

Skyler Blythe
Is Having a Moment

by
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FADE IN:

INT. UPSCALE LIVING ROOM - WHENEVER

SUBTITLE: SPRING, TEN YEARS AGO

A WOMAN is crouched on the floor sobbing, her words barely audible through catches of breath. She's a mess, with greasy hair and her face streaked with tears, mascara, snot. She stares up at someone, her eyes pleading, searching.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Don't you...got a...heart?! Ain't I...al-ways been...g-g-good to you?! Why are you...treating...me this wa-ay-ayyy?!?!

2ND WOMAN (O.C.)

Uh, well for *starters*, you psychotic *freak*, you don't own *shampoo*, you smell like a *yeast infection* and *nasal fluids* are cascading down your *chin*. So either pick your grimy ass up off my *Carrara floor* or I'll have my *concierge* do it *for* you!

Audience laughter rings out as the **2ND WOMAN** is revealed: a perky, freckled, extremely-short-but-not-quite-petite blonde, stylishly dressed...and center stage with her scene partner, mid-performance in a small, black-box theatre.

WOMAN

(horrified)

B-b-but...I'm your only s-sibling!

2ND WOMAN

Uh, correction: you're *mom's pathetic bastard kid*.

She breaks the 4th wall, addressing the audience.

2ND WOMAN

I'm sorry, but this creature has the grammatical skills of an illiterate Piggly Wiggly clerk and not the slightest acquaintance with Paul Mitchell! And look at me: *hello*, Seven Sisters, four-point-oh?!

More laughter; the audience clearly adores her...and it's written all over her face that she craves their adoration.

INT. OFF STAGE LEFT THEATRE GREEN ROOM - LATE NIGHT

A crowd is milling about a potluck buffet and makeshift open bar, loudly enjoying themselves post-show. The walls are decorated with company headshots and production stills from the theatre's long & varied history, as well as a stylish neon logo sign heralding *The Off Stage Left*.

A spoon clinks against a glass, and an **ACTOR** rises above the crowd on a chair, clamoring for their attention.

ACTOR

People, please! Some respect for
the esteemed *auteur* who walks among
us! I give you writer-director
Kevin Lanford!

KEVIN, early 30s, is found in the crowd and pushed toward the chair, where the actor pulls him up to take his place.

CROWD

*Speech, speech! / Be brilliant,
knock our socks off! / Laaaanford!,
etc.*

The crowd quiets down.

KEVIN

Oh man, I hate closings...so I'll
just say thanks to everyone who
came out to make the run a
success...and to Off Stage Left for
the World Premiere...and to the
best cast & crew an eternally
"emerging playwright" could hope
for!

A chant breaks out via a small group in the corner.

COMPANY MEMBERS

Broadway! Broadway!!

KEVIN

Ha! The name's Lanford, people,
not Durang or Kushner! Oh, and
special thanks to Mary Jane for
taking a chance on a small play
when her corporate board rides her
ass to, y'know, *make money*.

Revealed near the bar is **MARY JANE MILLER**, late 40s, bitter & insecure yet inextricably cocky, and well on her way to being sloshed. She raises her glass in salute, drenching her blouse in the process.

KEVIN

So have a great time! See ya
'round the ol' ghost light!

As the crowd responds, the 2nd woman from the play joins him on the chair before he can descend, and she's so small there's actually room; **COOPER HARRIS**, 29, has such an electric personality that she effortlessly commands the crowd's attention.

COOPER

Okay hooligans, control the ADD for
ten more seconds!

She presents Kevin with a wrapped gift.

COOPER

Every writer should have something
shiny on their desk, so we pooled
our meager cast resources...and
until the awards start rolling in
we wanted you to have this.

Kevin opens it; it's an engraved, gold-plated pen stand with a mini-globe.

KEVIN

(touched)
Wow...it's perfect, thanks!

He gives Cooper a hug, which she returns perfunctorily, clearly uncomfortable with affection.

COOPER

Take it easy, chief, it's only
worth twenty bucks, don't drop it.
(to the crowd)
Proceed, party people!

The music cranks, the party resumes.

Alone at the bar, Mary Jane slams another drink, narrowing her hardened, suspicious eyes into slits as she watches Cooper disappear into the crowd.

EXT. THEATRE PARKING LOT - LATER

The sobbing woman from the play is sitting all alone on the hood of a beat-up, junker Volvo, staring up at the night sky, nursing a Diet Coke; say hello to **SKYLER BLYTHE** in her final, melancholy days of 29.

COOPER (O.C.)
Hey! *iChica!*

Startled, Skyler drops her soda can. Cooper joins her on the car with two beers, hands her one.

COOPER
Don't drink that crap, corrodes car batteries. Why the sad-sack routine, you bummed about closing?

Skyler shrugs.

COOPER
Sad we couldn't afford a better gift for Kevin?

Skyler shakes her head.

COOPER
Cat rip out your tongue and leave a bloody stump of wiggling pink flesh?

Skyler sighs, stares back up at the sky.

SKYLER
I'm just...pondering the full moon.
The immensity of the world.
Wondering what's out there for me.

Cooper stares at her for a moment.

COOPER
You're *kidding*, right? Luis Rickard's doing nude jello shots in the men's dressing room and you're *existentializing?!!*

SKYLER
(lost in herself)
I mean, will I ever fall in love?
Or have a real acting career?
(MORE)

SKYLER (cont'd)

Or buy a house or have a baby or drive a car with windows that actually roll down and that you don't have to reach your hand through to open the door?

COOPER

Uh...*yes, yes, probably, maybe* and
(off the car)
the sooner the better.

SKYLER

(hopeful)
You think so, really?

COOPER

Beats the shit outta me. Why are you torturing yourself and, uh, *me* on closing night?

SKYLER

'Cause that's it! Exactly! What if it's *really* closing night?! What if I never get my due as an artist, what if I've peaked with a lousy Equity-waiver play in a forty-three seat theatre and I'm destined to spend my life temping in offices and living in a tiny studio apartment to afford acting class?!

She turns to Cooper, desperate.

SKYLER

What if this is *it* for me, Cooper?!

Cooper calmly considers for a moment...then slaps her.

SKYLER

(shocked)
Ow.

COOPER

Get one thing straight: you're not owed *anything* by *anyone*. Not this town, not this business, not your colleagues.

(MORE)

COOPER (cont'd)

You get where you get by hard work & perseverance, and if you haven't learned that by the ripe old age of *blahty-blah*, then your *destiny* will be wasting time on self-pity while others celebrate their accomplishments with laughter & camaraderie & nude jello shots off Luis Rickard's killer abs!

Laughter rings out from inside the theatre.

COOPER

Thank you, people. Perfect timing.

SKYLER

(mopey)

Thirty. I'll be thirty next week.

COOPER

Good, a milestone! No better time to screw up your courage and face your future with your chin up, your chest out and your talent leading the way!

Skyler looks back up at the sky.

COOPER

Look, Skyler...we're all in the same boat. Hell, I'm gonna be thirty myself in October. My pathetic agent's *useless*, and I've never been on a date with someone whose business card couldn't've read *Professional Douchebag*. But y'know what? While you were out *here* looking for answers in dead celestial beings, I was in *there* making a redheaded stud strip to nothing and slurp eighty-proof raspberry jello from a Dixie cup. So which of us will remember this night more fondly?

Skyler smiles sheepishly.

COOPER

Maybe great things are just around the corner for us. Maybe not. But no one chooses this business for the odds, you want guarantees, go be a CPA.

(MORE)

COOPER (cont'd)
 There's always beans to count and
 morons who need 'em counted.

She swigs her beer, single-handedly crushes the can.

SKYLER
 (amazed)
 How'd you *do* that?

COOPER
 Three brothers, strong tendons.

LUIS, a buff redhead, emerges from the theatre in skimpy
 briefs.

LUIS
 (drunk)
*Cooper Harris! Get yer ass back in
 that dressin' room, yer five behind
 and the jello's gettin' runny!*

COOPER
 So he's not naked yet. Gimme five
 more minutes 'n three more slurps.

She heads back inside, grabbing Skyler's untouched beer.

COOPER
 Snooze you lose, lady.

Skyler's left to ponder a twisted aluminum can, a vast, dark
 sky and her own bemused, uncertain smile.

Sultry BARRY WHITE MUSIC plays as...

INT. GREEN ROOM - LATER

...Skyler, snoozing on the couch, awakens with a jolt,
 oblivious to the lime jello oozing onto her blouse from the
 sad paper cup she clutches. Getting her bearings, she tunes
 in to the other party die-hards: couples and small groups
 deep in conversation, sharing a joint or raiding the skeletal
 remains of the bar. A glance at a wall clock tells her it's
 nearly 2 AM.

INT. THEATRE LOBBY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Emerging from the ladies room in low light, Skyler stumbles
 on a sneaker here and a pump there, inadvertently
 interrupting a **MOANING COUPLE** passionately making out on a
 lobby couch, near a tripod and video equipment. Embarrassed,
 she rushes past.

MOANING GUY

(groggy)

Yo, Skyler...tape should be no prob
to edit, how many copies d'ya want?

Skyler awkwardly averts her gaze.

SKYLER

Oh, y'know, a dozen or so, hey I'll
call ya tomorrow, 'k?

And she scurries off.

INT. THEATRE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Skyler yawns as she passes the theatre office window,
oblivious of...

INT. THEATRE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

...Cooper and Mary Jane, deep in argument, only one of them
sober.

MARY JANE

(slurring)

Jusss...admit what you...fucking
did!

COOPER

Why is this a federal *case*?! It
was a lousy ten-minute tour, they
just wanted to see our space!

MARY JANE

Because they wanna...**take it over!**
'Caushe they know our...city grant
is... upfer

(struggling)

re-...re-

COOPER

Renewal, look, you know I'm only in
their next show, I'm not in their
stupid *company*, and if--

MARY JANE

(ridiculous)

A-*haaa!* So our theatre's *stupid*,
you admit it!!!

COOPER

I said *their* company's...
 (a different approach)
 Okay, look, I won't deny they put
 me in an awkward spot here, and if
 I had a *do over*...
 (heartfelt)
 ...really, Mary Jane, can we just
drop it?! I've been here three
years, how many shows have we done
together, aren't we friends? If
there's anyone's loyalty you
shouldn't question, it's mine,
hello?!

Mary Jane sloppily pours another Scotch, drenching her desk
 in the process.

MARY JANE

Bullshit, lady! Bulllll-*shit!* If
 you were *loyal* you'd-a told those
 mother*fuckers* to *stick their dicks*
in their ears

COOPER

Lovely, we have fully
 devolved into sailor-speak,
 this'll get us somewhere...

MARY JANE

instead-a bringin' 'em to *my*
 theatre to try *fuckin'* me
 outta my culshural affairs
grant and the best Equity-
 waiver space ever! You got
brass balls, little girl,
brassh fuckin' *balls!*

They stare at each other for a moment as Mary Jane gulps her
 drink, drenching her shirt more than quenching her thirst.

MARY JANE

(simmering anger)
Yer a liar...an opp-or-tun-ist-ic,
self-serving liar.

Cooper considers; it hurts, but a decision has been made.

COOPER

Hey. Okay. Here's a tip: there's
 this hip new club called Alcoholics
 Anonymous. Music's not so great
 but I hear the coffee *rocks.*

Mary Jane seethes, then impulsively throws the rest of her
 drink at Cooper's face...but only gets the wall.

COOPER

Nice shot. Probably wanna clean that up ASAP, cheap hooch eats through paint.

She heads for the door.

MARY JANE

(furious)

Get outta here! And don't you dare ever come back, you little no-talent shit!

Cooper pauses at the door and doesn't look back.

COOPER

You must be psychic; that was my plan.

She leaves. Now a frustrated, caged animal, Mary Jane paces, coming face-to-face with a wall of framed production photos, several featuring Cooper. She glares at them for a moment... then angrily swings at the wall with a feral growl, sending frames crashing to the floor in a crescendo of broken glass & trashed friendship.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Skyler's Volvo is *sput-sput-sputtering* in an attempt to turn over before finally giving up.

INT. SKYLER'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Skyler is hunched in her seat, clutching the wheel, eyes squeezed shut.

SKYLER

(mumbling)

Please just start for me you heap-a-junk, don't make me call Mom for a middle-of-the-night lecture about my clunker and expired triple-A card, oh please I beg of you...

She takes a deep breath, tries the ignition again...and succeeds.

SKYLER

Thank you! Sorry I called you a clunker!

Her attention is seized by Cooper angrily stomping through the parking lot. Skyler tries to roll down the window to call out to her, but the window jumps its track and the crank breaks off in her hand. She fumbles with her seat belt and tumbles out the door, but it's too late: Cooper has commandeered her seen-better-days Mustang and is *tearing* away from the theatre, leaving Skyler alone in the parking lot, pathetically clutching her broken window crank.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. SKYLER'S STUDIO APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

SUBTITLE: TEN YEARS LATER

The place is tiny but well-organized. Thrift store furniture, old but clean. Theatre-and-Hollywood-themed bulletin boards and books everywhere. A struggling, creative soul lives here.

SKYLER (O.C.)
(drunk)
Haaaa-ppy birfday to meeee...

There's a **THUD** against the outside of the front door.

SKYLER (O.C.)
(small)
Ow.

KEVIN (O.C.)
(laughing)
Hold *still*, I can't prop you up and open the door at the same time!

SKYLER (O.C.)
HurryupIgottapee!

Keys are fumbled with, the door flies open, and Skyler careens in, landing on the floor in the center of the room.

SKYLER
(small)
Ow.

Kevin comes in bearing bags of already-unwrapped birthday gifts, bottles of wine, party decorations. He closes & locks the door, drops the keys in a key basket.

KEVIN
Keys. Here in the basket where they belong. Think you can remember that?

SKYLER

Fixxxx me a drrrrrrink, lover!

KEVIN

And your birthday presents, all eight hundred, here on the couch with each card attached for convenient recall when you write your thank-you notes, which you'll do before you turn forty-one, right?

(then)

God it smells like litter box in here.

SKYLER

Whassat from? "Lover, fix me a drink?!"

Kevin heads to the tiny kitchen.

KEVIN

"Virginia Woolf." You *wish* I was your lover. And you're getting coffee.

SKYLER

(bursting)

Ooh-ooh-yeah! "Fix me a drink, lover!" And he goes "Martha's drinking rubbing alcohol tonight" and she goes "Never mix never worry!"

KEVIN

Something like that.

Kevin surveys the fridge's contents: curdled milk, uncovered cat food cans, moldy tomatoes.

KEVIN

Sad, sad, sad.

SKYLER

What's sad?!

