly lit theater as the overture
for Act II pours into the lobby.

INT. AUDITORIUM IN PARIS - DAY

Johanna stands at a lectern on a large stage. She is
addressing a 500-person multicultural audience.

Banners for a "INTERNATIONAL MEDIA EXPO" are mounted on
several walls. A poster that reads, "DR. JOHANNA LUCKY, MEDIA
DIVA," is displayed on the stage.

Johanna, professionally dressed and coiffed, beams her sexy-
as-hell confidence and speaks in her full-throttle Lady
Macbeth voice.

JOHANNA

And of course the very word
innovation derives from novus, or
new, in Latin. . . So, something
newly introduced. . .

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1

What advice do you have for the
rest of us?

JOHANNA

Hard work, belief in the power of
ideas, and of course. . . a sense
of humor! Anyone else?

The crowd, riveted, applauds enthusiastically.

Johanna scans the audience. There in the third row, with
Dante in his lap, sits M. Devil, smiling up at her. Her eyes
widen in recognition.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2

Can you tell us how you got where
you are today? Lots of people have
good ideas.

JOHANNA

That's true. But I held fast to
some very bold ideas. Even when I
was shot down. My advice is: Make
your idea the best in its class.
Then don't be afraid to do whatever
it takes to proceed.

Johanna's face begins to flush. The HANDSOME FRENCH ACADEMIC, serving as moderator, catches her eye, winks flirtatiously, and points to his watch.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

There are no shortcuts. There were none for Marie Curie, Henry Ford, or Steve Jobs. Not that I belong in that pantheon. But there were none for me either.

Johanna's face turns red. She gulps water and tries to compose herself.

Audience members clap and cheer.

The academic escorts Johanna off the stage and gives her a little squeeze. People and media types swarm her. Distraught, she bolts through a door and stumbles outdoors onto the sidewalk.

EXT. PARISIAN STREET - DAY

It's pouring rain. Johanna is getting soaked.

She runs past abandoned outdoor cafes, rain pummeling the tables lining the sidewalks. Shaken, she huddles in a shop doorway. She pulls out her cellphone and makes a call.

JOHANNA

(into phone)

Hi. It's me. I'm a complete and utter fraud. (beat) The scales have fallen from my eyes. I see who I am. (beat) No. I'm not just jet-lagged. Wasn't it Plato who said "Know thyself"?

Johanna looks up to see the sexy French academic signaling her from a block away. He holds open the door of a cab and positions an umbrella between himself and the dry oasis inside.

ACADEMIC

(shouting)

Join me for a cocktail?

JOHANNA

(into phone)

Gotta run. Have a good sail.

Johanna pulls out a mirror, repairs her makeup, and plasters on a grin.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
(shouting)
Wait up!

She runs toward the shelter of the academic and the idling taxi. She ducks inside. The taxi creeps forward in traffic.

INT. CELESTIAL MEDIA/CLINTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Clinton sits in a wing chair, looking fidgety, having been corralled into a meeting he doesn't want to have. Johanna wears a tight dress and high heels. She paces back and forth.

An expensive painting hangs on the wall next to a photo of Clinton on his new yacht, "Halcyon Days."

JOHANNA
So, my research shows that the heart of post-Katrina New Orleans would be a perfect place to launch the project.

CLINTON
I don't know. . . We're really not in the nonprofit game. That's not what we do.

JOHANNA
No? Well, it's time we did. It may sound corny, but we should give back. To society. To children who are dying to read but don't have enough books.

CLINTON
But I need you here. You already travel so much.

JOHANNA
How have your finances been lately? How do you like your new yacht? The beach house addition? Secret deals? Yes, I hear everything. You OWE me.

CLINTON
Well, I, er. . .

JOHANNA
Have your lawyers figure it out. We'll call it "Books4Kids." And we'll distribute thousands, maybe millions, of books to needy kids.

Clinton stands up to try to intimidate Johanna. He puffs out his chest and jingles his pocket change.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

And have them set the organization up as a foundation, separate from Celestial Media. All donations will be a tax deduction for you anyway, so what's the big deal?

Clinton steps in front of Johanna and places a hand on each of her shoulders.

CLINTON

You wear me out.

JOHANNA

You know I'm right.

He shrugs. She takes it as a yes, and exits. He shakes a pill out of a prescription bottle and downs it.

INT. CELESTIAL MEDIA/WAGNER'S CUBICLE - DAY

Wagner wears earbuds around his neck. He has his cube decked out like a creative studio, with speakers, CDs, and posters of his band, River Styx.

WAGNER

A guy keeps calling. French accent.

JOHANNA

I'm not here. Meaning I'm off men for a while.

Johanna reaches across Wagner's desk and picks up his new River Styx CD. She makes an approving face.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

All that sweating and flirting and acting like a fool. Like being fifteen all over again. No thanks.

WAGNER

I can't tell him that, Boss.

JOHANNA

You're creative. Make up an excuse. I've gotta go pack for the Big Easy.

EXT. PUBLIC PARK/NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Books4Kids is holding a big outdoor rally called "10 Million Pages Strong." Kid-friendly posters: "Read lots of books and keep track how many pages you read!"

A bookmobile is parked nearby. Storytellers, dressed in folkloric costumes, jugglers, and clowns circulate among the rows of chairs teeming with parents and children.

Johanna sits on a stool holding a microphone. She is interviewing six children about the books they're reading. Each child wears a white sweatshirts with his/her name spelled out in big letters.

It's obvious by her fumbling and reliance on index cards that Johanna hasn't gotten to know them.

JOHANNA

(into microphone)

So. . . Tanya! What's the coolest book you've read this school year?

TANYA

(into microphone)

"The Willowy Witch"

JOHANNA

(into microphone)

Why did you like it?

TANYA

It's about a witch who uses her magic to be super mean. Then her black cat shows her how to be nice.

Johanna turns to ANTONIO, a pistol at nine-years-old.

ANTONIO

(into microphone)

I want to read the most books of anyone. Googaplex. It's the biggest number, right after infinity.

JOHANNA

(into microphone)

Well! Googaplex.

ANTONIO

(into microphone)

If I read the most pages, I'll win lots of money.

Johanna looks touched by Antonio.

JOHANNA
(into microphone)
Well keep reading, everyone!

Johanna hurries off the stage. Media people swarm her, microphones and camcorders in hand.

MEDIA PERSON #1
What a great project. How many pages have the kids read so far?

JOHANNA
Umm, let me get back to you on that. Where's my staff?

Gabe sees what's happening and whisks Johanna away in a limo.

GABE
New at this game?

Laquita rushes after them.

JOHANNA
Nobody knew who I was six months ago. Now they're eating me alive.

Laquita gets into the car.

INT. LIMO - DAY

LAQUITA
Screw kids and books. Reporters want to hear about "Thrill TV." Plus I heard a rumor they're planning to give you a special humanitarian award.

JOHANNA
I hope it's just a rumor. Half the time I don't even feel human.

EXT. JOHANNA'S TOWNHOUSE/ROOF GARDEN - NIGHT

Nigel and Johanna stand together on the edge of the balcony. The Boston skyline is in the distance, which includes a view of the CITCO sign. Nigel wears a suit and his bear/bull cufflinks, but his tie is loosened.

Johanna kicks off her high heels.

They each swirl brandy in a snifter. The bottle sits on a table, along with a bowl of cashews and a flaming candelabra.

NIGEL

No.

JOHANNA

Come on. I thought we could put down the swords and have a heart-to-heart.

NIGEL

No. I don't feel guilty. I'm a straight-up capitalist. Not your father confessor.

Johanna scoops up Satchmo.

JOHANNA

Look. We both grew up poor. My grandfather came here from County Clare to lay bricks.

Nigel takes a small handful of cashews.

NIGEL

I can out-poor you. There were seven of us in a three-room flat. My father worked in the coal mines in Yorkshire. Don't get me wrong. I wouldn't trade it for all the elite childhoods in the world.

JOHANNA

But. . .

NIGEL

Now it's my turn.

JOHANNA

But haven't you noticed? People are acting like zombies. All because of "Thrill TV."

NIGEL

Nope.

JOHANNA

Sometimes I feel like I've created a monster. Like Dr. Frankenstein.

Nigel checks his watch, puts down his drink, and gets ready to leave.

NIGEL

If anything, I want more. More sales, more programs, more global reviews.

Johanna stands up to face him.

JOHANNA

You don't think we have enough?

NIGEL

This is commerce, darling. And don't tell me you don't have a stake in it. That peculiar-looking man who keeps popping up? With the black poodle. Giving off a whiff of . . . sulphur?

Johanna's face turns bright red. She slips on her abandoned heels and now matches his eye level.

NIGEL (CONT'D)

Where have I seen him before? Skulking around the Liverpool docks? Wall Street?

Johanna opens the door to her townhouse.

INT. JOHANNA'S TOWNHOUSE/STAIRCASE - NIGHT

NIGEL

And how you've gone from Brunhilde to vixen with no stops in between. And dumped Barney! Your best asset.

JOHANNA

He dumped me.

NIGEL

Look. Without your "Thrill TV" we'd all be racking our brains over the new, new thing in an over-saturated market.

JOHANNA

Finally. A little credit.

Johanna hooks one leg behind Nigel, pulls him toward her, and kisses him hard. He looks stunned, then kisses her back.

He opens the front door, hesitates, and turns back.

NIGEL

More. That should be your mantra.
More.

She closes the door behind him, then leans on it, and exhales.

JOHANNA

Useless bastard!

EXT. BOSTON'S NORTH END - DAY

Johanna, Laquita, and Wagner, shiver as they walk to the North End. The quaint streets and sidewalks are blanketed in snow. Little puffs of vapor appear when they exhale.

They laugh and throw snowballs at each other.

EXT. STATUE OF PAUL REVERE - DAY

They walk through a small park on Hanover Street with an equestrian statue of Paul Revere. Johanna and Laquita make snow angels.

EXT. HANOVER STREET - DAY

All three walk another block to a modest storefront with a neon sign: "Caesar's Pizzeria."

The streets are eerily quiet; not a person in sight.

WAGNER

Feels a little weird to have the streets all to ourselves.

LAQUITA

Yeah. It is quiet. Strange.

JOHANNA

Well, it's so freakin' cold.

WAGNER

I dunno. You'd think some people would be at least be out shoveling. ("The Godfather" voice) It's like they've gone to the mattresses.

JOHANNA

You watch too many movies.

They look at the shop windows and notice that many of the shades are drawn. The silence is broken only by their muffled footsteps.

INT. PIZZARIA - DAY

Two brick ovens take up most of the space in this tiny Pizzeria, with its maps and flags of Italy and snapshots of famous people who have eaten here.

Heat from the ovens envelops them. Wagner walks to the counter and speaks to a young, Italian-accented CASHIER.

WAGNER

Hey. Picking up 3 pizzas. Name's Wagner.

CASHIER

One quattro formaggio with melanzana, one pepperoni, and one lobster tail pizza.

The Cashier boxes up them up.

JOHANNA

Lobster tail?

LAQUITA

For Clinton. Who else?

WAGNER

(to Cashier)

We noticed that the streets seem deserted. Guess it's the cold weather, huh?

CASHIER

Yeah. Below zero. That'll keep people indoors.

Johanna gives the Cashier her credit card and slips a \$20 bill into the tip jar.

Johanna, Laquita, and Wagner open the door to exit.

CASHIER (CONT'D)

That and the fact that they're glued to their TV screens.

LAQUITA

What do you mean?

CASHIER
"Thrill TV." You been living under
a rock or somethin'?

They exit, exchanging shocked looks. They walk back toward the office, each carrying a steaming box of pizza, looking grim.

EXT. PAUL REVERE STATUE - DAY

M. Devil, wearing a black fedora and smoking a cigar, appears from the shadows and watches them walk away. He walks Dante. He sees the snow angels and flicks his ashes onto them.

EXT. JOHANNA'S PARENTS' HOME - DAY

Johanna and Laquita, pull up in front of one of many triple-deckers in South Boston, an Irish enclave.

Johanna's car practically screams "look at me" compared to the beaten up cars that line the streets. A young couple stops to admire it.

LAQUITA
Wow. I haven't been here since last
Thanksgiving.

JOHANNA
Well, the great thing about
Southie. It always looks the same.

Laquita gingerly lifts a pumpkin pie from the back seat and carries it to the door.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
I'm surprised you're willing to
come back, knowing how dull my
family is.

LAQUITA
My family's just as stuck in their
ways. But with more attitude.

INT. JOHANNA'S PARENTS' HOME/PARLOR - DAY

They walk into a eerily deserted front parlor and look around. Laquita follows Johanna into the kitchen.

INT. JOHANNA'S PARENTS' HOME/KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The kitchen is as quiet as an undiscovered tomb. A kit-cat wall clock keeps time with its pendulum tail. The counters are bare except for bottles of wine, soda, beer, and a few scattered ashtrays.

JOHANNA

What the hell is going on? The turkey should be cooking away by now. Where are the sweet potatoes? The marshmallows?

Laquita places her pumpkin pie on the counter. She opens her eyes wide and looks at Johanna.

LAQUITA

I hope there hasn't been some kind of emergency!

JOHANNA

Maybe they're at my Uncle's house.

Johanna and Laquita climb a flight of stairs, looking for signs of life. Johanna opens the door to family room. Raucous laughter and music pour out.

INT. JOHANNA'S PARENTS' HOME/FAMILY ROOM-CONTINUOUS

JOHANNA'S MOTHER, whose heyday was during the Carter administration, wears a vintage disco dress. Johanna's once-handsome FATHER is now balding, with a round, Irish face. Both dance to a disco beat.

In the background UNCLES, AUNTS, and COUSINS gather around as Johanna's mother and father show off, with a lot of index finger-pointing toward the ceiling. A disco light throws stardust over the modest furniture and carpet.

All the relatives are dressed in 1970s clothes. Their eyes are glazed over, some because of smoking pot, others because their brains have gone numb. Ghostly shadows of disco singers perform on a transparent stage projected onto a wall.

JOHANNA

(to a male COUSIN who holds a beer in one hand and a joint in the other)
What the hell is going on?

COUSIN

(shouting over noise)
"Thrill TV." The sensor said your mother wasn't in the mood to make dinner this year. She went a little crazy ordering clothes.

LAQUITA

But she always makes Thanksgiving dinner. It's her thing.

COUSIN

Not this year. It's like this "Thrill TV" thing has taken over our brains. (takes a hit of his joint) Kinda like a drug.

JOHANNA

But what about family traditions?

COUSIN

Who cares?

JOHANNA

I do!

COUSIN

No offense, but where do you get off? You're the one who brought us "Thrill TV."

Johanna, upset, runs to a nearby bathroom and throws up into the sink (OS). Laquita stands frozen in place. She runs into the bathroom to see if she can help Johanna calm down.

JOHANNA

(behind the door)
I've gotta get out of here.

Johanna's mother sees her, disengages from an intricate dance routine, and rushes over.