KEVIN

Another Albee quote: "George and Martha: sad, sad, sad." It also describes your fridge. Did you know there are four grocery stores in your neighborhood?

SKYLER

Duh! But they charge money and I'm broke, broke, broke! *Where's my drink?!*

Kevin finds an ice-encrusted coffee can in the freezer.

KEVIN

You said you had to pee.

Skyler's eyes go wide as she looks down her dress.

SKYLER

Whoops.

INT. SKYLER'S APARTMENT - LATER

Skyler and Kevin are settled on the couch with steaming mugs of black coffee; Skyler has washed up (and changed) and is sobering up. They're watching an old black & white movie on the beat-up television.

SKYLER

(sighing)

I love old movies best. Everyone looked like a million bucks and there was never trash on the street. Romance was epic, endings were happy. Now it's all sci-fi blockbusters and bombs blowing up Baghdad.

KEVIN

Aw, there's always something good out there to see, you just have to look. The old days weren't always--

SKYLER

(screaming)

AHHHHHHHHHHH!!!! NO, NOT TONIGHT OF ALL NIGHTS!!!!

She heaves a couch pillow at the TV screen.

SKYLER

PLEASE GO AWAY, I SWEAR TO GOD I CAN'T LOOK AT YOU ANYMORE!!!!

Revealed on television is Cooper, starring in a big-budget national commercial.

KEVIN

Sssssh! I haven't seen this one yet!

He rushes to the set and turns up the volume, enraptured.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY (TV COMMERCIAL)

Cooper is conducting a corporate staff meeting, lording it over a dozen or so sycophantic **MINIONS**. In black-rimmed eyeglasses, she's the quintessential high-powered executive.

COOPER

... 'cause the last time I checked, this company paid you people to come up with ideas to keep us on top! But guess what?

(screaming)

We're not on top! And I'm not hearing any ideas!!!

FIRST MINION

(desperate)

Uh, free scuba gear with the purchase of a Supersized Shrimp Delight Combo!

COOPER

Asinine!

She punches a button; the minion screams as his chair flies across the room and crashes through the skyscraper windows.

SECOND MINION

A set of collectable miniatures from that movie about the tall, eco-conscious blue people with tails!

COOPER

Been freakin' DONE!

She punches another button; the minion screams as her chair flies straight up and crashes through the ceiling.

THIRD MINION

Free psychotherapy for everyone who walks through the door!

COOPER

Absolutely--

She's about to punch a button but freezes.

COOPER
 (pleased)
 --not a bad idea.

CUT TO:

INT. PSYCHOTHERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY (TV COMMERCIAL)

Cooper sits poised with a big notepad, attentive and focused.

COOPER
 Start with your childhood! I'm
 guessin' pansy momma's boy, and
 don't even think about lying
 because I'm Senior V.P. of
 Marketing, I will *call* you on your
 stuff!

Revealed across the desk from her is a **JOE EVERYGUY**, happily
 munching away on a burger & fries, frosty milkshake at the
 ready.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
*Burger Junction. Unlike the other
 guys, our food stands on its
 delicious own.*

COOPER
 What about adolescent bedwetting?
 Because *believe me*, bub, I have
ways of finding out!

INT. SKYLER'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Skyler lunges past Kevin, slams off the TV.

KEVIN
 What? It's funny.

SKYLER
 Hysterical! So is the one where
 she works the drive-thru in a paper
 hat and screams at customers, and
 the one where she Thelma & Louises
 the delivery truck off a cliff!
 Too bad *that* wasn't real!

KEVIN
 Jealous much?

Skyler springs into action, grabbing a plastic-milk crate-bookshelf, emptying its contents; magazines, DVDs and Internet print-outs spill out on the floor between them.

SKYLER

Eleven features, starting with Disney's "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, The Movie!" Guest-starring roles on fourteen sit-coms and twenty episodic dramas! All the major networks plus Comedy Central, TNT, Lifetime, Oxygen, MTV, VH-1 and three I've never even heard of! National spots for AT&T, Apple, Hilton, JetBlue, Milk Duds and, yes, the continuing saga of Burger Junction! Print ads in magazines from *American Dog Lover* to *Vogue*! CooperHarris.com, The Official Website! Five unofficial fan sites devoted to all things Cooper! Feature profiles in newspapers from Albany to Yuma and, my favorite, this little gem right here!

She grabs an issue of *Entertainment Weekly*, whips it open straight to a full-page, photo-illustrated spread on the comedic-sexy-bespectacled Cooper Harris.

SKYLER

Surely you've seen this?

KEVIN

(reading)

Cooper Harris Is Having a Moment.

SKYLER

A freaking "moment" my ass! She's having a full-blown, 24-7 news cycle, *It Girl*, "get me a Cooper Harris type" *media frenzy*!

(deep breath)

And quite frankly, *I don't get it!*

Kevin peruses the scattered Cooper stuff.

KEVIN

What's to *get*? Good for her! I knew she was working a ton, but I didn't know she was, y'know...

KEVIN

(impressed)

..."*having a moment.*"

SKYLER

(irritated)

"*Having a moment!*"

SKYLER

Yes, well, she is! And why *her*?
Why *now*?
(off the *Entertainment*
Weekly)
Why *this*?!

KEVIN

I guess 'cause she's worked hard,
she's paid her dues. She's "found
her niche," as they say.

SKYLER

Oh, do *they* say that, Kevin? Who
exactly are *they*? Because I have
news for *them*!

She angrily flips through the *EW* and flashes him a photo of
Tina Fey.

SKYLER

This is her so-called *niche*!

She flips back & forth between Cooper and Tina Fey.

SKYLER

"Oooh, look at **me** world, I wear the
same glasses as Tina Fey but I'm
blonde! Get it, everyone, I'm a
blonde Tina Fey! Haha! So when
you want Tina Fey only blonde, I'm
your go-to gal! 'Cause the glasses
make me look smart, see, and even
though I'm not sexy, Tina Fey's
perceived as **sexy glasses chick**,
ergo **so am I!** Haha!"

Kevin compares/contrasts for a moment.

KEVIN

Hmmm...now that you mention it,
there sorta *is* a resemblance.

SKYLER

(unplugged)

There's no resemblance whatsoever!
It's the glasses! ***It's total media***
manipulation and I can't believe
it's working! ***It's making her a***
goddamned star!

KEVIN

And driving you crazy.

SKYLER

*And omigod, look at **this!***

She drags him by the sleeve to her computer, where she pulls up Cooper's photo page on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb).

SKYLER

Look at these pictures! What jumps out at you?!

KEVIN

Ummm...she goes to lots of parties and premieres?

SKYLER

Oh, make no mistake, the girl's a red carpet *whore!* But look at her *hair!* As a natural blonde she's never seen *without* her glasses! But when her hair's black or brunette, *no glasses ever!*

KEVIN

So?

SKYLER

So she's worming her way into our ridiculous culture of celebrity worship under false pretenses!

Her next mouse click reveals...

KEVIN

(reading)

"Trademark: black-frame eyeglasses."

SKYLER

Exactly! And once *that* look was plastered everywhere, she established herself as a dark-haired celebrity *without* glasses, so eventually the Tina Fey comparisons will fade!

KEVIN

(impressed)

Boy, that was smart.

SKYLER

It was *contrived!* But *this* is what makes my head explode!

Another mouse click.

KEVIN

(reading)

"Age: thirty-four. Hometown: Miami, Florida." Yuck, I hate that place! South Florida's just become one big cesspool of--

SKYLER

*Missing the point! Thirty-four my **ass!** She was **born** just months after **me**, but has **miraculously** managed to age only **five years** in the last **decade!***

She paces.

KEVIN

So she shaved off a few years. That's kinda cute.

SKYLER

Bunnies are cute! **This** is pathetic! **She's** pathetic!

KEVIN

Oh, mountain-molehill. She's not selling arms to the enemy.

Skyler spontaneously bursts into frustrated tears. Surprised, Kevin guides her back to the couch.

KEVIN

All right now, deep breaths. Let's change the subject; uh...how 'bout them Dodgers?!

SKYLER

(sobbing hysterically)

*I was...atmycar'n...it was closingnight'n...abigbeautiful fullmoon'n...she said maybe goodthingsrjustaroun'thacorner'n...
...and it's just not fai-ai-
airrrrrrrr!!!*

She impulsively heaves the *Entertainment Weekly* straight at the television. Kevin studies her for a moment.

KEVIN

Wow. Okay. Here's a crazy thought: maybe you should talk this over with someone besides me. Someone with lots of diplomas on the wall.

EXT. SHERMAN OAKS HOME - AFTERNOON

A perfectly lovely upper-middle-class neighborhood on a gorgeous, sunny Southern California day. Kids are playing kickball in the street, and a crew is unloading a huge moving truck next door.

INT. HOME THERAPY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Diplomas are impressively arranged on the wall, temporarily capturing Skyler's attention from her relaxed perch on a nearby plush settee. After a moment she sighs and continues.

SKYLER

Yeah...the struggle. To be seen, get noticed, be appreciated as an artist with true talent, with something to offer Hollywood. That sounds stupid, "Hollywood," like I'm too naïve to know that's just a word thrown around as a metonymy of American cinema, and in fact is a dumpy part of town I wouldn't be caught dead in alone at night, despite recent sporadic gentrification. I've paid my dues, dammit! Twenty years of classes! Commercial, scene study, classical, improv & sketch, image consulting, dance & movement & *fencing*, for godssake! And I have *excelled* at them *all*, thank you! Forty-one Equity-waiver productions, everything from Shakespeare & Molière to Jonathan Marc Sherman & Durang! Eight *DramaLogue* Awards! Three Valley Theatre League nominations! An *L.A. Weekly* Award for Best Production my *first* time out of the gate as producer! Two *Backstage West* Garland Award noms and a goddamned Best Actress Robby Award, which I won out of a field of twelve nominees *and I still don't know who the hell this "Robby" dude is!*

(deep sigh)

I know she's worked hard. I know she's got talent. But so have I, and so do I!

(MORE)

SKYLER (cont'd)

And if I never even get an opportunity to grab at least a *little* piece of the pie, and I have to *grow old* watching *her* star rise and rise and *rise...*

(heartbreakingly
vulnerable)

Well, I just don't know if I can take it. And that scares me very much.

She waits. There's no response. As she looks over her shoulder, revealed is **EILEEN**, an attractive therapist of 60-something, intently taking notes in an expensive leather binder at her desk. Skyler respectfully waits; Eileen finishes, then looks at Skyler with a kindly smile.

SKYLER

Well?

EILEEN

Well *what*, dear?

SKYLER

What about what I just said?!

EILEEN

What did you just say?

SKYLER

Look at your notes! You took notes!

EILEEN

(laughing)

Silly, I don't take notes when clients talk! I find it impedes my comprehension in the long run!

(off her notes)

What do you think of Chicken Cordon Bleu as an entree? The Pacificos are coming for dinner tomorrow and

(sudden thought)

*no, I'll try Beef Bourguignon!
It's all the rage since that Julia Child movie, I saw the recipe on Facebook!*

She scribbles happily, Skyler stares gape-jawed.

EILEEN

Dear, close your mouth, that's unattractive.

INT. "GREAT ROOM" - CONTINUOUS

Eileen bursts forth from her home office, finished with the day's business and ready for some fun. Skyler follows.

SKYLER

(stunned)

But...whaddy mean *it's not working out*, it was only our first session!
And you didn't even help me!

EILEEN

Help-schmelp, why do people think that's what therapists do? We're just walls off which things should be bounced! You want help, call the help desk!

SKYLER

(wailing)

But you're my mother! This was totally unethical in the first place, the least you could do is offer constructive advice!

EILEEN

Ethics-schmethics, did you get stuff off your chest? ***Yes!*** Do you feel better now?

EILEEN

Yes!

SKYLER

No!

EILEEN

(off her watch)

Meeting the girls for happy hour, dear, join me for a quick glass of wine?!

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Alone, Eileen makes short work of opening a chilled bottle of Riesling, doles out two healthy pours. She perches at her bar and sighs, raising her glass impatiently.

EILEEN

(calling out)

I won't ask twice, Skyler, I will gladly drink yours, too!

Skyler drags her mopey self into the kitchen. Eileen pats the barstool next to hers.

EILEEN

Sit!

Skyler does, Eileen toasts.

EILEEN

Here's to more classes and nominations and all those other things about which you rambled!

SKYLER

Mom!

EILEEN

(savoring)

Mmmm! Delicious! So many of my girlfriends are wine snobs, but honestly, you get more bang for your vino buck at Trader Joe's!

(off Skyler's imploring look)

Okay, listen up: all those things you've been doing all this time-

SKYLER

Twenty years! Since I was twenty!

EILEEN

Leave age out of it, dear. You may be in your forties now but that doesn't mean I have to be in my sixties. Let's just say that all this time, all these pursuits... they represent your *path!* You're taking your *journey!* And this Hooper woman, she's on hers!

SKYLER

Not *Hooper!* *Cooper!*

EILEEN

Immaterial. So if acting is all you care about, don't you think it's time you embraced that with every fiber of your being?

SKYLER

(sputtering)

B-but...I *do!* I always *have!*

EILEEN

Darling, if that were true you wouldn't waste a nanosecond comparing yourself to a woman who lies about half a decade and hides behind eyeware to resemble someone else.

(savoring)

Honestly, the Germans may have permanently blood-stained hands, but no one can *touch* their genius with Rieslings!

She smiles at her daughter, who does not smile back.

SKYLER

So that's *it?! I'm on a journey,*
I'm following a *path?!*

EILEEN

It's not rocket science, Skyler. Therapists don't cure cancer, and neither do moms.

SKYLER

But *surely* you've got something more than *that!*

Eileen considers, rolls her eyes and opens her binder, reading as she flips through her notes.

EILEEN

(rote)

"Advice is what we ask for when we already know the answer but wish we didn't." Erica Jong.

SKYLER

Huh?

EILEEN

(flat)

"When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one that has opened for us." Alexander Graham Bell.

SKYLER

Mom! That's not even--

EILEEN

Ooh, this one's good! "Never allow someone to be your priority while you're just their option."
Unknown.

She raises her glass.

EILEEN

And drink more wine! At the end of the day, it makes everything in life more palatable.

Skyler peers at her mother's notes.

SKYLER

Do your clients really buy these *crappy platitudes*?

EILEEN

Well honey, I suppose. No one's fired me so far.

Skyler slumps forward, clutching her wine glass with a sigh.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL PARK BUILDING - AFTERNOON

The typical mix of auto body repair and other establishments whose business you can never quite pinpoint, all with sliding gunmetal-grey garage doors open in the middle of a busy Saturday. But the door at the building's end is closed, with every parking spot taken.