JOHANNA'S MOTHER

Dear! You're here! And Laquita, how lovely to see you. Isn't this disco scene a hoot?

JOHANNA

We thought we were coming over for a traditional dinner.

JOHANNA'S MOTHER

Been there. Done that. This is what my "Thrill TV" sensor said I needed right now.

JOHANNA

We've gotta go. I'm not feeling well.

JOHANNA'S MOTHER

You're acting like you're at a funeral. Cheer up! Martinis on the sideboard. And pigs in blankets.

Johanna's mother cha-chas her way back to Johanna's father who hasn't missed a beat. He waves at them while doing the bump with a cousin.

Johanna, pale and stricken, walks zombie-like out of the room, nearly tripping over a drinks with parasols in them. Laquita follows.

EXT. JOHANNA'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY

Johanna, still shaken, drives Laquita in silence. The highway is thick with traffic as they drive toward Back Bay.

LAQUITA

Let's go somewhere. Maybe get a turkey sandwich.

JOHANNA

I'm not hungry. For once.

LAQUITA

Let's go get a glass of wine then. Come on. It wasn't that bad.

JOHANNASD

(trance-like)

I never thought it would come to this. To people completely selling out to this--diabolical thing.

Johanna parallel parks on Newbury Street in front of a bar/cafe.

LAQUITA

It's fine. Just roll with it.
(starts singing a disco song,
mockingly)

Johanna turns off the engine and rests her head on the steering wheel.

LAQUITA (CONT'D)
There's something I need to tell you. Remember the contest? For kids who've read the most pages?

JOHANNA
Yes.

Laquita pulls out her phone and taps on CNN. A video comes up of Antonio being interviewed by newscaster.

ANTONIO (V.O.)
(filtered, on phone)
Yes, I read the most pages of all!
And you know what?

CNN NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
(filtered, on phone)
No what?

ANTONIO (V.O.)
(filtered, on phone)
I'm going to take the prize money
and buy my family a "Thrill TV."
They really want one!

Johanna looks defeated. Laquita clicks off her phone.

LAQUITA
You gonna be okay?

JOHANNA
No. Shhh. Hear that? It's the sound
of civilization crashing down
around our ears.

LAQUITA
Don't be so melodramatic.

JOHANNA
Am I the only one who gets it?
We're staring into the void. (beat)
Hey. Let's drive by Barney's house.

LAQUITA
No. That's weird. Thought you said
he was a man-boy. Not mature enough
for you.

JOHANNA

Please. Maybe he's outside sitting
on his stoop.

LAQUITA

It's 30 degrees out. Alright. But
don't get any weirder than you
already are.

Johanna turns the car around and they speed toward the North
End.

INT. JOHANNA'S TOWNHOUSE/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Johanna, in her nightgown, is darting in and out of her walk-
in closet as she packs her suitcase. Her face covered with an
avacodo-colored mudpack. She sips a glass of wine.

She keeps discarding clothes onto a chair and grabbing
different outfits from her closet. The bedspread is strewn
with jewelry and scarves.

An ArtDeco-style vanity and mirror take up one wall of the
bedroom. The vanity is heaped with creams and perfumes. Above
the mirror is a shrine to her fame with Magazine covers and
awards.

Johanna hears the sound of glass breaking downstairs and
freezes.

She throws on a white bathrobe, grabs a poker from the
hearth, and descends the staircase, terrified but ready to do
battle. She catches her reflection in a mirror on the way
down and is taken aback.

INT. JOHANNA'S TOWNHOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

She flicks on the light. There's broken glass on the floor.
Satchmo is nearby scratching his back in a door frame.

Johanna exhales, puts down the poker, and pours herself a
large glass of wine. Her mask crumbles, depositing a powdery
dust onto her bathrobe.

She frantically pushes some buttons on her phone, holding it
away from her face.

JOHANNA

(into phone)

Barney! It's me. I hope I'm not
calling too late. But I'm leaving
for Beijing--

More of her mask settles on her bathrobe.

INT. BARNEY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Barney and Pepita are semi-naked in bed. A framed poster of Larry Bird hangs over the headboard. Pepita wraps her long legs around Barney's hips and is licking his ear.

BARNEY
(into phone)
Not a good time. I'm in the middle
of something. You okay?

INTERCUT AS APPROPRIATE WITH JOHANNA'S CONDO:

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Oh. I just wanted to say goodbye
before traveling half-way around
the world.

PEPITA (V.O.)
(filtered)
Barney. Come on. . .

BARNEY (V.O.)
(into phone)
Good luck.

INT. JOHANNA'S TOWNHOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sipping wine, Johanna wanders around her townhouse, footsteps echoing. She pauses in front of a portrait of a prosperous Colonial-era woman.

JOHANNA
(to portrait)
Don't look at me like that, you
pious prig. You had your secrets
too. You probably did whatever it
took to climb the social ladder.

Johanna studies her opulent furnishings, as if seeing them for the first time. She glides her hand along the back of the horsehair sofa then plays a few bars on the piano, her face mask shedding onto the keys.

She sees a framed photograph of herself and Barney on vacation. She picks it up, polishes the glass with a corner of her robe, and puts it back down.

She reaches for her phone, punches buttons, holds it out again.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Hi. It's Johanna Lucky. From the diner. I need your help.

EXT. PARADISE - DAY

Gabe juggles his phone as he heaps shrimp onto his plate from a buffet table that stretches to infinity. He wears white robes, as does everyone else. Birds chirp.

INTERCUT AS APPROPRIATE WITH GABE IN PARADISE:

GABE
(into phone)
Okay, but She's booked solid. It'll be tough.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Who is?

GABE
(into phone)
God, obviously. I thought you knew.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Right. Just checking.

GABE
(into phone)
I might be able to squeeze you in for five minutes in July, 2014.

JOHANNA
(into phone)
No! It can't wait. I'm begging you. The future of civilization is at stake.

GABE
(into phone)
Her days are packed. (eats a shrimp) I'll try to pull some strings.

EXT. FENWAY PARK - DAY

Johanna checks her watch as she runs down the bar-lined streets and alleys as she approaches the Fenway Park entrance. Posters for "Thrill TV" are plastered on the sides of buildings.

A fatherly SECURITY GUARD stands by the gated entrance.

Johanna shows the guard a special pass. His eyes widen. He hurriedly opens the gate.

Johanna sits in the bleachers, keeping watch and popping M&Ms. She takes a beautifully-wrapped gift out of her purse and places it on the bench.

The entrance reopens and a half-dozen male and female ANGELS on white Harleys roar into the Park. They are dressed in head-to-toe white, including their helmets.

Gabe zooms in, spots Johanna, and waves.

God, dressed in all-white cashmere and down, drives in last, doing figure-8s on her Harley before jumping off, sprinting up the bleachers, and shaking Johanna's hand.

GOD

Johanna Lucky I presume.
Worshipping in what, in Boston,
passes for a church.

Johanna nervously picks up the gift.

JOHANNA

So pleased to meet you, God. Here's
a little gift from my last trip.
White tea from the Fujian province.
The Chinese swear it increases
longevity.

Johanna realizes she's talking to the wrong person about longevity and blushes.

GOD

Hah! Thank you. I love white tea.

God slips the gift into a deep pocket. Then she consults her watch, a digital sundial.

GOD (CONT'D)

Let me be blunt. Whatever made you
think that consorting with M. Devil
would lead to anything other than
disaster?

JOHANNA
Really bad judgment. Idiocy.
Temporary insanity?

GOD
Yes. And. . .

JOHANNA
Greed. Vanity. Ego. The need to be
a media goddess. The desire to be
heard. The desire to be thin.

God's eyes travel to the empty bag of M&Ms.

GOD
That's more like it. "Thrill TV" is
a complete disaster. Legions of
people are hooked on it. They're
gaining weight, maxing out their
credit cards, calling in sick.
Look.

God pulls out a tablet and clicks on a link.

INSERT - LIVE CLOSE-UP OF TIMES SQUARE WITH EMPTY STREETS

RETURN TO SCENE

GOD (CONT'D)
Times Square. What do you see?

JOHANNA
Nothing. It's deserted.

GOD
Exactly my point. Times Square is
empty!

INSERT - LIVE CLOSE-UP OF APPLE STORE ON 5TH AVENUE

RETURN TO SCENE

GOD (CONT'D)
Ditto the Apple Store on Fifth. The
one that's open 24 hours? A morgue.

Johanna fights back tears.

GOD (CONT'D)
Do you have any idea what this
invention has done to the soul
count business? M. Devil is gaining
on me. Then, just when I almost
forget about it, there he is.
(MORE)

GOD (CONT'D)
On late night cable, hawking
"Thrill TV."

JOHANNA
Please. Will you help me? Reclaim
the remains of my tattered soul?

GOD
You're really ready?

JOHANNA
Yes. I miss having a soul. And the
fame part is a big let-down. After
the first 48 hours.

GOD
I could have told you that.

JOHANNA
And if I could ask, is the
hopelessness of life meant to be a
farce? Or maybe a Greek tragedy?

GOD
Here's the way it works. You need
go after happiness. And figure
things out for yourself.

Gabe signals that it's time to leave. The angels rev their
engines. God checks her watch.

God gets up and walks toward her Harley.

JOHANNA
How?

God fusses with putting on her helmet.

GOD
Begin with the contract. It's all
there. Your escape clause.

JOHANNA
The details are a little foggy.
What happened toward the end?

GOD
Maybe it's because you were drunk
when you signed it.

Johanna reddens.

JOHANNA

I'm afraid that if I sabotage
"Thrill TV" M. Devil will become
vengeful. He could sell it to the
international market. China for
starters. One point 4 billion
people.

GOD

You're not trying!

God and her entourage roar out of Fenway Park. Johanna stays rooted to the bleachers, pounding her fists against them, having a good cry.

JOHANNA

(muttering)

The contract, the contract. But
what? I miss Barney. He'd know in
an instant what the fuck I'm
supposed to do now.

The security guard climbs into the bleachers and stands over Johanna, casting a long shadow.

She gathers her things.

SECURITY GUARD

Friends in high places, Miss, eh?

Johanna blows her nose and tries to compose herself. As he leads her to the exit, she suddenly picks up her pace, then starts to run.

JOHANNA

If only that were true. (panting) I
just realized I've got to catch a
train.

ACT III

INT. HELL'S KITCHEN/M. DEVIL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Johanna makes a soggy entrance, raincoat slicked with water. She runs her hand through her hair, sending droplets flying.

She drops her dripping umbrella onto the hearth. It lands with a hiss. She slips off her shoes and coat. Her tight dress makes her look as thin as a stick insect.

Gothic, window-rattling thunder and lightening crash outdoors.

M. Devil leads Johanna to a chair, brings her a piece of his usual devil's food cake, then stirs up a pitcher of martinis. He pours two glasses and plunks 3 olives in each.

M. DEVIL

You're looking well, my dear. If damp! Wealth and fame seem to agree with you.

JOHANNA

(flushed from the heat)
I'm not so sure. I keep seeing the Grim Reaper peeking around the corner.

M. DEVIL

Clinton. Of course. We're coming up on his time. May be able to negotiate. . .

He grabs a poker and stirs a few logs in the fire.

JOHANNA

Oh no.

M. DEVIL

All mortals have to leave the earth eventually. You didn't come here to whine, did you? Careful not to bite the hand that feeds you.

JOHANNA

I expected to feel happier. . .

M. Devil lights a cigarette, inhales, and blows perfect smoke rings. He tilts his head back, stares into middle distance.

M. DEVIL

Let's see. Upending the all-male technology world? Check. Unprecedented success with "Thrill TV"? Check. Being recognized--internationally--as a media diva? Check. Oh, and being as thin as a toothpick while nibbling your way through every French bakery on the east coast? Checkmate.

JOHANNA

Okay. I got what I asked for. But I'm worried. About civilization. I never guessed that "Thrill TV" would become a monster.

M. DEVIL
(laughs)
And what did you expect? I never do
anything half-way.

M. Devil gets up, walks toward the stove, and adds a few logs to the fire. He stabs them with the poker while Johanna mops perspiration from her brow.

JOHANNA
It's been an amazing ride. But I
can't do it anymore. I want to call
it off. Our deal. To get my soul
back.

M. DEVIL
(reddening)
An exciting ride? You want your
soul back?

M. Devil spins around and faces her, holding the poker menacingly.

JOHANNA
(Lady Macbeth voice)
Yes. I think there's something in
my contract. A clause. But I was
too drunk at the time.

Johanna takes a sip of martini.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)
When I spoke to God, she mentioned.
. . .

M. DEVIL
Wait a goddamn minute. You spoke to
God? That lunatic on the
motorcycle, as vain as the day is
long. GOD?

JOHANNA
(tosses back her martini)
She's not a lunatic. She's rather.
. . .

M. DEVIL
Cease! Of all the double-crossing
soulless clients I've ever had, you
take the cake!

Just as Johanna swallows the last bite, M. Devil, red-faced with anger, comes after her with the poker. She skids around the apartment, trying to hide.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)
That's it. I'm banishing you to
Purgatory. A nice little preview of
Hell.

He herds Johanna to the red spiral staircase that leads down
into dark, dank infinity.

JOHANNA
No! It's so dark! And rancid.

He chases her down the stairs as she screams.

M. DEVIL (O.S.)
Get off at the board room on the
minus-25th floor.

INT. PURGATORY - DAY

Johanna, wandering around on the minus-25th floor, opens the
door onto a fun-house mirror version of a board meeting.

Everything is gray in this windowless room. An old-fashioned
coffee vending machine stands in the corner.

The bland all-male (cheap) "SUITS" sit around a polished
table. A standing alpha-male wearing a toupee delivers a
boring-as-hell PowerPoint with charts and graphs.

The other suits nod their heads, mirthlessly, dandruff
landing on their jacket collars.

SUIT #5
And that's why you're our
quarterback in the soul count biz,
Jim.

SUIT #6
We've got the enemy by the balls.

SUIT #7
This idea is a winner. A real kilt
lifter.

Johanna, apoplectic, searches for an escape hatch, but can't
find a door. She doubles over with spasms.

SUIT #8
(points to Johanna)
You over there. How about making us
some coffee, honey? Later you can
take dictation.

She scowls at him, but he doesn't notice and leers at her. He's a monster with a bad comb-over.

Johanna panics. Red-faced, she mumbles to herself. Her breathing is erratic; her eyes bulge in disbelief. She hears a voice.

WAGNER (O.S.)
Psssst. Over here.

Something moving behind a half-dead ficus tree in the corner catches Johanna's eye. It's Wagner. She stealthily inches her way toward him.

The suits are busy arguing over a flowchart. Johanna sneaks past undetected. Wagner takes her hand. They climb up a narrow staircase that leads to a dark, rank, Stygian tunnel.

INT. DARK TUNNEL - NIGHT

JOHANNA
(holding her nose)
Where the hell are we?

WAGNER
Subway. Abandoned tracks for the express train to Brooklyn. C'mon. Hurry.

JOHANNA
I can't breathe. The smell. It's repulsive!