INT. ACTING CLASS STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

If the outside is cold and uninviting, the inside of this space is the polar opposite: lots of greenery, plush carpeting and warm ambient lighting. Comfy chairs are arranged in a circle around a raised stage, and the twenty-or-so men & women of all ages & types are completely engrossed by the **30ISH ACTOR** finishing a monologue.

30ISH ACTOR

And Dad said, "Now for my last trick, I'm going to disappear, but I'll always be in the air around you, thinking of you, loving you." When I opened my eyes he was gone, and the only thing left was the sign we had made: *Sam the Amazing Magician*.

(MORE)

30ISH ACTOR (cont'd)
 (a life-affirming
 realization)
 I was...I was loved. I was...
 loved.

Lost in memory, he has begun to softly cry.

30ISH ACTOR
 (a whisper)
Scene.

Although his audience would love to applaud, no one does, but there's barely a dry eye in the house.

MAE OLINSKI (O.C.)
 (dramatic)
 Oh *dahhhling...*

MAE OLINSKI, parked at 59 but actually 74, sweeps onto the small stage and maternally embraces her student, enveloping him in her flowing, earth-toned fashion layers. Everything about Mae is passionate, larger than life. She shares a private exchange with the man; he smiles gratefully and returns to his seat.

MAE OLINSKI
 And that, darlings, is how we *do*
the work.

She claps abruptly and squeezes her eyes shut, leading her charges in a weekly ritual.

MAE OLINSKI
*Eyes shut! Minds clear! Passion
 front and center! I am Mae Olinski
 and I embody...the bold dramatic
 choice!*

She opens her eyes and takes in her students, all of whom have squeezed their eyes shut.

MAE OLINSKI
Wendy!

WENDY, a ridiculous, waif-like creature, squeaks out-

WENDY
*I am Wendy Axelrod, and I
 embody...the silly-billyness of it
 all! HeeheeHEEEhee!*

MAE OLINSKI
Pfeiffer!

PFEIFFER, a straight-arrow type, intones-

PFEIFFER
*I am Pfeiffer Hicks, and I
 embody...form over function!*

MAE OLINSKI
Belle!

BELLE, a 50ish blonde who screams money, offers-

BELLE
 (Texas twang)
*I am Belle Bridges, and I
 embody...gettin' the hell outta
 here to suck down a big, fat
 cocktail!*

Skyler, seated next to her, stifles a laugh and elbows her in the ribs.

MAE OLINSKI
Skyler!

SKYLER
I am Skyler Bythe, and I embody--

Mae and the rest of the class wait, but nothing comes.

MAE OLINSKI
 (finally)
Yessssss?

SKYLER
I embody...uh...

Skyler opens her eyes and looks around, suddenly lost. A few students sneak a peek as she meets Mae's sympathetic gaze. Skyler shrugs.

SKYLER
 (simply)
 I honestly don't know anymore.

EXT. VENTURA BLVD. WINE BISTRO - AFTERNOON

An upscale place with an inviting, crowded sidewalk patio, where Belle is plying Skyler with wine & appetizers.

BELLE
 So you never saw her again after
 that closin' night party? Done,
 finished, history?

SKYLER

Yep. She had some kinda fight with the artistic director and never came back. I called her to get her side of the story, but she just said it was time to move on, she was through with theatre. We said we'd get together sometime but we just fell outta touch.

BELLE

Cut to now she's a star.

SKYLER

*Cut to **she's haunting me!** I go to the gas station! I'm minding my own business, filling my tank!*

EXT. GAS STATION - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

Skyler's pumping gas, absently staring at a loud, colorful commercial on the state-of-the-art video screen built into the gas pump. As her tank reaches capacity and she returns the handle to the pump, the bespectacled Cooper appears on the screen in a new commercial.

COOPER

Ugh! Do you know how many dates I've been on with stinky-breath guys? I'm talking major halitosis, people! And ladies, we deserve better than that!

Skyler just stands frozen, watching slack-jawed.

INT. IMPROV COMEDY CLUB - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

Skyler & a few girlfriends are milling about the lobby after a show, perusing the framed photos of famous comedy alumni lining the wall.

BELLE (V.O.)

Aw, she can't be **hauntin'** you!

SKYLER (V.O.)

Well, then the universe be messin' with my head!

A **PERKY COUPLE** wander over, stopping next to Skyler's group. The woman excitedly points to the very top photo on the wall, above everyone's heads.

PERKY WOMAN

(excited)

Oh, look honey! That's *her*, the one I *told* you about! She useta perform here before she got really big! **Cooper Harris!** Omigod she's ***hysterical!***

Skyler's jaw drops as the couple wander away.

EXT. VENTURA BLVD. BISTRO - CONTINUOUS

SKYLER

And once I was in a ladies' room stall at a movie theatre, *totally* minding my own business, when--

BELLE

Y'know what? I've seen her plenty, and she's not better than you. But you've got no defining *feature*, no one thing that sets ya apart!

She leans in close, clutching her wine glass.

BELLE

(confidential)

You say this Cooper chick *took off* once she started wearin' those stupid glasses? Fine! *I* am gonna treat **you** to a little shopping adventure, with the goal of finding **your** trademark!

SKYLER

(scoffing)

Oh, so I should resort to cheap tricks? I think I'll stick to my dramatic abilities, thanks.

Belle motions a waiter for another bottle of wine.

SKYLER

Oh, gosh, no, I only have, like, six bucks.

BELLE

Exactly. *That's* what yer "dramatic abilities" have gotcha! That, and an unhealthy case of the ***Why Not Me?'s***.

She whips out a fistful of credit cards.

BELLE

Look, what **good** is havin' a workaholic business-titan husband if ya can't help out a friend in her time of need?!

EXT. THE GROVE SHOPPING COMPLEX - LATE AFTERNOON

Teeming masses of upscale, attractive people shopping and seeing/being seen.

EXT. NORDSTROM - CONTINUOUS

Belle emerges from the store, Skyler trailing her with a huge Nordstrom bag of merchandise.

BELLE

So you'll start immediately! Wear 'em to every casting workshop, all yer auditions, *everything!* Oh, and you'll *have* to take new headshots! And in class, wear 'em in class!

SKYLER

(skeptical)
Really? In class?

BELLE

You think that crazy old bitch doesn't understand havin' a trademark?
(dramatic)
"Daahhhling, do the work!"
Dripping drama is her *thing!* She doesn't say that shit at home alone with her 18 cats!

Skyler hugs her huge Nordstrom bag tightly.

SKYLER

Well thanks, Belle. This was so wonderful of you, but I feel bad that you spent--

BELLE

Ooh I love this place, they have wonderful clothes plus a zillion *tchotchkes* no one needs! **C'mon!**

She abruptly yanks Skyler through the dramatic entrance of Anthropologie.

INT. ANTHROPOLOGIE - CONTINUOUS

Belle's a kid in a candy store, her attention seized by every shiny new object.

BELLE

Dontcha *adore* this store? I get a delicious sense of *self-entitlement* just walking in! Every single over-priced thing is simply a *must-have!*

SKYLER

Actually, I've never been in here. It's not really in my--

Belle clutches a silky, sleeveless blouse.

BELLE

God I must have this! In all *four* colors!

She grabs one of each and dashes off. Skyler smiles, decides to check out the home decor section, where she peruses photo frames. Finding one she loves, she checks the price...and nearly drops it in shock.

SKYLER

Groceries for two weeks. Pass.

An **ELEGANT OLDER WOMAN** overhears, shoots her a look of disdain before turning away. Stunned by her rudeness, Skyler sticks out her tongue at the woman's back, then moves on to candles...where she freezes, suddenly a deer in headlights.

SKYLER

(blurting out)

Cooper Harris!

Cooper whiplash-turns toward the voice, immediately on the defensive. With a mask of feigned politeness, she focuses intently on Skyler's face, her synapses working overtime to search for a connection or context.

SKYLER

Skyler Blythe? Off Stage Left?

Cooper's body instantly relaxes; danger averted. And no, she's not wearing glasses.

COOPER

Skyler. Hey there, how are ya?

SKYLER
I'm good, I'm, uh, shopping, wow
it's been a long time.

COOPER
Yeah, uh, since, I dunno when...

SKYLER
Closing night...

SKYLER
..."Roomful of Divas."

COOPER
The theatre, right!

Awkward silence.

COOPER
Uh, so do you see any of that crowd
anymore?

SKYLER
(lying)
Nah, not really. Well, I mean, a
few of 'em, I guess...

COOPER
Wow, "Roomful of Divas." Really
dug that play. I just mentioned it
to a girlfriend the other day, we
were both saying how we'd only once
had a role written for us, and that
was mine. What a blast to work on,
Kerwin totally captured my voice.

SKYLER
Oh, I agree, it was a special show.
I'm still tight with, uh, Kevin.
He's doing great, married his
boyfriend back in '08, during the
first legal window.

COOPER
Oooh, that whole Prop. 8 thing just
chapped my ass!

SKYLER
Totally.

COOPER
And you, you're good? Still
acting?

SKYLER

Oh yeah! I mean, I *temp* so I have freedom for, y'know, auditions, but still searching for that right *agent fit*. Did a show at Off Stage last year, I try to, y'know, leave the place, but...

(bad Pacino)

...just when I think I'm out they pull me back in!

Cooper smiles politely. Awkward silence.

SKYLER

But you! Uh, congrats on, um, *everything!* So *exciting!*

COOPER

Thanks, yeah, certainly can't complain. Just shot an ABC sit-com pilot, in fact.

SKYLER

Awesome!

COOPER

Well, you know how these things go, mid-season replacement, only half-a-dozen episodes, "don't get your hopes up, kid," so we'll see.

SKYLER

Well sure, mid-season, right...

They smile. Awkward silence.

COOPER

Well hey, great running into you...

SKYLER

So nice to see you again, I was like, *wow, small town...*

As they awkwardly lunge for a perfunctory hug, Skyler drops her Nordstrom bag and trips, nearly careening into Cooper, who catches her.

COOPER

Whoa there, pardner!

She helps Skyler recover the bag, peering inside.

COOPER

Hey, *those* are serious scarves! Been doin' some damage to the ol' credit card?

SKYLER
 (embarrassed)
 Well, y'know, a little.

COOPER
 Oh, *this* one's beautiful!

Cooper gingerly removes a colorful silk scarf from the bag and places it around Skyler's neck, arranging it *just so* before stepping back for the full picture.

COOPER
 Perfect!

SKYLER
 Really?

COOPER
 Omigod Skyler, *you rock* that scarf!

Skyler looks down at it, pleased, then gives Cooper a grateful smile.

SKYLER
 Thank you.

BELLE (O.C.)
 That's what *I* told her, just not in those words.

They turn to find Belle standing inches from them, wearing one of the sleeveless silk blouses.

SKYLER
 (flustered)
 Oh, uh, Cooper, this is, uh...

BELLE
 Belle Bridges, pleased to meetcha!

COOPER
 Hello.

They shake hands.

BELLE
 Don't you normally wear black-framed eyeglasses? Y'know, like Tina Fey's only a little different?

COOPER
 (awkward)
 Uh, sometimes, yes. Depending on the role.

BELLE

Well good for you, hey listen, have you actually *eaten* that shrimp delight thingy at Burger Junction? 'Cause normally I like their food but I'm sorry, I just could *not* choke that down! Tasted like *rancid rubber shoe!*

COOPER

(irritated)

Yeah, I don't do seafood so much.

(then)

Take care Skyler.

She walks away.

SKYLER

Cooper, wait! "Roomful of Divas!" You kinda, um, vanished afterwards, I've had your video ever since!

COOPER

Ohhh, right...yeah, we taped closing night...

SKYLER

It turned out really good, I think you'd like it. Oh, plus remember the video guy shot some of the closing party? It's kinda like a mini-documentary!

COOPER

Awesome! Well tell ya what...

She rummages through her purse for a pen and scrap of paper, scribbles down her info.

COOPER

...here's my e-mail & cell, I'd love to get it from you. It'd be cool to show my husband the last play I ever did.

SKYLER

That's great...I'll be in touch!

COOPER

Ciao!

And she's gone, swallowed up by the marauding throngs of shoppers outside the store. Belle sides up to Skyler.

BELLE

"Doesn't do seafood" my *ass*, she's never even stepped *foot* in a Burger Junction. And big picture-wise, can I just tell ya? I am *so* not impressed.

Skyler stares off into the Grove crowd.

SKYLER

She looks fantastic.
(then)
How funny, I forgot she's married.
I saw that on IMDb.

INT. GROVE PARKING STRUCTURE - LATER

Belle and Skyler (still wearing the scarf), climb into Belle's aqua Jaguar, buckle up for the ride home. Belle starts the engine then kills it, studies her friend.

BELLE

Okay, you've been a walking zombie since talking to that dumb woman.

SKYLER

No, I'm fine, I just--

BELLE

--wish you were *her*, wish you were on *TV*, wish you were *married* and wish I'd stop hittin' every nail on its damned *head*.

SKYLER

(shaking her daze)
No, it's not...I don't wanna *be* her...

BELLE

"Single White Female," sweetie, next thing ya know you'll be wearin' big black Tina Feys and go around sayin'
(perfect mimic)
you rock! like a moron.

SKYLER

It was just... weird seeing her, I mean since she's been on my mind and all lately...

BELLE

Well she's hard to escape, she *is* ubiquitous.

SKYLER

(smiling)

Good word.

BELLE

Nice smile. Haven't seen it for an hour.

Skyler sinks into her seat.

SKYLER

What keeps replaying in my mind is that look when I said her name. It was like, maybe she might be in danger. Which I guess makes sense, there's all those dumb online fan sites she has nothing to do with. But there was real fear in her eyes...there was *disconnect*, a moment of *should I call security to save me from this person?*

She stares off at the endless rows of parked cars.

SKYLER

I dunno. I just...wouldn't wanna have to feel that way anywhere. It kinda makes me sad.

Belle pats her leg reassuringly.

BELLE

See? Bein' broke and totally obscure definitely has its advantages.

She starts the Jag and throws it into reverse...but before she can go five feet a huge white SUV comes zooming past, its driver laying on the horn.

DRIVER

(shouting)

It's called a mirror, buddy, learn how to use it!

The women shoot looks toward the SUV just in time to ID the driver as Cooper, looking comically like a little kid propped up behind the wheel of the monstrously large vehicle.

BELLE
 (eyes narrowed into slits)
I...don't like...that woman.

INT. SKYLER'S STUDIO APARTMENT - LATER

Staring at herself from all angles in her full-length mirror, Skyler smooths out wrinkles...rearranges her hair...tucks in her tummy & butt...then turns away with a disgusted grunt, finally removing the scarf. She lays it out on the bed alongside her other newly acquired two dozen or so beautiful, expensive scarves.

SKYLER
 (sighing)
 If only it were that simple.

A sudden thought strikes her, and she rushes to her entertainment center area, where disorganized stacks of CDs, DVDs and VHS tapes share cramped space with inexpensive audio equipment and the TV. She sorts through the VHS tapes, sets aside one with a label which reads *"Roomful of Divas" Closing Night 5/14*, but doesn't find what she's looking for; annoyed, she shoves them away in frustration. Her **CAT** brushes up against her with a *purr* en route to the litter box.

SKYLER
 (absently)
 Hey, Merylstreep...

And she tackles the rest of the area, pulling apart her DVD and CD stacks in search of something...but to no avail, it still can't be found. Meanwhile, Merylstreep has finished her business and is rearranging her kitty litter, with more of it landing out of the box than in.

SKYLER
 Stop that! Bad kitty!

She moves to halt the mess being made...and there it is: the videotape in its outer sleeve, covered with a fine dusting of kitty litter.

SKYLER
 Scratch that! Good kitty!

She cleans off the tape, studies the label: *"Roomful of Divas" Closing Night 5/14 - Cooper's copy - luv, Skyler*

INT. SKYLER'S KITCHEN AREA - LATER

Perfectly spotless and organized, with lovely lace curtains in the window above the sink.

KEVIN (V.O.)
So what'd we think, people, did she
kill tonight or *what?!*

INT. SKYLER'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Same thing here: tiny, but clean and decorated with charming, feminine touches.

MAE OLINSKI (V.O.)
Oh *darling*, she was an absolute
revelation! But please remember,
I'm in the *loooong* process of
teaching her everything I know, so
it's to be expected at this point!

INT. OFF STAGE LEFT GREEN ROOM - EVENING (HANDHELD VIDEO,
TEN YEARS EARLIER)

The closing night party: Kevin parading Skyler past a group of adoring audience members gathered around the buffet.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS
*She was wonderful!, She was
riveting!, Loved her loved her
loved her!, etc.*

SKYLER
(mock embarrassment)
Please people, don't, stop! *Don't
stop!*

Cooper cuts in, jutting her face before the camera.

COOPER
*Omigod, Skyler **rocked!** She just
totally **rocked!***

The audience members fawn over Cooper.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS
*You were **hysterical!**, **Wow** you're
funny!, *Girl you cracked me **up!**,
etc.**

Mae cuts in front of the others, takes Cooper's hand and curtsies deeply before her.

MAE OLINSKI
 (dripping drama)
*Oh, m'lady! You are destined to be
 a stahhhhr!!!*

The image freezes; it rewinds.

Mae cuts in front of the others, takes Cooper's hand and curtsies deeply before her.

MAE OLINSKI
 (dripping drama)
*Oh, m'lady! You are destined to be
 a stahhhhr!!!*

Again the image freezes.

INT. SKYLER'S STUDIO APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Couch-potato Skyler is zoned out with a nearly empty pint of cookie dough ice cream, wielding the remote like a weapon as she studies the frozen video image, her face void of emotion.

EXT. MERIDIAN PICTURES SECURITY GATE - MORNING

Skyler's Volvo lumbers up to the guard kiosk.

INT. SKYLER'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Skyler, looking poised and professional, smiles at the **STUDIO GUARD** as she offers her driver's license.

SKYLER
 Good morning! Skyler Blythe, with
 Innovative Temps. Working for
 Kerry Hynde in marketing this week.

The guard takes her license, does his thing on the computer.

INT. MERIDIAN MARKETING DEPARTMENT - LATE MORNING

Movie posters and lobby standees are everywhere...including Skyler's workspace, the administrative area outside the office of **KERRY HYNDE**, Head of Marketing. Skyler's printer finishes spitting out a large stack of papers; a *crunching sound* is emanating from Kerry's office.

SKYLER
 (on the phone)
 Of course, that's fine. Thanks
 very much, have a nice day.

She disconnects.

SKYLER
 (calling out)
 Kerry, he's unavailable, I left
 word.

KERRY (O.C.)
 (no bullshit. Ever.)
 When he calls back **make sure you
 find me!** Even in the john!

SKYLER
 Absolutely. Also, the letters have
 finished printed, may I leave them
 with you to sign?

KERRY (O.C.)
 Screw it, sign as me. But get my
 name right, the last temp signed
Terry, I wanted to wring her
 illiterate **neck!**

The *crunching* stops, a plastic cereal bag is noisily wrapped
 up.

KERRY (O.C.)
 Goddamned Golden Grahams! Why take
 a perfectly good cereal and fuck it
 up with this "whole grain goodness"
 bullshit? I'm watching trailers,
 don't bother me unless there's a
 catastrophe!

The office door **slams** behind Skyler, making her flinch. She
 forges ahead with her next task.

TROY (O.C.)
 Don't sweat it. Her bark sucks but
 she's got no bite.

Skyler spins to find **TROY WILLIAMS**, 40ish, bald, suspender-
 clad, leaning against the wall studying her.

TROY
 Unless she gets mad. Rumor has it
 she killed her predecessor, bashed
 in her head with a shovel. But
 nothing's been proven. Yet.

He extends a hand, they shake.

TROY

Troy Williams, Special Events
Director.

SKYLER

Skyler Blythe, hello.

TROY

Well, Skyler Blythe hello, today's
your lucky day. Ever been to a
premiere?

SKYLER

Once, actually. *Nutty Professor
II: The Klumps*. A friend did
stunts and she brought me.

TROY

Terrif, well you're about to attend
your *second* one, only *without* that
hack Eddie Murphy and *with* all eyes
on you. Y'see, my secret weapon at
our shindigs is the usual lovely in
your chair, but with her gone I'm
up a creek unless you fill in.
How'd you like a ton of overtime
tomorrow night for providing good
ol' fashioned red carpet ambiance?

SKYLER

(grinning)
I'd like it a lot!

TROY

I know, right? ***Ka-ching!***
Calltime's 5PM at Grauman's, I'll e-
mail you the staff spiel, and get
plenty of rest tonight 'cause
you'll be on your feet 'til at
least midnight. Oh, and our
movie's ***that bad boy*** over in the
corner. *Ciao!*

He starts to leave.

SKYLER

Oh, 'scuse me?! What's the attire?
Semi-formal, a black dress okay?

TROY

Sorry, my bad. My assistant will bring your costume & makeup over tomorrow.

SKYLER

Costume and makeup?

TROY

(mock confidentially)

That's the secret weapon part!

Skyler turns around and finds "that bad boy" is a lobby standee for the romantic comedy-horror film *Screamin' Zombie Love!*, featuring a sexy-grotesque undead bride. She spins back toward Troy, but he's gone. Her phone rings.

SKYLER

(answering)

G'morning Susan's desk, this is Skyler.

INT. KEVIN & JACK'S HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - LATE MORNING

Writing in his home office, Kevin is kicked back at his desk, on which the engraved mini-globe pen stand closing night gift presented by Cooper is prominently displayed. He's surrounded by five big, snoozing dogs; his canyon view is stunning.

KEVIN

How's the gig?

SKYLER (V.O.)

Typical. But good.

KEVIN

D'ya e-mail her yet?

SKYLER (V.O.)

No, I don't wanna be too eager.

KEVIN

(leading)

But you wanna give her the *tape*...

SKYLER (V.O.)

Sure.

KEVIN

...maybe meet for coffee, pick her brain about her *career*...

SKYLER (V.O.)
 Uh, I guess...

KEVIN
 Then e-mail her! Invite her to
 lunch on the lot this week, what's
 your problem?

SKYLER (V.O.)
 Well, okay, but--

KEVIN
Good-bye!

He hangs up.

INT. MERIDIAN MARKETING DEPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Skyler disconnects and ponders her stack of letters,
 considering...then impulsively digs through her purse, finds
 Cooper's scrap of paper and sets about composing an e-mail.

INT. MERIDIAN MARKETING DEPARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Skyler's perusing *Variety* when a voice barks out behind her.

KERRY (O.C.)
*I'm in my car, don't bother me
 unless someone's dead!*

EXT. MERIDIAN PICTURES LOT - MORNING

Sunlight glints off the dew on the perfectly manicured lawns,
 birds chirp from the gorgeous trees as the Meridian workforce
 arrive to start their day.

INT. MERIDIAN MARKETING DEPARTMENT LOBBY- CONTINUOUS

Skyler steps into an elevator packed with grumpy office
 drones.

SKYLER
 (too cheerful)
Good morning.

No one acknowledges her existence.

INT. MERIDIAN MARKETING DEPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

As her desk comes into view, Skyler catches sight of a huge paper bag on her chair, with *TEMP see me - Zack* scrawled in thick black Sharpie. She peers inside; her face falls.

EXT. MERIDIAN PICTURES COMMISSARY COURTYARD- AFTERNOON

Groups and pairs of employees are enjoying lunch, laughing, talking, enjoying the beautiful weather and their salads, sandwiches, pastas. In their midst, alone at a small table, is Skyler, opening her brown-bag lunch of peanut butter & jelly sandwich, milk and banana.

INT. MERIDIAN MARKETING DEPARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Skyler's engrossed in some mindless task when a voice barks out behind her.

KERRY (O.C.)

I'm going to the premiere! Don't be late, the last temp missed the red carpet arrivals, the whole bit we planned got scrapped, I wanted to rip her fucking face off!

EXT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATRE - EARLY EVENING

The red carpet/premiere madness is ramping up: the westbound lanes of Hollywood Boulevard are closed to traffic, cops are stationed/milling about everywhere on traffic duty; a black-jacketed private security detail are out in force, protecting the metal-gated perimeters of the event area from the gathering crowds of tourists, fans, curiosity seekers; photographers, cameramen and reporters are staking out their assigned interview spots along the red carpet; Meridian Pictures staffers are setting up the will call tables, organizing the limo/celebrity arrivals area and greeting high-strung publicists, managers and agents; red velvet ropes are being set up everywhere, prohibiting access here, demanding crowd flow proceed there...

...and out of the onlooker crowd emerges a **ZOMBIE BRIDE**. Teetering on dangerously high heels, she's impossible to turn away from in her blushing beauty-cum-flesh-eating monster get-up, equal parts sexy and horrific in her skin-baring, fashion-forward nuptial couture and way-too-realistically gory blood & guts makeup. Approaching a gated entrance into the event, she startles an overzealous **SECURITY GUARD**, who grabs her arm and nearly knocks her off her heels. When she produces the appropriate staff badge, he laughs and allows her entrance;

she teeters off into the thick of the firmament...and stops.
And searches.

SKYLER'S POV - CONTINUOUS

All the Meridian staffers are in business attire, very sleek,
very professional. She locks her focus onto Troy, busy
juggling a myriad of issues at will call.

EXT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

Troy catches sight of her approaching and breaks into
applause & catcalls.

TROY
Ni-iiice!!!

SKYLER
(pleading)
Is this right? This can't be
right! *I'm the only one in
costume!*

TROY
And isn't it *fabulous?!*

He steps back, takes her in.

TROY
Wow, why Zack slums in my office is
a mystery to me, he should be an A-
list makeup guy!

Skyler grabs a handful of, um, *insides* hanging out of her
costume.

SKYLER
*Everyone else looks really nice!
I have **guts** spilling out!*

TROY
Exactly! The gorier the better!

He spins her toward the row of seemingly endless *Screamin'
Zombie Love!* posters lining the red carpet.

TROY
*Zombies, darlin'! Zombies lose
their entrails! It's what makes
'em zombies!*

SKYLER

But--

TROY

(annoyed)

Sweetcheeks! Kinda missing the *point*: this is the funnest job all night! Do *the red carpet mingle*, make 'em laugh, gross 'em out, just no *talking!* And stick close at the party, I'll need you for somethin' special once it gets ramped up!

He gives Skyler a reassuring shoulder squeeze, nearly knocking her off her heels as he rushes off. She recovers her balance and sighs.

EXT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATRE - LATER (DUSK)

The first limo arrives, spilling out a plasticized celeb couple with a cadre of handlers. Flashes are popping, the onlookers are screaming, the madness has officially begun.

And the zombie bride is nowhere to be found...until we discover her tucked into a corner, sitting on a planter talking on her cell.

SKYLER

...but I look ridiculous! I *feel* ridiculous!

KEVIN (V.O.)

Whine-whine-whine! You're an actor, act like a zombie!

SKYLER

You don't get it! It's exactly like those saps on street corners in chicken costumes hawking nine-piece buckets of crispy recipe!

KEVIN (V.O.)

Hey, that was funny: chicken-hawking!

EXT. KEVIN & JACK'S HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - CONTINUOUS

Kevin & **JACK**, distinguished-handsome, are enjoying happy hour on their beautiful deck in the golden-orange rays of dusk, surrounded by five begging dogs.

JACK
What's her problem now?

KEVIN
Zombie costume at a premiere.

JACK
Tell her it could be worse: I got
sprayed today at a car wash by a
woman dressed as a hose. Refill?

KEVIN
Please.

Jack smoothly pours more wine.

KEVIN
Jack says stop whining and have
fun.

EXT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

Limos are stacking up, the scene is getting crazier.

SKYLER
But--

A hand snatches her phone away, pockets it.

TROY
See, *this* is the problem with
temps: they never know when they've
got it good.

He pulls her up.

TROY
Mingle!!!

He gives her a gentle shove, nearly knocking her off her
heels as he dashes away.

SKLYER'S POV - MOMENTS LATER

The red carpet is packed to capacity...yet everyone makes
room for the zombie bride as she approaches, good-naturedly
laughing and enjoying her. Flashes of light continually
blind her as she repeatedly gets caught in the background of
celeb photos.

EXT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

Skyler has made her way to the limo arrival area at one end of the red carpet as the doors are opened on the latest limo and a **TRIO OF FEMALE CELEBS** spill out. Fan frenzy begins anew, flashbulbs popping everywhere...

FANS
(hysterical)
Meghan! Zoe! Cooper! Over here!!! Will you sign this?!, etc.

...and the zombie bride freezes as she comes face to face with the three glamorous stars, staring down at the shortest of them, Cooper Harris. A Meridian staffer materializes with handshakes and a standard-protocol greeting.

MEGHAN
Wait-wait-wait, first let's take pix with the wanna-bes!

ZOE
Oh for shit's sake...