WAGNER
(hands her a water bottle)
Take a big swig. Come on.

JOHANNA
I can't go on. I'm doomed. Let me just stay here and die.

WAGNER
Don't be such a diva. Just another couple of miles down here.

After a long, long struggle--finally--sounds from a cabaret waft into the tunnel. A shimmering staircase appears in the distance. Wagner and Johanna struggle to reach it.

INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT

JOHANNA

How did you ever find it?

WAGNER

Gabe showed me on Google Map. Look.
We're here.

They clamber up the stairs.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Filthy and panting, they burst into an underground nightclub. The singer, who they've interrupted, glowers at them.

Johanna, chastened, gives Wagner a big smile and collapses against him.

JOHANNA

You can't believe how awful it was
in that board room. If I had a soul
it would have been bored witless.

WAGNER

I've got a cab waiting.

EXT. NYC, W. 54TH STREET - NIGHT

A horse and carriage await them at the curb. The driver, dressed all in black, holds a small dog, sips a "travel martini." Johanna and Wagner collapse inside.

WAGNER

Boston. Back roads to Louisburg
Square.

The driver turns around to face them.

M. DEVIL

Well. Have I made my point?

The horse and carriage speed off toward the West Side Highway.

M. DEVIL (CONT'D)

Come my little protegees. The least
I can do is to give you a lift.

INT. JOHANNA'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Johanna lies on the couch eating pizza while watching "Thrill TV." She's participating in a Jeopardy-like quiz show and her answers show up on the scoreboard. She's winning. Her home phone rings but she ignores it.

Loud banging on the door.

DETECTIVES

Anyone home?

JOHANNA

I'm coming.

Johanna jumps up, kicks the pizza box under the couch, runs to the door and peers through the peephole.

INSERT CLOSE-UP

Two detectives. One is a young man built like a prizefighter. The other is a beleaguered, middle-aged woman.

RETURN TO SCENE

Johanna unlocks and opens the door. The detectives flash their badges.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Oh my God! What's going on?

MALE DETECTIVE

Are you Dr. Johanna Lucky?

JOHANNA

Yes. What is it?

MALE DETECTIVE

I'm sorry. There's been an accident.

JOHANNA

What? My mother? My father? What happened?

FEMALE DETECTIVE

Are you acquainted with a Clinton Frasier?

JOHANNA

Yes. Of course. He's the CEO of the company where I work. What's wrong?

MALE DETECTIVE

May we come in?

JOHANNA

Yes. Of course.

Johanna turns off "Thrill TV" and motions for the police to have a seat in the living room.

FEMALE DETECTIVE

I'm afraid we have some bad news.

JOHANNA

Oh no. (gasps) What happened?

FEMALE POLICE OFFICER

Are you familiar with "Thrill TV"?

JOHANNA

Yes. It's my project.

MALE DETECTIVE

Mr. Frasier was entertaining clients on his boat today. Out in the Harbor. Headed toward Martha's Vineyard. They were all watching "Thrill TV." Replay of Wimbledon. Mr. Frasier was playing. Virtually. You know. He pretended to swing a racquet and fell over. His heart.

JOHANNA

(nearly hysterical)

He's okay, though. Right? I'll get my things. Go to the hospital?

FEMALE DETECTIVE

Dr. Lucky. I'm sorry to have to tell you. Mr. Frasier died this afternoon at 1:14 p.m. On Halcyon Days. His yacht.

Johanna, shocked, takes in the news. Tears stream down her cheeks.

JOHANNA

NO! He didn't say it would happen this soon.

MALE DETECTIVE

Who didn't say?

JOHANNA

Nothing. I'm in shock. Why are you here? How did you find me?

FEMALE DETECTIVE

Mr. Frasier's cellphone. Your number was first, under "favorites."

JOHANNA

Where is Margery? His wife?

MALE DETECTIVE

She's not at home and is not responding to our calls. We're told she doesn't have a cellphone. We thought you might be able to help us locate her.

JOHANNA

Yes. Maybe she's at the beach house.

FEMALE DETECTIVE

Already checked. We need you to come down to the station.

Johanna's cellphone rings.

JOHANNA

May I?

FEMALE DETECTIVE

Yes.

JOHANNA (V.O.)

(into phone)

Barney. Two detectives are here. Clinton's had a heart attack. I NEED YOU!

BARNEY (V.O.)

(filtered)

I know, babe. I tried to reach you. Where are you?

JOHANNA (V.O.)

(filtered)

Home. But I'm on my way to the police station. Just a formality.

BARNEY (V.O.)

(filtered)

I'm on my way. Meet you there.

Johanna clicks off the phone. She keeps shaking her head in disbelief, wiping her tears with her sleeve.

MALE DETECTIVE

The doctors said it was quick. He died sailing, which I gather was something he enjoyed.

JOHANNA

But I wasn't ready for him to die! No one was. He was my mentor. My friend.

Johanna slowly gets her jacket and purse, as if sleepwalking.

FEMALE DETECTIVE

We also found this.

She hands Johanna a piece of crumpled paper with a 212- phone number (M. Devil's number, which she has memorized). Johanna shows a nanosecond of recognition, then goes back to sobbing.

MALE DETECTIVE

Look familiar?

JOHANNA

No. What happens when you dial it?

FEMALE DETECTIVE

Funny thing. A guy picks up and says it's a dog grooming service. But there's no listing.

MALE DETECTIVE

Can you think of any reason Clinton would have been clutching this phone number in his final hour?

JOHANNA

No. None at all.

INT. HISTORIC CHAPEL, BOSTON'S NORTH SHORE - DAY

Spring day. Margery Frasier and other Boston Brahmin-type family members; Johanna (clutching Barney's arm); Nigel and Laquita (who are inconspicuously holding hands); Wagner (bereft; the suits, and others from Celestial Media, file into the chapel.

The sound of a choir, accompanied by an organ, floats out the doorway.

Johanna detaches from Barney and gets close enough to Wagner to whisper in his ear.

INT. HISTORIC CHAPEL - DAY

JOHANNA

Psst. What the hell happened? What was Clinton doing clutching THAT phone number when it happened?

WAGNER

Clinton was in.

JOHANNA

He was in? You never told me!

WAGNER

It was all on the down low. You're not supposed to know. Whatever you do, don't--

Just then the portly young MINISTER clears his throat (as a way to shush Johanna and Wagner) and begins speaking from the pulpit.

MINISTER

Dear friends. We gather together to honor one of our brethren . . .

Johanna, clutching Barney, spots a peculiar looking man, bundled up in a down jacket, in the back row. A small poodle sits at his feet.

M. Devil returns her gaze, crooks an eyebrow, and nods formally.

Barney catches this exchange. He's puzzled.

BARNEY

(whispering)
Who the hell is that?

JOHANNA

(whispering)
Oh. Um. Just an investor.

Barney shivers involuntarily. He looks at Johanna as if seeing her in a new light.

INT. JOHANNA'S TOWNHOUSE/LIVING ROOM

Johanna is sniffing into her handkerchief while watching an old, black-and-white movie on "Thrill TV." The area surrounding the TV is a simulated art deco-style hotel room.

Johanna reclines in a white satin robe with ostrich feathers (picture Jean Harlow). She is eating caviar on small toasts.

. . .

. . . The romantic lead steps off the screen (he is suave-- but transparent, literally) and lies down with her on the couch. . .

. . . Just as she turns to make out with this ghostly actor, she notices the time, gasps, and falls off the couch. . .

INT. JOHANNA'S TOWNHOUSE/BEDROOM

. . . Johanna flings the robe and matching slippers on the bed and throws on clothes. She grabs her briefcase and runs out the door. . .