COOPER
No, she's right! The press get off on that, it makes you look *real!*

ZOE
(impulsive)
*Then grab the **zombie chick**, the crowd'll **cream!***

She grabs Skyler's hand and yanks her toward the crowd of onlookers, nearly knocking her off her heels. The crowd does, indeed, go crazy as the celeb trio sign everything thrust at them and pose for everyone's photos, hanging onto the towering zombie bride as if she's a larger-than-life prop.

When the trio have had enough, they wave their good-byes to the adoring masses and turn back, ready to meet the press on the red carpet.

ZOE
Holy *shit*, didja see that cow in the *tanktop?! She must live on Pop-Tarts & Big Macs!*

MEGHAN
That tattooed dude with the mustache was cute, in a filthy-mechanic kinda way.

ZOE

Since when are you *Sandy Bullock*?!

Cooper pulls Skyler down to yell into her ear.

COOPER

*Cool costume, Bridezilla! It
totally rocks!*

And they're gone, off to conquer the celeb-hungry press. Skyler stands frozen in the constant glare of flashes, trying to process what the hell just happened. An **AUTOGRAPH HOUND** reaches over the metal gate and squeezes a fistful of her hanging entrails.

AUTOGRAPH HOUND

*Wow, kickass guts! Are those
real?!*

Skyler slaps his hand away.

INT. PREMIERE AFTER-PARTY TENT - LATER

The studio spared no expense for the lavish affair: buffets, open bars, elaborate, themed decorations/movie marketing materials and cater-waiter servers as far as the eye can see. In the very center of the cavernous ballroom stands a circular stage with a 3D *Scream!* *Zombie Love!* backdrop and A/V equipment. Meridian staffers are having their pre-party staff dinner in groups and pairs, laughing, talking, enjoying themselves immensely. In their midst, alone at a small table, is Skyler, having extreme difficulty getting food and drink into her makeup & prosthetic-impaired mouth.

INT. PREMIERE AFTER-PARTY TENT - LATER

The party has kicked into high gear, the lights/music blinding/deafening, the throngs of Beautiful People seeing & being seen, Meridian staffers overseeing every detail with plastered-on smiles, servers catering to guests' every whim, security guards stoically manning their posts at every exit/entrance.

And one exhausted zombie bride doing her thing, wandering through the crowd, getting grabbed for photos at every turn, doing her best to stay atop her heels.

A hand reaches out, spins her around.

TROY

(semi-drunk)

There you are!

(MORE)

TROY (cont'd)
*Come with, sugarlips, it's time to
 put you to good use!*

He drags her to the center of the party and up the steps to the stage, where **SETH**, a '70s-throwback photographer, is waiting.

TROY
 Seth! One regulation zombie! Do your thing!

And he's gone.

SETH
 Yer not Susan.

SKYLER
 No. I'm temping for--

SETH
 Whatev. You know the drill?

SKYLER
 Uh...drill?

SETH
 (bored)
 Keep your body within those red lines on the stage, six to eight inches from the lenticular background which, trust me, costs more than yer worth. Dance yer tits off fer 30 seconds while the guests make gaping assholes of themselves and I capture it for their keepsake party DVD. Questions? No? Good!

Skyler glances past him and realizes there's a long line of party guests waiting to join them on the stage. Seth is already manning his equipment, ready to shoot.

SETH
 Well, let's go! *Shake it,*
 tempgirl, it's time fer dancin'
 with the fuckin' *stars!*

The zombie girl does as she's told, and finds herself doing a half-minute freestyle dance with a **MOVIE STAR-GORGEOUS COUPLE**...then another with an **OLDER PRODUCER-TYPE** and **HIS WIFE**...after which she's relaxing into it and seems to be having fun, when she turns to find her third dance partners.

Meghan. Zoe. Cooper.

She takes a deep breath, steeling herself for the 30-second encounter. She's ready.

But two of them are drunk. Way drunk.

ZOE

*Woo-hooo! Checkitout, our very own fuckin' **zombie's** back!!!*

MEGHAN

*Hot **damn**, she looks 'zackly like the one that gets blown outta the plate glass window!*

ZOE

*But this one's still got her **head!** Right, **zombie**, you still got yer **head?!***

She grabs Skyler's neck and shakes.

ZOE

*Yep, still fuckin' **attached!***

MEGHAN

*Maybe she's **an-ah-ma-tronical**, y'know like the Disneyland presidents!*

Meghan pokes Skyler in the ribs.

MEGHAN

*I dunno, can't **tell!** It's either a **dummy** or a flabby, outta-work **actor!***

She & Zoe crack up so hard they're spilling their drinks.

COOPER

(only slightly drunk)

Ladies! Not cool! Knock! It! Off!

Her friends are stunned by her tone.

MEGHAN

*You don't haveta be a **bitch**, Cooper.*

ZOE

*C'mon, I spilled my fuckin' **drink** anyways!*

She grabs Meghan and they tumble down the steps toward the nearest bar.

SETH

Next!

Cooper pulls the zombie bride away from the dance area as more guests arrive.

COOPER

I'm so sorry, they're assholes when they drink. Well, *bigger* assholes.

Uncomfortable & stunned, Skyler does anything but make eye contact.

SKYLER

(deeper voice)

That's...okay. I'm...fine.

COOPER

You're sure?

Cooper follows Skyler's shifting gaze to make eye contact.

COOPER

They were just *goofin'*, it's not personal. What's your name? Can I get you a drink or something?

Skyler does *not* let Cooper get a read on her face...

SKYLER

Thanks, I'm good.

...and rushes back to the dance area. Cooper watches her return to her job, then shrugs it off and rejoins the party.

SKYLER'S POV - CONTINUOUS

Cooper catches up with her girlfriends at the nearest bar and playfully smacks them both on the backs of their heads.

SETH

(annoyed)

Dance, zombie bride girl, dance!!!

And indeed, to avoid crying, dance she does.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

A beautiful, sweater-weather day. The sun is shining, neighbors are gardening, walking dogs. A shiny new pickup truck takes the corner.

EXT. SKYLER'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Kevin parks the pickup and hops out with two Starbucks lattes and a pastry bag, bounds up the stairs to...

INT. SKYLER'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

...Skyler's open front door; he comes through and finds packed moving boxes everywhere; the place is stripped bare of all personal touches.

KEVIN

Whoa! Someone's been busy!
(off the open door)
Hey, where's the cat with the dumb name?

Skyler emerges from her bare bathroom, drying her red, puffy face.

SKYLER

Already at Mom's.

KEVIN

Whoa. Someone's been crying.

Skyler shrugs, offers a sad smile.

INT. SKYLER'S APARTMENT - LATER

Skyler and Kevin are camped out on the floor devouring Starbucks muffins, sipping their lattes.

KEVIN

But seriously? There was no other way?

SKYLER

(off the room)
Look around, my friend. Would I have done all this if there was? Would I have begged you to rent a pickup?

KEVIN
Well, actually, I didn't.

SKYLER
(disappointed)
*Kevin! We'll be making trips 'til
midnight in your Beemer!*

She rushes to the window.

SKYLER
I *said* I'd pay you back someday
if...
(confused)
Oh. Liar!

KEVIN
(sheepish)
It's not rented. Jack bought it
for me.

SKYLER
Oh my God, your husband's
ridiculous!

KEVIN
Nah, it was cheap. I mean, for
him. We'll use it for the dog
park, no biggie.

Skyler plops back down onto the floor, shaking her head.

SKYLER
I want your husband.
(then)
I want *any* husband.

They share a knowing look.

KEVIN
I can't believe you're...

SKYLER	KEVIN
Don't say it! Dammit I asked you not to say it!	...moving back in with your mom.

KEVIN
I just don't get how it's come to
this.

SKYLER
(a breathless tirade)
I'm *broke*, Kev!
(MORE)

SKYLER (cont'd)

My stupid transmission blew last month and there went my rent! No savings! Six Visas and Mastercards maxed and canceled, I think my credit score's a negative number but I don't wanna know! Temp work's too inconsistent to count on, my bakery basket business is a bust, I'd rather *shoot* myself than wait tables and besides I'd suck at it, I'm not borrowing one more dime from you or Belle 'til I pay you both what I already owe, and oh *yeah*, when I asked my idiot landlord for an extension he raised my rent fifty bucks.

KEVIN

Yep. Them's dire straights, all right.

He peers into the Starbucks bag.

KEVIN

But hey, I bought an extra muffin. You can have *that*, at least.

She snatches the bag.

KEVIN

(sudden thought)
What about your manager?! I thought she was getting you out, didn't you get those two cable auditions from her?

SKYLER

(flat)
Zelda.

KEVIN

Yeah, the one who showed up for the last five minutes of my reading and *raved* about you though she didn't catch *one line* of your dialogue?

SKYLER

Uh-huh. Well...
(breaking into a reluctant smile)
...um, she kinda...
(bursting into laughter)
...*she kinda killed herself!*

Kevin takes it in...then bursts into laughter, too.

KEVIN

No!

SKYLER

Deader 'n a doornail!

KEVIN

That's awful!

SKYLER

Terrible!

KEVIN

So why are we laughing?!

SKYLER

'Cause it took me years to find her, now I can't get signed by anyone else!

KEVIN

We're going to Hell!

They laugh themselves out. Kevin lays back, stretches out on the floor, staring at the ceiling.

KEVIN

You gonna miss this place?

SKYLER

Would you?

She stretches out, too, staring at the ceiling.

SKYLER

Hey. Remember that monologue Mare Winningham had in "St. Elmo's Fire?" She moved out of her parent's mansion and into a tiny apartment, and Emilio Estevez comes over to help her paint...or wait, *she's* painting, I think...

KEVIN

Rob Lowe. Comes over to fuck her.

SKYLER

But first she has a speech about making a sandwich in the middle of the night, something like *It was in my kitchen, my bread & peanut butter, and it was the most delicious sandwich I've ever had in my life.*

(sighing)

I'll get back on my feet soon...but in the meantime, yeah. I'll miss this shoebox.

Kevin glances at her, then scoots closer and takes her head in the crook of his arm, rubbing her hair *noogy*-style.

KEVIN

You're *one hot mess*, kid. But you'll be all right.

SKYLER

(sighing)

Yeah. Always am, one way or another.

They lie together enjoying the silence that's punctured only by chirping birds and barking dogs.

EXT. EILEEN'S HOUSE - MORNING

SUBTITLE: ONE MONTH LATER

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Hands are busy making coffee, eggs, toast.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The same hands knock on a bedroom door. The response from inside is decidedly disgruntled.

INT. SKYLER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

With blackout shades closed, it might as well be midnight in here. The only sign of life is a nearly-dead ficus and a lump of humanity under the bedcovers.

EILEEN (O.C.)

Skyler Elise Blythe, I've made your breakfast for the very last morning in this lifetime. I suggest you enjoy it, and then turn your attention to our mounds of laundry since that was our deal in lieu of rent. In exchange for that and some additional light housework this afternoon, you can expect my continued silence on the issue of your being 40 and living with your mother, as well as the fact that at your age I was married, raising a teenager and beginning a successful career. My ten o'clock client has arrived, so this is your final wake-up call. Have a lovely day.

Her heels click down the hallway. The lump under the covers angrily twitches this way & that, lashing out at nothing in particular and at life in general.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Skyler sits in the breakfast nook picking at her eggs and nibbling her toast with disinterest. In her mismatched, ill-fitting sweats & bed-head hair she looks like a homeless mental patient. She glances at the clock: 10:20. She grabs her cell phone and finds no messages, no texts. She sighs and clutches her steaming mug of coffee, staring out the window.

She sighs again and starts to look away...but peripherally something outside catches her attention. She watches with immediate interest as the garage of the house next door is opened from the inside by an **ELDERLY MAN**, 80ish, who then backs out his mint-condition, 1964 cherry-red convertible Pontiac GTO. He stops the car in the driveway and gets out to manually close the garage door, then gets back into his car and cautiously drives off.

Skyler cannot avert her gaze, staring off at the car as it drives away. Mesmerized, she absently sips her coffee and ends up pouring it down her sweatshirt.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - EARLY AFTERNOON

Skyler is hip-deep in laundry, going through the motions with no particular affinity for domesticity.

EILEEN (O.C.)
*Skyler? I have an hour free, feel
 like lunch? And if you're still in
 bed you're disinherited.*

Skyler rolls her eyes, quickly shoves the rest of a load into the washer with too much detergent, randomly punches buttons & knobs.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Skyler & Eileen are sharing soup & a sandwich in the breakfast nook.

EILEEN
 I wasn't paying attention, Dear, he moved in a month ago, maybe two. If I had an anal-retentive time-awareness disorder, I could tell you, but you're out of luck.

SKYLER
 And you're sure he lives alone?

EILEEN
 Unless there's a hoochie mama chained to the bed, yes, I'd say so.

SKYLER
 But why haven't you met him? I mean, you've *always* been neighborly! No muffin basket, no plate of cookies? And don't say *hoochie mama*.

EILEEN
 Would you like to see my appointment book? *You're* unemployed, *you* bake him cookies!

SKYLER
 It's too late *now!* Neighbors are s'posed to do that right away!

Eileen leans in closer.

EILEEN
 Skyler. The gentleman is eighty if a day. Surely you can find guys closer to your own age to date?!

SKYLER
(horrified)
Mother!

EILEEN
Then why the interest? Honestly,
despite my extensive training in
the field, I never know what goes
through that mind of yours.

Skyler stares out at the house next door.

SKYLER
I don't...know, exactly. Just
curiosity, I guess. It's
fascinating he keeps the same exact
schedule every day, including
weekends.

Eileen returns to her lunch, more interested in food than
this conversation.

EILEEN
Huh. Hadn't noticed.

Skyler leans in closer, eager to share.

SKYLER
Out the door before 10:30AM. Gone
all day, returns home precisely at
6PM. And why doesn't he invest in
a garage door opener at his age?!
Maybe we should buy him one!

EILEEN
(flat)
In lieu of cookies.

SKYLER
Although with what he drives
there's no way he's broke or
anything. Omigod, Mom, is that an
amazing car or *what*, it's gotta be
forty years old but it looks brand-
new!

EILEEN
Hadn't noticed.

SKYLER
Then lights out promptly at 9PM.
And that's his day.

EILEEN

(mock concern)

But what about "Idol," he must DVR it, right?! Oh *no*, but then his votes don't count because the *lines* don't stay open!

SKYLER

I hate when you mock me.

EILEEN

You wear a bull's-eye, my love.

Eileen pinches her daughter's cheek and slides out of the breakfast nook.

EILEEN

Clean up, 'k? I could use some prep time for my two o'clock.

And she's gone. Skyler stares out at the house next door, mesmerized; she absently drinks from her soup bowl and ends up pouring it down her sweatshirt.

EXT. SHERMAN OAKS NEIGHBORHOOD - LATE AFTERNOON

Kids are playing in yards, neighbors are chatting, walking dogs as the cherry-red 1964 GTO cautiously turns the corner onto its street.

INT. EILEEN'S FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Zoned out in front of the TV in a comfy chair, Skyler is still in her sweats, hair uncombed. Her bowl of chips is half-empty, her glass of Diet Coke is flat and she clearly has zero language comprehension of the *telenovela* she stares at with the volume low.

The sound of a purring car infiltrates her consciousness and she comes alive, shooting a look at the clock: 6:00. As if hit by a cattle prod she jumps up, sending chips flying as she races to the window.

SKYLER'S POV - CONTINUOUS

The elderly man repeats his earlier routine in reverse: parking in the driveway, manually opening his garage door, gliding the car into its space, closing the garage door from the inside.

She continues to stare in fascination until muffled conversation snaps her out of her daze. She bounds out of the den into...

INT. EILEEN'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...to find her mom escorting a **GOTH 20-SOMETHING DUDE** from her therapy office to the front door.

EILEEN

...and you take good care now, okay? Remember to call me day or night if you need me, my phone's always on.

The dude shrugs darkly and is gone.

SKYLER

Wow. What a dark soul.

Eileen stares out the front window.

EILEEN

(sighing)

I don't understand today's younger generations. In my time we didn't manufacture our psychological issues, they occurred organically.

She turns around and catches sight of her daughter.

EILEEN

For heaven's sake, Skyler, it's officially evening, a shower and change of clothes wouldn't spell Armageddon!

She strides off.

EILEEN

Any mail today?

SKYLER

Uh...haven't checked.

EILEEN

Please *do so* before you shower! I have to get ready for a date.

SKYLER

(mumbling, mimicking)

I haveta get ready for a date...

EILEEN (O.C.)
*I heard that! And if you started
 the day with fresh underpants maybe
 you'd get dates, too!*

EXT. EILEEN'S FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Skyler pads over to the mailbox, snags the mail, heads back inside.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

She glances at the mail as she spreads it onto the foyer table, finding what she expects: everything for her mother, nothing for her. She starts to shuffle away, but does a double-take at one piece of mail; she grabs it, studies it, her eyes darting back & forth, the wheels spinning. Suddenly energized, she races to...

INT. SKYLER'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

...where she jumps on her computer, and a few quick mouse clicks & keystrokes later is at...

SKYLER'S POV - CONTINUOUS

...the IMDb page of one **CLAYTON FARLEY**. In the black & white profile photograph, he's 30-something and Cary Grant-handsome. Skyler scrolls through his film credits, which begin in 1949 and end in 1962 with "Coyote Heart." The Main Details column includes "age 81" and "Awards: Nominated for Oscar." On the Awards line, Skyler clicks on more and finds **Academy Awards, USA 1963 Nominated**, Oscar - *Best Actor in a Leading Role for Coyote Heart* (1962). Skyler returns to the main page and clicks on Photo Gallery to survey the many production and on-set photos, both black & white and early '60s-era color; Farley exudes pure movie stardom in all of them. Skyler returns to one which shows the most facial detail, studying it intently for a moment.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Skyler is taking the fastest shower of her life.

EXT. EILEEN'S FRONT YARD - EARLY EVENING

Skyler emerges from the house nicely put together, with fresh-faced make-up and hair pulled back simply.

She crosses the two lawns and two driveways, steps up to the neighbor's front door and rings the bell. Hanging down at her side, her left hand clutches a piece of mail.

She waits. No response. After a polite length of time, she rings again.

INSIDE POV - CONTINUOUS

Through thick lace curtains, Skyler comes into view from her right side, the mail in her left hand not visible. An elderly man's hand deftly closes a heavy curtain behind the lace.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Skyler smiles patiently, decides to knock on the door loudly. She waits. Still no response. She steps back, cranes her neck to see the front windows of the house...just in time to see the lace curtains flutter.

SKYLER
(calling out)
Hello? Sir? My name's Skyler, I
live next door. I have a piece of
mail that belongs to you...I think?

More waiting. More nothing. She sighs, props the mail against the front door, starts to leave...

...but half-way across the lawn, she changes her mind and dashes back to the house to retrieve the mail.

INT. SKYLER'S BEDROOM - A MOMENT LATER

She tosses the piece of mail onto her desk and flops onto her bed, staring at the ceiling. Revealed is the envelope, addressed to Mr. Clayton Farley, from the sender NDSS - National Down Syndrome Society.

KEVIN (V.O.)
(calling out)
*Red or white? We have tons of
both.*

EXT. KEVIN & JACK'S HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME - EVENING

Skyler stands at the deck railing, breathing in the crisp night air and the majesty of the stunning canyon view.

SKYLER
 (calling in)
Of course you do! White, please!

KEVIN (O.C.)
*Chardonnay, Pinot grigio, Riesling,
 Sauvignon blanc, Gewurztraminer,
 Chenin blanc, Semillon or Muscat?*

SKYLER
Eeny, meeny, miny, whatever!

Jack joins her on the deck with a spread of cheese/crackers/
 fruit, followed by the menagerie of five dogs, who patiently
 beg and follow everyone's every move throughout.

JACK
 He drives me crazy, too. Just open
 something, who cares?

Kevin follows with a bottle, glasses and corkscrew.

KEVIN
*I care! And **sommeliers** care!*

JACK
 Wordsmiths. Always showing off.

They settle in around the beautiful tiled table, Skyler
 lavishing affection on the nearest dog.

SKYLER
 I love your place so much! It's
 like the world's best treehouse!

KEVIN
 ...she said for the millionth time.

SKYLER
 (excited)
 So'd you look him up?!

KEVIN
 I looked him up.

SKYLER
 And...?

KEVIN
 And...it'd be cool if it's him.
 But does it even look like him?

SKYLER

He's practically fifty years older,
Kev! But of course it's him! It
explains why he's such a recluse!

KEVIN

So call him, maybe he's listed.

SKYLER

He's not.

KEVIN

So go over again tomorrow.

SKYLER

And stand at the door while he
ignores me? I already feel like an
idiot, half the neighbors probably
saw me.

KEVIN

Well maybe it's just junk mail and
he won't want it anyway.

SKYLER

Uh, kinda not the point?! I wanna
meet him!

KEVIN

So you can say what?

SKYLER

*How did it feel to be a movie star?
Tell me about Gary Cooper and
Audrey Hepburn and Henry Fonda and
Thelma Ritter! Why'd you disappear
after your Oscar nom?*

KEVIN

*Why do you do the same exact thing
every day?*

SKYLER

No, not that. That's probably just
what old people do.

KEVIN

Not my grandpa. He's 94, goes for
a different walk every day,
switches between Starbucks and
Jamba Juice.

SKYLER

(sighing)

There's *gotta* be a way to meet him.
If only he'd answer his damned
door!

KEVIN

Hmmm...

She & Kevin lose themselves in thought, staring off into the
canyon as they drink their wine, munch cheese & fruit.

JACK

(finally)

I'm in Hell. There's no other
explanation.

KEVIN

He speaks! What sayeth thou,
silent one?

JACK

You two redefine *myopic*. Do you
really need me to tell you how to
meet him?

SKYLER

Uh...yeah. Please, Jack, if you
have a suggestion...

JACK

The man won't come to his door.

SKYLER

No, I stood there for--

JACK

(as if to a child)

...a long time, got it. And he's a
creature of habit.

SKYLER

Omigod yeah, comes & goes at
exactly the same time every day, no
deviation.

Jack just stares her down...until her face *slowwwly* lights
up, Edith Bunker-style.

SKYLER

Heyyyy...wait a *minute*...

Jack drains his wine glass, massages his temples, heads back
inside.

JACK
I need Advil. You people make my
head ache.

Skyler grins; Kevin isn't pleased.

KEVIN
(calling in)
*I would've thought of it
eventually, honey!*
(mumbling)
Maybe. Probably.

He refills wine glasses.

SKYLER
Do you think we're myopic?

KEVIN
(sighing)
We're passionately focused.

He clinks their glasses.

EXT. SHERMAN OAKS NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

Another beautiful SoCal day. Outside the Blythe residence,
all is calm and still. Inside, however...

INT. EILEEN'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...Skyler's like a caged panther, pacing a groove in the
floor as she stakes out the neighbor's house through the
kitchen window, clutching the misdelivered mail. She checks
the clock: 10:21. Her cell phone rings and she nearly jumps
out of her skin.

SKYLER
(answering impatiently)
Yeah, hello!

INT. DAY SPA - CONTINUOUS

Belle is mid-massage, ultra-pampered.

BELLE
So not paying rent doesn't mean
you're allowed to hibernate. And
Madame Olinski is personally
offended you haven't been to class.
(MORE)

BELLE (cont'd)
 Dinner & drinks tonight, my treat!
 Well, my husband's.

INT. EILEEN'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Another glance at the clock: 10:22.

SKYLER
 Belle, sorry, just been taking time
 to, y'know, get my bearings,
 listen, can I call ya back, I'm in
 the middle of something...

BELLE (V.O.)
 (offended)
 Hey! I haven't been able to reach
 you for *weeks!*

SKYLER
 I know, this is just really
important and--

BELLE (V.O.)
 And *friends aren't?! I don't like*
your tone, missy!

Nearly 10:23. Skyler lets down her guard, looks away from
 the window.

SKYLER
 Oh sweetie, don't say that, of
 course you're important to me!
 Tonight sounds great, I'd love to
 join you.

BELLE (V.O.)
 Excellent! Wear that purple &
 black scarf, I wanna see what it
 does for your eyes!

SKYLER
 (smiling)
 Purple & black scarf, copy that.

BELLE (V.O.)
 Omigod juicy gossip! That mousy
Julie girl who can't act her way
 out of a wet paper bag with
MapQuest?! Mae paired her in a
 scene with that physical trainer
 Aaron, and she not only *sucked*, she
 was so nervous she peed her *pants!*

SKYLER
 (drawn in)
No way!

BELLE (V.O.)
*Way! So afterwards he pulls me
 aside, right?! And you know every
 girl in class wants to jump his
 hunky blonde bones! So he pulls me
 aside and he says to me--*

The purr of an engine; Skyler's face falls.

EXT. SHERMAN OAKS NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

The neighbor is backing his GTO out of his driveway, the garage door already closed; Skyler's horrified face appears in her kitchen window, *a la* Edvard Munch's "The Scream."

Skyler comes racing out of the house clutching the mail and helplessly watches the GTO shift into drive and head off down the street.

INT. HOME THERAPY OFFICE - LATER

Skyler's stretched out on the plush settee. Eileen's glasses are perched at the edge of her nose as she listens, takes notes.

SKYLER
 I guess I'm just fascinated. I mean, my dream is to one day do Academy Award-caliber work, and this man did it! He was a player during the Golden Age of Hollywood! Well, the tail end, anyway. He *mattered*. He was *somebody*.

EILEEN
 Uh-huh.

SKYLER
 I know that must sound silly to someone who thinks Hollywood's frivolous...and I know in many ways it is...but I'm hoping the man was a true *artist*, and not just a creation of the studio system. Or simply a manifestation of the period's obsession with glamour.

She spins around to face Eileen.

SKYLER

Am I making any sense at all?

EILEEN

As much as ever, Dear.

(sighing, removing her
glasses)

Do you know what I'm hearing? You assign value to a life based on its Internet-data-whatever score. How many films have you been in, how many people think you're wonderful? Meanwhile, you've spent years spinning your wheels struggling to join some club you imagine is closed to you, and when you see a former colleague like Cooper Harris gain entry it feeds every insecurity you harbor about *your* identity and talents. Then along comes an anonymous senior citizen whom you normally wouldn't notice, but your head spins because once upon a time *he* earned the Ultimate Golden Ticket. So. Correct me if I'm wrong, which I'm not, but it seems someone in this room has misplaced values, and it sure isn't me.

She holds out her hand, palm up.

EILEEN

In the immortal words of Lucy Van Pelt, *That'll be five cents, please.*

Skyler stares at her mother, speechless.

EILEEN

Oh for heaven's sake, I jest. I happen to know that you don't even have five cents.

(laughing)

Now *that's* funny!

Skyler sinks into the settee; this hasn't helped at all.

EILEEN

Oh cheer up, buckeroo. The world loves an optimist, and based on your last twenty years of performing on any stage that would have you, with diminishing returns on your emotional investment as your only reward, I'd say the world loves you a helluva lot.

(off her watch)

So go! It's 5:58 PM. Play, be, do!

Skyler just stares at her.

SKYLER

Huh?

Her eyes light up and she bolts upright.

SKYLER

Omigod! The time! Thanks, Mom!

And she's out the door as fast as her 40-year-old legs can carry her. Eileen sighs, picks up the piece of mail on her desk, holds it out expectantly at arm's length.

Skyler races back in.

SKYLER

I forgot the-- Right! Thanks!

She snatches it from her mother's hand and races back out.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The cherry-red GTO cautiously pulls into the driveway, stopping at its usual place. The **ELDERLY MAN** climbs out, makes his way to the garage door and opens it. Turning around, he stops in his tracks; there's a woman standing next to his car.

SKYLER

Hello! Are you...Mr. Farley?

The man considers his response.

ELDERLY MAN

(not unkind)

May I help you with something?

SKYLER

I'm...my name is Skyler. Skyler
Blythe.

(quickly)

I'm your neighbor, I live right
there, next door.

The man nods his understanding...then continues on his way,
nonplussed.

ELDERLY MAN

Nice to make your acquaintance.
Have a nice evening.

He gets back in his car and parks it in his garage. When he
gets out of his car, Skyler is standing in the garage
doorway.

SKYLER

I'm sorry, I don't mean to pry,
but...are you Mr. Clayton Farley?

The man closes his car door and again considers his response,
this time not looking at her.

ELDERLY MAN

(softly)

Perhaps I wasn't clear. By "have a
nice evening" I meant "good
evening, Miss, I will now take my
leave."

He turns toward her, dismayed at finding her in the path of
his garage door.

ELDERLY MAN

But as you're standing in the very
spot where my garage door comes to
rest, I must ask you to please step
back.

SKYLER

Of course, but, uh...I'm sorry, I
haven't been clear, either.

She produces the piece of mail.

SKYLER

I may have a letter that's meant
for you.

The man approaches her, reaches for it...but Skyler backs up.

SKYLER

But, I...still don't know your name. I need to give it to the right person, I'm sure you understand.

ELDERLY MAN

(sighing)

Yes, I'm Clayton Farley, may I please have my mail?

Skyler studies the envelope, dejected; this is going worse than she'd imagined.