EXT. BOSTON PUBLIC GARDEN - DAY

. . . Johanna rushes past flocks of tourists heading toward the Swan Boats taking pictures. Checking her watch, she zips around them, but they're in her way. . .

. . . Johanna takes a diagonal path that leads to a STATUE OF AN ANGEL. It is ANGEL OF THE WATERS, by Daniel Chester French, 1924.

Is the Angel murmuring something? She looks up. Impossible.

. . .

. . . An acorn falls from a branch and pings Johanna on the head. Then another. Then a third. Hard. Ouch!. . .

. . . Johanna, dazed, holds her hand on her head and lays down on a park bench, using her briefcase as a pillow. She goes into a trance-like state . . .

. . . The statue's head and hands move ever so slightly, like a mime artist impersonating a statue of an angel, barely perceptible gestures. Angel has a thick Boston accent. . .

ANGEL

Pssst. Up here.

JOHANNA

What? Who are you?

ANGEL
Evangeline. Friend of Gabe's.

JOHANNA
Okay. I've officially gone mad.

She twirls her index finger around one ear ("crazy").

ANGEL
Shhh. Listen up. Even though I think you're a total sell-out, I can help you.

JOHANNA
What are you talking about?

ANGEL
M. Devil. Your deal. I know everything. God's wicked pissed, ya know.

A homeless man comes by and digs through a trash can for empty bottles. Tourists stroll near them. Johanna and the Angel freeze until they are alone again.

JOHANNA
I'm trying to get out of it.

ANGEL
Hah. Guess you're not as bright as everyone thinks.

JOHANNA
Why? What do you know about it?

ANGEL
I know about the contract. The love clause. Barney. You're in love with him, right?

JOHANNA
Am I? Yes. I AM! But he knows what a ruthless bitch I am. Why would he want to get back together?

The Angel pantomimes locking her lips and throwing away the key. Then she morphs back into a statue. Johanna rubs her sore head, takes out her cell phone and leaves.

JOHANNA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Howard, sorry I'm late. Bumped into someone. (beat) No. You're my sanity.

Johanna rushes up Beacon Hill toward the Park Street subway station.

INT. MIT/HOWARD'S OFFICE - DAY

Johanna, with a demonic gleam in her eyes, meets with Howard, who looks like he hasn't slept for days. Their heads are huddled together and they speak in whispered bursts.

HOWARD

I don't see how we can. It's ubiquitous. And our Beijing team is preparing a launch.

JOHANNA

I don't give a damn. We've gotta do this. Take it down.

A knock on the door. Howard opens it just a sliver and nods to a grad student. The student catches sight of Johanna and practically genuflects. Howard returns to his computer.

HOWARD

This is quite a drastic step. Powerful ramifications.

JOHANNA

I'm aware. Please. We're on tenuous moral ground here.

HOWARD

It could be dangerous. The damn quantum physics and all.

JOHANNA

Whatever. It. Takes. We're talking about the fall of civilization here. I'm hooked on it too, you know.

Howard stares into space for several beats while Johanna forces herself not to speak.

HOWARD

Frankly so am I. Hold on. There is something that might work. But you'll need at least two accomplices. And you'll only have 23 minutes. Not a second more.

JOHANNA

I'm listening.

HOWARD
You're not afraid of heights are
you?

JOHANNA
Me? Nope.

Howard opens his wallet, takes out a dollar bill, and smooths
it out on the desk in front of them.

HOWARD
You're familiar with the triangle?
The all-seeing eye derived from
Egyptian mythology? The eye looks
kindly upon prosperity.

JOHANNA
Never really gave it much thought.

INT. WATERTOWN DINER - DAY

Johanna and Barney sit in a booth, scrambled eggs congealing
on their plates. Gabe pretends to polish glassware as he
eavesdrops on them.

JOHANNA
I can't tell you the details. Very
hush-hush. And more than a little
scary.

BARNEY
Then whatever it is, don't do it.

JOHANNA
I have no choice. Trust me.

She butters a blueberry muffin. Barney pushes his plate away.

BARNEY
Call me. From wherever you are.

JOHANNA
I can't. There won't be time.

BARNEY
I just realized something. Lately.
As far as I'm concerned you're
right up there with Larry Bird.

JOHANNA
Are you just saying that to up the
ante? So I'll try harder to come
back alive?

Johanna grabs his hands across the table. They exit arm in arm. Gabe slips Johanna a note on the way out. The Icarus tattoo on his arm waves at her shyly.

INT. LAQUITA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Laquita clacks around the living room in her 5-inch heels. She's (virtually) participating in a reality show on "Thrill TV" about fashionistas who are competing for a cash prize.

Laquita's living room has been transformed into a fashion runway. She is holding a microphone, calling the shots for the winner of this round.

Empty yoghurt containers and diet soda cans litter the surfaces, as though she's been held captive for days.

The doorbell rings. She click-clacks her way toward it and opens it. Johanna and Wagner (whose guitar is slung across his chest) elbow their way inside.

JOHANNA

You're late! LET'S GO ALREADY! Get dressed.

LAQUITA

Oh God. I'm ready. Really.

WAGNER

You've been watching it, haven't you. It's OK. Johanna had to drag me away from a barroom brawl.

JOHANNA

YOU'RE KILLING ME. GET YOUR HEADS IN THE GAME, YOU TWO!

INT. LAQUITA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Johanna, Laquita, and Wagner rush out of Laquita's apartment, skip the elevator, and run down several flights of stairs, 2 at a time.

EXT. LAQUITA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Gabe, driving A pickup truck, idles at the curb. Johanna, Laquita, and Wagner jump inside. They head toward Kenmore Square.

GABE

Dear God! Dark clouds are moving
in. It's going to pour any minute.
We should reschedule.

JOHANNA

Impossible. We have to go through
with it tonight.

Laquita and Wagner exchange nervous glances.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Okay. You both know what you have
to do, right?

LAQUITA AND WAGNER

Right.

The truck gets stuck in a terrible traffic jam. Gridlock!

Johanna jumps out, starts directing traffic.

JOHANNA

EMERGENCY. LET US THROUGH!

A Boston cop on foot patrol catches sight of Johanna.

COP ON FOOT PATROL

Hey you! Who do you think you are?

Johanna, ignoring him, creates a break between two cars--just
enough space for the truck to get through. She notices that
some drivers are watching "Thrill TV" on their dashboards,
distracted. She jumps back inside. The truck breaks loose and
speeds toward Beacon Street.

Wagner and Laquita nervously check their watches. Johanna
passes around a giant bag of M&Ms and downs a handful.

Gabe stays with the truck in an illegal parking space in
front of the CITCO sign. Everyone jumps out.

Wagner's River Styx band mates are warming up. Fans gather,
sleepwalking zombies who have bothered to step out into the
real world because of live music.

Wagner jumps up on stage, greets the fans, and begins
playing. Fans roar with excitement while thunder rumbles in
the distance.

Johanna and Laquita grab a tall ladder from the back of the
truck and set it in front of one of the buildings that
supports the CITCO sign.

Johanna climbs the ladder. A flashlight dangles from her wrist. She reaches the roof, takes a deep breath, and climbs up the supporting beams on one side of the CITCO sign.

JOHANNA

NOW!

Laquita clicks her stop-watch.

INSERT

Close-up of stopwatch that is set to count down 23 minutes.

RETURN TO SCENE

Laquita mans the ladder while Johanna searches for something . . .

Johanna's foot slips. She loses purchase on the small ledge she is standing on . . . Gasps. . .

Thunder gets louder and closer. A bolt of lightning flashes across the Charles River. . .