SKYLER

(rambling)

It came yesterday with *our* mail, I'm sure it was an honest mistake, our postal carrier's usually excellent, but then you're new to the neighborhood and all, so I guess, y'know...

She realizes Farley's hand is still outstretched, waiting. She quickly hands him the envelope.

FARLEY

(sincere)

Thank you.

SKYLER

Y'welcome.

Farley reaches up for the garage door rope handle to close the door; Skyler, indeed, does have to quickly step out of the way.

SKYLER

(quickly)

Hey, I was wondering if I could ask you a question or two, I mean seeing as we're neighbors and we know each other now.

FARLEY

Ms. Blythe, need I remind you of your stated intention a mere moment ago?

SKYLER

Uh...I'm sorry, what?

FARLEY

You said you had no intention of prying.

And the garage door comes down, leaving Skyler alone on the driveway to ponder her failure.

EXT. SHERMAN OAKS NEIGHBORHOOD - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Crickets are chirping and the neighborhood's asleep.

INT. SKYLER'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Except, that is, for Skyler, who lays in bed staring at the ceiling.

EXT. EILEEN'S FRONT YARD - MORNING

Skyler sits on the front porch, primed and ready for...

EXT. FARLEY'S FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

...the morning garage door routine. When Farley turns around from closing the garage door, he finds himself facing Skyler.

SKYLER

(brisk)

Okay, when I said I didn't mean to pry I was telling the truth, I *don't* mean to, but I kinda can't help myself. Y'see, I've spent the better part of my adult life trying to gain a foothold in an arena where you succeeded, and, to be blunt, succeeded spectacularly. So while part of me really wants to respect your whole "good fences make good neighbors" vibe, which believe me I totally do, a *bigger* part of me just *has* to ask you once more, politely as pie, if I couldn't just pick your brain for maybe 30 minutes. My friends say I'm really good company and my mother--

(dead end)

Well, she's bound by therapist-client confidentiality, but as a daughter I think she'd say I'm pretty cool.

(MORE)

SKYLER (cont'd)

At the end of the day, Mr. Clayton,
I mean Mr. Farley (sorry I'm kinda
nervous), all I wanna know is what
it's like to scale the heights, to
make movies and gain the respect &
admiration of this awful,
wonderful, crazy-making business of
show.

She takes a deep breath, glad to have that off her chest.

SKYLER

(blurting it out)

Oh, and I could even *bake*
something, I'm not much of a *cook*
but I'm great with *sweets*, I make
these peanut butter & jelly bars
from my own recipe, they kick a--
(quick save)
They're very tasty.

Farley doesn't respond, instead studying her intently as he
makes his way back into his car. He closes the door, staring
straight ahead for a moment, then lowers the car window.

FARLEY

Peach.

SKYLER

(wide-eyed)

Sorry?

FARLEY

The only fruit I can tolerate.
Please make them with peach
preserves.

And he's gone, once again leaving Skyler alone on his
driveway.

INT. FARLEY'S DEN/SITTING ROOM - EVENING

Candles and a crackling fireplace. Well-appointed book-
shelves and walls lined with framed photos and professional
achievements. This is the home of a man who accomplished
much, and early.

And on a circular oak coffee table, a plate of moist,
stuffed, crumbly, one-of-a-kind peanut butter & peach
preserve bars...which are disappearing fast.

FARLEY

(his mouth full)

These...mmm-~~mmmm~~...are heavenly,
young lady.

SKYLER

I am so glad you like them, Mr.
Farley. I'm very pleased this
time, they don't always turn out so
well.

FARLEY

Ah. A metaphor for life if I ever
heard one.

(closing his eyes, lost in
the taste sensation)

You should really sell these. You
could, you know.

SKYLER

Oh, I tried that for awhile. The
whole struggling-actress-sells-
baskets-o'-baked-goods thing. I
spent more than I made.

FARLEY

Never say *die*, that's my motto.
More hot cocoa?

SKYLER

I'm good for now, thank you.

Farley finishes his pastry, makes use of his napkin and gives
her his undivided attention.

FARLEY

Now. What is it you'd like to ask?

Skyler clutches her mug, sips her cocoa and zeroes in.

SKYLER

Why did you walk away? Everything
I've been able to find online says
you quit in 1963! Just walked off
"The Fall of the Roman Empire"
after a week on the set and never
looked back. Or worked again.

FARLEY

Ah. A girl who cuts right to the
chase. Admirable.

(smiling)

Yes.

(MORE)

FARLEY (cont'd)

Indeed, I left...as it turned out, much to the good fortune of Christopher Plummer. I must say, I've always marvelled at how wonderful he was in my role...*his* role. And imagine, only his third feature! Say, have you seen "The Last Station?" Terrific depiction of Leo Tolstoy! And the boys at the Academy *finally* recognized Mr. Plummer's fine work, I'm happy to say! Lovely film. Lovely man.

He reaches for the cocoa pot on the table, pours for them both.

FARLEY

Do have more cocoa! It cools off much too fast, and cold cocoa is something I *cannot* abide.

SKYLER

Thank you. So, um, *why* exactly did you--

FARLEY

(steamrolling)

Now you say *you're* an actress, is that right? Forgive me, actor, I understand from the television that these days dramatic performers prefer the masculine designation as an umbrella description. Makes sense, I suppose, when you consider sexism as an historic conundrum. But of course, acting roles are either male or female, so looked at from that angle I suppose one could say it's silly *not* to use *actress*. Which do you prefer, Skyler?

SKYLER

(disoriented)

Uh...either is fine, sometimes I say actor and sometimes I--

FARLEY

Well that's fine, each artist should certainly be entitled to make that call! *Artist*. Now *that's* an impartial word, yes? Appropriate for both sexes. And all art forms, to boot!

He takes another pb&j bar, relishes it.

FARLEY

I would lay a wager that you haven't previously made these little beauties with *peach preserves*, am I right?

SKYLER

Uh, no, never.

FARLEY

See? Give *that* a whirl next time, your business will take off like *hotcakes!*

SKYLER

I will certainly take that suggestion!

(one more try)

Now Mr. Farley, what I'm *really* wondering is how an actor who receives an Oscar nomination decides to walk away from his career when he can clearly--

FARLEY

(a full-mouth explosion)

Apricot! Well my goodness *that* would work just as well! Just stay away from grape. I'm not a fan, and I'll bet most people feel that way, if they're being honest!

(off Skyler's face)

Oh. I'm being terribly rude. I apologize. You've come to discuss acting and I'm prattling on like a silly-ass schoolboy.

(settling in, "focusing")

So acting! Yes! The big, scary monster called Hollywood! I had quite a run, my dear, quite a run indeed. 'Course that was a lifetime ago...*your* lifetime, I'm sure! So tell me about your own career! What projects have you done, what kinds of roles have you played?

Skyler considers, opens her mouth to re-start her line of questioning...but stops herself. He's not going to open up about his past...and she gets it; she acquiesces.

SKYLER

(sad smile)

My... "career." Yes, well. That word doesn't really apply. I still have hopes that it's, maybe, not too late...but in the meantime I've enjoyed doing theatre around town, lots and lots of small theatre. I went to college for theatre, in fact...

FARLEY

(too enthusiastic)

Well, that's wonderful! That's *marvelous* training for a career before the cameras, really *marvelous!* What kinds of shows? Musicals, melodramas, comedies?! Tackled any of the classics, have you?

SKYLER

(half-heartedly)

Yes, actually. Quite a number of them.

INT. FARLEY'S FOYER - LATER

Farley opens his front door for Skyler.

FARLEY

Now remember to rent that at the library, or use the computer to... load it down, is that right? "Carnival," the 1961 Broadway cast version. There's a London cast record as well, from '63...but no, go with the original, they were better! I wish you could play vinyl in your home, I'd be happy to loan you mine, but ah well, such is progress!

(he extends a hand, they shake)

Skyler, truly a pleasure. Happy to have made your acquaintance! As well as that of your baking talents! Be well!

SKYLER

Thank you. Good night, Mr. Farley.

She leaves. He closes, locks the door...and **completely transforms**. Gone is the smiling, energetic host, replaced by an old man exhausted by the effort of keeping his emotional distance; he is, clearly, still a remarkable actor.

INT. EILEEN'S FAMILY ROOM - LATE NIGHT

In her mismatched sweats ensemble, Skyler has become one with the couch & her cat & a pint of mint chocolate chip & the remote control, which she uses to channel surf with supreme apathy. A moronic infomercial. Home Shopping Network. "Saved by the Bell." An even more moronic infomercial.

And, joy, a Cooper Harris commercial.

SKYLER'S POV - CONTINUOUS

The TV screen: Cooper and a gorgeous Golden Retriever on opposite sides of a huge field on a stunning day; in slow motion, her hair blowing in the breeze, she whistles, claps and calls to "her" dog as he runs across the field toward her with a ball in his mouth.

COOPER (V.O.)

He's not just your dog. He's your family. And doesn't your family deserve the very best at every mealtime?

The scene cuts to a sparkling, spotless kitchen, where Cooper and "her" **PERFECT HUSBAND** and **PERFECT SON** watch "their" dog scarf his perfect bowl of dry food. Copper addresses the camera.

COOPER

Plentiful brand dog food is packed full of whole-grain goodness, and the delicious blend of chicken and beef gives your four-legged companion's every bite a taste sensation beyond doggy compare.

The scene cuts to a perfect, upscale den, where the family playfully wrestle with their dog and his delightful squeaky toy.

COOPER (V.O.)

And what's more, unlike most other brands, Plentiful has...

SKYLER (O.C.)

(innate, guttural cry)
Aaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!!!!

INT. FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Skyler *jams* the remote's MUTE button, and with ninja assassin-precision *power-flicks* a spoonful of ice cream at the TV screen, scoring a direct-bull's eye hit on Cooper and her phony telegenic life.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Skyler storms in, tosses the remnants of her dessert into the sink, opens a liquor cabinet and tosses back a healthy, straight-from-the-random-bottle shot and storms out...

...then slinks back in with a sigh to retrieve cleaning supplies from a pantry shelf.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Eileen, dressed and ready for her day, raps on Skyler's bedroom door.

EILEEN

Skyler Elise Blythe! In my continuing quest to be remembered fondly long after my death, I have foolishly renigged on my earlier oath to never make your breakfast again!

SKYLER (O.C.)

Yeah, come in, Mom.

INT. SKYLER'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eileen comes in and is stunned to find her daughter up and dressed and sitting at her desk, sunlight streaming through the open windows.

EILEEN

Who are you and what have you done with my usual daughter? And what are you writing?

SKYLER

Nuthin'. Just scribbling thoughts in my journal. Been too long.

EILEEN

So? How'd it go with Mr. Oscar winner? Did he give you a shot of inspiration?

SKYLER
(apathetic shrug)
He didn't win. He was only
nominated.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Eileen sips coffee in the breakfast nook, studying Skyler,
who sits perched on the kitchen counter eating her breakfast.

EILEEN
(finally)
You really need to move forward,
y'know. With your life. Being
forty, not making headway as an
actress--

SKYLER
Actor.

EILEEN
--it's not the end of the world.
In fact, it's really the *beginning*
...you could be using this downtime
to start a new *chapter*, pursue new
interests! You're young-ish,
you're creative, the world could be
your *oyster* if only you would--

SKYLER
Mom! I appreciate it. But the
only thing I can do in this world
is act.

EILEEN
Yes, but--

SKYLER
That means there's no *but!* I don't
need or want to be a *star*, or even
get *rich*, I just want a chance to
work. And it's possible, it's out
there, I just...
(sighing)
I need to work harder. Re-dedicate
myself. That's all.

EILEEN
Nice car. I remember the year
those came out.

SKYLER
 (annoyed)
Did you hear a word I said?!

Skyler follows her mom's gaze out the window...where the cherry-red GTO is parked in Farley's driveway, driver's door open...but the garage door is closed and Farley's nowhere in sight. Skyler shoots a look at the clock: 10:31.

The doorbell rings.

EILEEN
 (smiling)
 I think that's for you.

EXT. EILEEN'S FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Skyler opens the door to find Farley waiting patiently. When he speaks, he's like a different man; gone is the *marvelous!* and *wonderful!*, replaced by a grounded, not-theatrical-in-the-least demeanor. He's much closer to who he was in their first encounter, but without the rude, aloof edge.

FARLEY
 Good morning, Skyler.

SKYLER
 (uncertain)
 Good...morning.

FARLEY
 I would like to invite you to my home for dinner this evening, if you haven't any plans.

SKYLER
 (stunned)
 I...have no plans, yes, thank you.

FARLEY
 Seven-thirty?

SKYLER
 Seven-thirty.

FARLEY
 Have a good day, Skyler.

And he's gone.

Eileen sides up to her daughter.

EILEEN
What'd he want?

SKYLER
Uh...to feed me, apparently.

And they watch the cherry-red GTO drive away.

INT. FARLEY'S DINING ROOM - EVENING

The dinner table is a lavish spread, considering the guest list of one; the host has clearly designed the meal with a sense of occasion. Dinner is over, wine is being sipped.

SKYLER
That was *unbelievable* lasagna, Mr. Farley.

FARLEY
Thank you. My wife was a true gourmet. I've had forty years of free time to try out her recipes.

He refills their wine glasses.

FARLEY
And wait'll you taste her *tiramisu*.

INT. FARLEY'S DEN/SITTING ROOM - LATER

Skyler relishes her final bite of dessert.

SKYLER
(eyes closed)
Oh, I...I'm in Heaven, there really...just aren't words.

FARLEY
There never were. For years she was convinced I married her for purely gastronomic reasons.

He reaches for a framed photo, hands it to his guest.

FARLEY
That's her. Nancy Farley.

Skyler studies the photo that's revealed: 29-year-old groom Clayton Farley and his bride at their 1958 wedding, caught in a candid moment of laughter.

SKYLER
She was so beautiful.

FARLEY
Yes. Inside, too. Gave me the
best five years of my life. Only
wish I'd realized it at the time.
Or told her.

SKYLER
Oh, I'm...sure she knew.

FARLEY
Nope. Hadn't a clue.

Skyler offers him a sympathetic smile, props the photo on the coffee table and goes to peruse the many photos lining a wall.

SKYLER
(awed)
These are...amazing. So many
memories.

She takes in several of them, *hmmming* and *ahhing*. Farley smiles watching her.

SKYLER
(finally, off one)
Hey! This is Oscar night! 1963!

FARLEY
Yes.

SKYLER
That's the Santa Monica Civic
Auditorium! Oh, and the host that
year was...uh,
(searching)
wait, I know this...

Sinatra.

FARLEY

SKYLER
Frank Sinatra, yes!