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

(to steady her nerves)

"Out, damn'd spot! out, I say!—One;
two: why, then
'tis time to do't.—Hell is
murky."

Johanna regains her footing and shakily climbs to the top of the illuminated triangle (the CITCO logo).

She finally reaches the summit and pops off the back of an electrical unit. She trains her flashlight on a tangle of multicolored wires.

Lightening flashes. The band unplugs their instruments and amps but keeps playing.

Thunder clap. Johanna, frightened, drops her flashlight.

Two bored BOSTON POLICEMEN drive by in a cruiser and slow down. An empty section of the dashboard is labeled "Thrill TV," to show that it had been installed but ripped out.

YOUNG POLICEMAN

Something's up. I've got a sixth sense for this type of thing.

OLD POLICEMAN

You and every other cop in the city.

(MORE)

OLD POLICEMAN (CONT'D)
Let's head over to Landsdowne
Street. Wet T-shirt contest in
progress.

The cruiser crosses over a median strip and makes a U-turn.

A flash of lightning illuminates the area where Johanna's
searching. Finally! She sees a metal box labeled "Thrill TV."

LAQUITA
Seven minutes AND 43 seconds! And
this is not what I meant when I
said I wanted to learn the
business.

Johanna unfolds Howard's directions. She looks down at the
ground and her fear of heights kicks in big time. Her hands
shake.

Music from the band still roars in the background.

Johanna frowns at the drawing, takes a deep breath and pulls
some wires from inside the "Thrill TV" box. Nothing. She
plugs them back in.

Beads of sweat roll down her face, blurring her vision.
Thunderclap in the distance. A few drops of rain plop down
onto Howard's drawing, blurring the diagram.

LAQUITA (CONT'D)
FOUR MINUTES TEN SECONDS! HOW'S IT
GOING?

JOHANNA
(crazed)
"What need we fear who knows it,
when none can call our
pow'r to accompt?—Yet who would
have thought the old man to
have had so much blood in him?"

A bolt of lightning illuminates the drawing. Johanna has an a-
ha moment. She reaches for a different set of wires attached
to a complicated motherboard.

A few more big drops of rain splash down.

LAQUITA
FORTY-FIVE SECONDS! NEED TO STEP ON
IT!

Gabe sprints from the truck and runs toward Johanna.

GABE
I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE. SEE THE
TINY RED WIRES? PULL THEM! NOW!

JOHANNA
ARE YOU SURE?

GABE
YES, GOD JUST TEXTED ME. DO IT!

The red wires seem permanently welded to the motherboard. Johanna tugs hard. Finally she's able to free them.

Lightening strikes the "Thrill TV" box. It bursts into psychedelic flames.

Everyone at the concert looks up at Johanna. She's frozen in place--stunned. Flames surround her.

Johanna comes to and scrambles down from the CITCO sign. Gabe runs over to hold the ladder. Laquita runs up the ladder to help her down.

Johanna is so limp that Laquita practically has to carry her.

Wagner, Gabe, and Laquita huddle around Johanna in the pouring rain. They jump up and down, congratulating her.

Gabe points to a white limo on Beacon Street. Everyone looks. It slows down. God rolls down the window, looks directly at Johanna, and holds up an iPad.

GOD
Watched the whole take down on
this. Well done, my dear.

The window closes as the limo glides by.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - DAY

People are back, milling around in a hollow-eyed daze. Two male NEW YORKERS in their 20s grab a table in the no-traffic zone and set down their lunches.

NEW YORKER #1
Yeah, it's really strange. Not sure
what to do with myself anymore. Now
that it's gone. I feel like my
fuckin' dog died.

NEW YORKER #2

I know! I find myself just staring
at the walls. As if I could will it
back into being.

They stare into the abyss, wordlessly, depressed.

INT. M. DEVIL'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

M. Devil, fuming, paces back-and-forth across the living
room. Dante follows closely, playfully.

M. Devil climbs the red, spiral staircase to his at-home law
office and grabs Johanna's file.

He pulls out her contract. Lights a match. Considers burning
it. The match goes out.

Knock on the door. He opens it to find -- Gabe.

M. DEVIL

Oh. It's you.

GABE

May I come in?

M. DEVIL

I guess. But do me the honor of
keeping your tattoos under control.
They freak me out.

GABE

Deal. I came to talk about
Johanna's case.

M. DEVIL

Don't ever mention her name to me
again. I was just setting her
contract on fire.

GABE

So, you found out about Barney.

M. DEVIL

Barney? I'm deeply pissed that she
took down "Thrill TV." I was having
a grand time pitching it on TV.
Best gig I ever had in a very long
life.

GABE

They're in love.

M. Devil stares off into space.

M. DEVIL

Oh yeah?

INT. BARNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

A gorgeous young reporter, dressed in red, is sitting in Barney's office when he arrives with his coffee and the "Globe."

BARNEY

Hello? Do I know you?

REPORTER

Mr. Murphy. I'm here on special assignment. I'm a huge fan of your writing. I never thought I'd have a chance to actually meet you!

BARNEY

Uh, appreciate that.

The reporter walks right over to Barney. He acts like he's drunk a love potion. She smiles up at him seductively. He kisses her recklessly. She loosens his tie.

Barney kicks the door closed with his foot. They fall onto his desk spilling coffee all over his papers. He pulls her down onto the floor, coffee dripping on them as they kiss passionately.

Barney's cellphone rings. The reporter grabs it and throws it across the room. Just as he's about to straddle her, he looks up and there it is--the autographed Celtics basketball perched on his shelf--on a silver pedestal.

Barney's POV - INSCRIPTION

"To My Hero, Love, Johanna"

RETURN TO SCENE

Barney jumps up and pulls up the reporter from the floor.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

Christ! I'm so sorry. I don't know what came over me.

REPORTER

I rather enjoyed it.

BARNEY

This can never happen again! I mean never.

She pulls herself together, smiles seductively, and hands him her card. He opens the door for her, trying to look nonchalant, and ushers her out.

INT. CELESTIAL MEDIA/HALLWAY - DAY

Barney exits his office and rushes to a conference room, dabbing ineffectively at the coffee stains on his shirt.

A frumpy EDITOR walks by, a pencil sticking out of her bun.

EDITOR

Nice, Barney. This isn't a frat house, you know. (softening) Top drawer of my file cabinet. A clean shirt, for emergencies. It's yours.

Barney walks toward Editor's office, grateful and chagrined.

INT. BAR/RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Johanna sits at the bar, morosely staring into a glass of wine. The TV is broadcasting a baseball game--Yankees: 11; Red Sox: 3.

D.J. BEARDSLEY, a suave intellectual, appears on the bar stool next to her.

D.J. BEARDSLEY

Dr. Lucky. At last we meet.

JOHANNA

Do I know you?

D.J. BEARDSLEY

Not yet. D.J. Beardsley. The writer.

They shake hands. Johanna is stand-offish.

JOHANNA

Oh yes. That book. Something about aliens taking over Utah. An overnight sensation.

D.J. BEARDSLEY

That's history. I'm dying to write your life story.

JOHANNA

Why?

D.J. BEARDSLEY

Ha. Don't feign modesty. You're one of the most intriguing woman of the 21st Century.

JOHANNA

My life story, as you call it, isn't over. Don't bury me yet.

Johanna acts as if D.J. Beardsley has cast a spell over her. She puts her hand on his thigh, caresses his ear with her tongue, leaves a \$20 bill on the bar, and takes off with him, his hand fondling her backside.

M. Devil sits incognito at the opposite end of the bar, smiling as he sips his brandy.

EXT. ALLEY OUTSIDE BAR - NIGHT

D.J. Beardsley pushes Johanna up against the side of a building, slips his hand under her blouse and starts fondling her breasts.

Lots of heavy making out as Johanna undoes his zipper and slips one hand down his pants, as she pulls him toward her with the other. He pulls up her skirt and starts fondling her. . .

Just then a window opens and music wafts down into the alley-- Mozart's "Clarinet Concerto in A." Johanna and Barney's favorite piece! The music jolts her back to reality.

JOHANNA

I've gotta go. I can't.

D.J. BEARDSLEY

Playing hard to get? That's a turn-on for me.

JOHANNA

No. I just can't. Let me go.

Johanna pushes D.J. Beardsley off her and pulls herself together. He is visibly annoyed and becomes hostile.

D.J. BEARDSLEY

Does this mean no book deal?

JOHANNA

No book deal. I can't.

D.J. BEARDSLEY
So you keep saying.

Johanna runs toward the street and hails a cab. He makes a fist and punches his other hand several times.

D.J. BEARDSLEY (CONT'D)
Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

INT. JOHANNA'S TOWNHOUSE/BATHROOM - NIGHT

Johanna takes a bubble bath while talking on the phone. <Try a split screen here?>

JOHANNA
(into phone)
Nothing happened. I promise. But it was like I was on a fast-moving train headed for Sex City. I jumped off at the last minute. Before completely blowing it with Barney.

INT. M. DEVIL'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM

M. Devil, wears a headset as he sits in front of electronic wire-tapping gear. He's heard everything. Furious, he removes his headset and fumes.

INT. OLD-FASHIONED BAR - NIGHT

Barney sips a beer while playing poker with his buddies.

BARNEY
It was an out-of-body experience.
I'm telling you, the woman was smouldering!

He shuffles the deck of cards and deals.

BARNEY (CONT'D)
I bailed out at the last possible second. Johanna would've figured it out. She just knows things.

A shadowy figure overhears all. It's M. Devil ineptly pretending to play pool at a nearby table. He is quietly seething.

INT. GABE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gabe sits in front of electronic wiretapping equipment. He sets down his headset.

He takes out his cellphone and speed dials M. Devil.

INT. M. DEVIL'S APARTMENT/KITCHEN - NIGHT

M. Devil is in the middle of cooking a complicated dish, a cookbook propped up on the counter. The phone rings.

M. DEVIL
(into phone)
Yeah? Not a good time, Gabe. (beat)
I don't believe you. They can't
still be in love.

M. Devil slams down the phone. He picks up Johanna's contract, rolls it up, and ignites it over a gas burner.

INT. JOHANNA'S APARTMENT/BEDROOM - DAY

Johanna, wearing a sleep mask, stirs as her alarm clock rings and light pours in through the windows.

She gets out of bed and heads for the shower.

INT. JOHANNA'S APARTMENT/BATHROOM

She takes off her nightgown, catches sight of her naked self in the mirror, and screams, horrified.

Then she studies her full-figured reflection. Her frown turns into something like approval. She strokes her curves. Then the light dawns on her.

JOHANNA
My contract. . . M. Devil. . . ?

She jumps into the shower and sings female-power type songs. She hops back out, wraps a towel around herself, and sashays over to her closet.

INT. JOHANNA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Johanna goes through her closet, pulls out slinky dresses, holds them up to her new (old) body, and discards them onto the bed.

Finally she seizes upon a Hawaiian muumuu, adds a belt, checks her reflection, and shrugs. What the hell?

INT. BEACON HILL CAFE - NIGHT

Barney, dressed in business clothes, briefcase in hand, stands in front of the entrance to a cafe on Charles Street. Johanna, wearing a simple ponytail and T-shirt, walks toward him.

JOHANNA

Sorry. I'm a mess. I've been packing up my things. After selling the antiques. Guess what. The horsehair love seat is going to an historic home in Concord.

BARNEY

Oh, too bad. Let me buy you a soda. And a hamburger?

JOHANNA

Nix on the hamburger. Look at me!

BARNEY

I happen to like the way you look. I'm a fan of this look, remember?

JOHANNA

Just a salad. Believe it or not (patting hips) so am I.

Johanna takes a seat at a nearby table while Barney orders soda, and pizza slices, and a salad. She fiddles with the salt and pepper shaker.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

The nightmare's not over yet. (fighting back tears) I feel so bad! I nearly destroyed society! And took everyone down with me.

BARNEY

On the upside, I hear the "Thrill TV" rehab industry is booming.

JOHANNA

You see! Oh, Barney. I'm so ashamed. And look how I treated you! I really went off the rails.

BARNEY

Yeah. No sane man would have stuck around. That's what Pepita said. She was jealous as hell.

JOHANNA

I'm sorry. No, that's a lie. (beat) All that talk about greed. Fame. Wealth. And how it corrupts you. It's true. It robs you of your soul.

The waiter delivers 2 slices of pizza to Barney and a salad to Johanna. She helps herself to his pizza.

BARNEY

Right on.

JOHANNA

They can take the red carpet and shove it. Along with the MME awards.

BARNEY

Leave those to evil Nigel. Whatever happened to him, anyway?

JOHANNA

India. Seeking spiritual enlightenment. Meeting with a descendent of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. In honor of George Harrison.

BARNEY

Gold cufflinks and all?

JOHANNA

He gave those f-ing things to Laquita. Turns out they used to be an item.

He crooks an eyebrow at her.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Yeah. Who knew?

Johanna's cellphone rings; she pointedly ignores it.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

I saw this show about the universe when I was watching "Thrill TV." It turns out we're all made of stardust.

BARNEY

And I'm the King of Prussia.

JOHANNA

It's true. Each of us is made of all the elements on the periodic table. Just like stardust.

BARNEY

That explains a lot. I guess?

They get up to leave.

JOHANNA

They offered me Clinton's job. Corner office and everything.

BARNEY

What'd you say?

JOHANNA

That I'm too busy with Books4Kids. Want to come over?

BARNEY

Yeah.

They walk past posters for "Thrill TV," covered with graffiti, and climb the brick sidewalks of Beacon Hill, antique lanterns guiding their path.

Barney notices the big "For Sale" sign in front of Johanna's townhouse in the distance.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

Damn. I never got to drive your red sports car.

She gives him a fake punch on the arm.

When they get close to the For Sale sign, Johanna pulls it out of the ground and throws it in the trash.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

Huh?

JOHANNA

I changed my mind. This would make a good headquarters. Lots of room to sort out the kids' books.

INT. JOHANNA'S TOWNHOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Johanna and Barney, holding hands, sit on floor pillows and snuggle. The room is stripped bare except for cups, a half-empty bottle of wine, the photo of Steve Jobs, and a TV.

BARNEY

How 'bout if we turn on the TV,
just for old time's sake?

JOHANNA

Ugh. If you insist.

Johanna switches off the lamp, light bouncing off her tear-shaped tattoo. The screen glows. Barney takes the remote. Static fills the room as he channel surfs.

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

. . . We thought the Sox would pull
it out tonight, but they're still
eleven runs . . .

Barney changes the channel.

TV HOST (V.O.)

. . . And which woman will the
bachelor. . .

M. DEVIL AS TV PITCHMAN (V.O.)

. . . Favorite oldies from the
sixties. Herman's . . .

BARNEY

Guess there's nothing on.

He clicks off the TV.

JOHANNA

Thank God. Really. Thank God!

BARNEY

I didn't come here to watch TV
anyway.

JOHANNA

No?

Barney buries his face in Johanna's cleavage. They kiss passionately and then collapse into each others arms.

FADE OUT:

THE END