SKYLER
(sheepish)
I'm a total Oscar geek.

FARLEY
(smiling)
There are worse things to care
about.

(then)

(MORE)

FARLEY (cont'd)

Tell me something: what do you see
when you look at that photograph?
When you see me that night?

Revealed is the black & white Oscar photo: an impossibly debonair, 34-year-old Clayton Farley with his beautiful, very-pregnant wife Nancy on the red carpet. All eyes, including hers, are on her movie-star husband.

FARLEY

Besides the fashion, and the media
frenzy.

SKYLER

I see...a man at the top of his
game.

FARLEY

True enough.

SKYLER

(softly)
And you were having a baby.

FARLEY

Also true.
(off the frame on the
table)
And what did you see when you
looked at *this* one?

Skyler rejoins him, looks again at the candid wedding shot.

SKYLER

Love. A real connection.

FARLEY

A connection. Yes. The kind that
carries a person their entire life,
that can get them through any
hardship and over every obstacle.

SKYLER

That's magical. My parents had
that, too, they were hopelessly in
love.

FARLEY

Did they tell each other? Or show
each other?

SKYLER

Oh, yes! Nearly every day!

FARLEY
(smiling)
Good!
(then, softer)
That's...good.

He stares off, lost in thought. Skyler watches him for a moment, unsure if she should interject.

SKYLER
(finally)
Mr. Farley...why did you ask me
over again so soon?

FARLEY
(looking off)
Last night you had questions for me
which I intentionally circumvented.
It was rude, and I apologize.

SKYLER
(awkward)
Oh, I...really, there's no need.

FARLEY
(finger to his lips)
Please, you're my guest. You had
questions because you're a fellow
artist following a similar path but
with different guideposts, and in a
different time. You know a good
deal about me, thanks to the
information age in which we live,
and your curiosity is therefore
understandable.

SKYLER
(mesmerized)
Thank you. Yes.
(then)
So why *did* you walk away in '63?
Off the set, away from...
everything?

Farley's gaze remains fixed somewhere very, very far away.

FARLEY

You...can only imagine the feeling of being *wanted*, being...*craved* by people and institutions with the means to make you wealthy, the resources to give you...*power*, to make you the object of unseen masses who in turn crave you *themselves*, who make you the object of their lust, who return again and again to worship your face, your voice, on the so-called silver screen. The money, the opportunities, the travel, the glamour and attention and idolatry...it's more potent than any drug, and more...damaging.

(softly)

Damaging, and damning. Please, look at that photo on the wall again.

She does as asked.

FARLEY

Ignore everything in the picture except my face...look into my eyes. What do you see?

Skyler looks, searching.

SKYLER

Uh...I'm not sure what you...mean.
(then)
I see you. Your younger self.

FARLEY

Then you see a man who barely noticed his own wife. You see raw ambition. Naked hunger for more... always *more*.

Skyler looks at him.

SKYLER

More what?

FARLEY

Exactly.

He comes back from his faraway place, meets Skyler's gaze.

FARLEY

I boarded a plane for Madrid the day after that ceremony. Epic story. Six months in Spain with Loren, Sharif, Guinness. Anthony Mann directing.

SKYLER

"The Fall of the Roman Empire."

FARLEY

Nancy couldn't travel, of course, but her due date was just around the corner, so...

(then; haunted)

What kind of man jets off across the globe to play make-believe with strangers when his first child's about to come into the world? His...only child...

SKYLER

(cautious)

But...she wasn't *alone*...

FARLEY

Hardly! Had the best care in Los Angeles! Live-in nurses, doctors on call! Hell, my mother-in-law moved *in*, damned annoying woman didn't leave Nancy's side for six *months!*

(softly)

But still...what kind of man...?

He squeezes his eyes shut, remains very still for a moment; Skyler quietly returns to her seat, sips her coffee, respects the silence.

FARLEY

(finally, eyes still closed)

You asked why I walked away from **everything**. But that's most certainly **not** what I did. Without the most **important** things, all the rest was...so much distraction. Unnecessary window dressing.

He opens his eyes...and retrieves his wallet. He removes a photograph, hands it to Skyler.

FARLEY

This is Mindy. My daughter.
Athletic creature...don't know
where she gets it, neither of her
parents so much as ever jumped to a
conclusion.

Skyler studies the photo which is revealed: **MINDY**, a woman
with Down syndrome in her 40s, celebrating finish-line
victory at the Special Olympics, surrounded by joyous fellow
athletes and coaches.

FARLEY

God bless that fine organization.
As they say, *Let me win! But if I
cannot win, let me be brave in the
attempt.* Well. My daughter is the
bravest person I have ever known.

Skyler considers the picture a moment longer, then returns it
to her host.

SKYLER

(smiling)
Bravery's genetic. I read it
somewhere.

Farley considers, offers her a sad smile...then claps his
hands together, lightening the mood.

FARLEY

Unless I miss my guess, you're a
nightcap kind of gal!

SKYLER

(coy)
I've been known to imbibe.

As Farley makes short work of procuring a brandy bottle and
snifters from a liquor cabinet, Skyler glances around the
room...and realizes there are photos of Mindy everywhere, at
every age and participating in many Special Olympics events.
Farley pours, they clink glasses and sip.

FARLEY

Your hopelessly-in-love parents
raised you very well, Skyler
Blythe. **You**...are a good dinner
guest.

SKYLER

Thank you.
(then)
Can I...ask you a silly question?

FARLEY

A nosey neighbor, but a good dinner guest. Yes, you may.

SKYLER

Why don't you have an automatic garage-door opener? This being the twenty-first century and all.

FADE TO YELLOW:

OF BRIGHT SUNSHINE STREAMING THROUGH A WINDOW

INT. EILEEN'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Skyler races in, slurps some coffee, checks the clock: 10:25. Outside, a car horn honks impatiently.

EXT. SHERMAN OAKS NEIGHBORHOOD - A MOMENT LATER

With the top down (for the first time that we've seen), the cherry-red GTO drives away, Skyler in the passenger seat arranging a purple & black scarf to shield her hair from the wind.

MONTAGE

We follow the GTO as it arrives at a large home in a nearby neighborhood. It is revealed to be the lovely, well-appointed group home of several Down syndrome adults, and as a first-time visitor Skyler is welcomed warmly by staff, residents, relatives...and, especially, Mindy. Their day flies by, with highlights including swimming, volleyball, lunch (prepared by Mindy and her home supervisor, **DONNA**), acting exercises led by Skyler, and jewelry-making overseen by Mindy (who makes beautiful necklaces & bracelets, and clearly sells them).

And laughter, and hugs...many hugs...the biggest, warmest one of the day reserved for Mindy's late-afternoon farewell to her new friend Skyler Blythe.

INT. CHERRY-RED GTO - LATE AFTERNOON

Farley and Skyler settle in for the drive home, but before Farley starts the ignition they sit in silence for a moment.

SKYLER
 (finally)
 Wow.

FARLEY
 Yes.

SKYLER
 That was...
 (softly sighing)
 ...the best day.

They share a warm smile and Farley revs up the Goat.

EXT. EILEEN'S HOUSE - LATER (EVENING)

Perfect peace, crickets chirping. Skyler relaxing, stretched out on the front yard bench staring up at what passes for stars in L.A. After a moment, she impulsively sits bolt upright, ponders something, and dashes into the house.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER (LATE NIGHT)

Skyler sits in the breakfast nook surrounded by boxes of various sizes, all stuffed with mementos & memories from her life so far; spread out all across the table are theatre programs, ticket stubs, scripts, tchotchkes, high school & college commendations...and photos. Lots & lots of photos. She peruses and sorts through the tangible reminders of her past with varying degrees of reverence and amusement, *especially* amusement at the photos: bad adolescent hairstyles, wild nights with sorority sisters, proudly posed cast & crew archival shots.

Gathering a new handful of *stuff* from one of the boxes, she drops a few photos which sail under the table. Twisting awkwardly to retrieve them, she discovers one that makes her freeze; slowly she picks it up and returns to a sitting position, so engrossed in the photo that she barely notices *conking* her head on the table's edge as the photo is revealed: Skyler as a kid standing next to her father at a petting zoo, surrounded by adorable baby animals. While her dad comfortably leans against a wooden fence, Skyler is clearly mimicking his pose for the camera, right down to a single hand placed on a hip.

Skyler studies the photo carefully, a range of emotions playing out across her face: amazement, surprise, joy...and, finally, unabashed nostalgia. She traces the image for a moment, clearly longing to bridge the decades and return to that time.

EILEEN (O.C.)
 You were always doing that, y'know.
 Mimicking him.

She slides into the booth beside her daughter.

EILEEN
 Scootch over, little parrot.
 That's what we called you back
 then: his little parrot.

SKYLER
 (stunned)
 I don't...recall this at all. I
 don't even remember this *photo*, did
 you take this?!

Eileen takes the photo from her, turns it over.

EILEEN
 Oh c'mon, you knew your dad: age &
 location on the back of every
 single picture.

Revealed is the yellowing back of the photo: *Harold 39 & Skyler 11 - Griffith Park* in a messy, masculine scrawl.

SKYLER
 Wow.
 (then)
 Worst handwriting ever.

EILEEN
 Yup.

Skyler turns the photo over and they stare at it together for a moment.

SKYLER
 But the best dad.

EILEEN
 Yup.

SKYLER
 Boy, can you imagine what *he'd* say
 about my moving back in here? *Get
 a real job, kid, give your poor ol'
 mom a damned break!*

She sighs, puts the photo atop a stack of stuff, moves onto some other stuff...and finds a production still of Skyler & Cooper from that *über-dramatic* moment of the last play they did together.

SKYLER

(rolling her eyes)
Or better still, what he'd say
about dear ol' Cooper's success
versus my, uh, lack of same...

Eileen grabs the father-daughter photo and props it up in front of Skyler.

EILEEN

I'm sorry, would you like to guess again?

SKYLER

(lost)
Uhhh...sure.
(then)
What?

EILEEN

(stern)
He would say no such thing to you, not now, not ever! Harold Blythe was incredibly proud of his only child, and you would do well for the purposes of this and any other conversation to remember that!

SKYLER

Mom, *please*. I'm not talking about seeing me in school plays or when my debate team won a tournament or-

EILEEN

Hey! Are you forgetting how unequivocal that man's support was? Do you need a reminder, or maybe a splash of cold water in the face?!

SKYLER

Don't get defensive. I'm just saying I haven't exactly *gone anywhere* with this brilliant career of mine, and so Dad might've had some thoughts regarding me, y'know, getting more serious about my future.

Eileen shakes her head in amazement.

SKYLER

Oh, don't do *the disappointed mom head shake*, I really hate that.

EILEEN

I thought you knew him better than that.

SKYLER

(defensive)

I knew Dad very well!

EILEEN

Really? Then let's see...what do you think he told me when I blew a gasket about your switching college majors?

SKYLER

Uh...*Dammit, Eileen, what's she gonna do with a theatre degree? Flip burgers?!*

EILEEN

He told me to stop riding you and to respect your decision.

SKYLER

Okay, sure, but he was probably *thinking-*

EILEEN

And when you quit school with only four credits left to do that New England theatre thing, remember his reaction?

SKYLER

Yeah, uh-huh, in fact I *do!* He said *Four credits, are you insane?! Get your ass back there and finish or you'll regret it the rest of your life!*

EILEEN

Nope, I said that. *He* told you to break a leg...and reminded me that you were a grown woman.

Beat.

SKYLER

(deflated)

Oh.

EILEEN

And I'll tell you something else he once said: *We have to always let her follow her dreams on her own terms...no matter where they take her.*

Beat. Skyler mulls this over a bit.

SKYLER

Wow. That's nice.

(then)

Well, he loved theatre...so no big surprise he'd say that!

EILEEN

Skyler. You were four days old at the time.

Caught off-guard, Skyler meets her mother's gaze.

EILEEN

And if he were here today, he would offer nothing but support for where you are in life. He'd tell you to stop being so hard on yourself and trust that your path is the right one *because you chose it.*

(pause)

And guess what else?

Skyler shrugs.

EILEEN

He'd tell you there's only one appropriate response to the success of other people, and that's *be happy for them.* Anything else only lessens you...and your parents definitely raised you to be bigger than that.

Skyler considers for a moment.

SKYLER

Is that the therapist in you talking...or the mom?

EILEEN

Neither. It's the woman who married a wonderful man who gave her a very special child.

Skyler looks down at the photo with a wistful smile.

SKYLER

You're trying to make me cry.

EILEEN

Well...that's the therapist *and* the mom.

Eileen takes both photos, gently places them atop a pile of stuff.

EILEEN

So, Skyler Elise Blythe, what're you gonna do with the rest of your life? Mope around your mother's house and grow older by the day... or get back out there on your path and kick some mofo ass?

SKYLER

Well, I dunno, I just...
(stunned)
Did you say...*mofo*?!

EILEEN

I did, dear. When I want, I can be very hip to the times.

The only response Skyler can muster is stifled laughter as we...

FADE TO BROWN:

OF A BEAUTIFUL CHOCOLATE-COLORED CASHMERE SWEATER

SUBTITLE: A MONTH LATER

SKYLER (V.O.)

...and I dreamt about him that night. The moonlight, the beach. And in the dream I told him the truth...

INT. COFFEE HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Skyler, looking *fabulous* in a brown & black cashmere sweater/long skirt/sleek boots ensemble, is finishing telling us a story.

SKYLER

...I told him everything. And he smiled that beautiful smile and said he knew.

(sad smile)

When I woke up, I realized something I should've known all along: sometimes being *safe* isn't the best choice...sometimes it's good to *risk*. Because once in a while...

(MORE)

SKYLER (cont'd)
 (heartbreaking tears)
*...you find true grace when you
 fall.*

Overcome with bittersweet yet hopeful sorrow, she stares off, awash in thoughts of romantic possibility as the coffee house lights quickly...

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. OFF STAGE LEFT THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

In darkness, the full house of 40-some breaks into enthusiastic applause and whistling. As the stage lights come up, the cast of one takes her solo curtain call: Skyler, all alone and overcome with joyful emotion at the audience's reaction. After graciously acknowledging the crew up in the booth, she looks offstage and *forcefully insists* that someone join her...and Kevin does. They hug, and he takes his own grateful bow. Jack jumps up from his seat in the front row, where he's sitting with Farley, Eileen, and Belle, and bestows on each of them a beautiful bouquet. As they take a final bow together, Jack whispers something to Skyler and they exit the stage laughing, utterly on top of their world.

INT. OFF STAGE LEFT GREEN ROOM - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

The theatre is an explosion of festive holiday decorations, complete with Charlie Brown Christmas tree. The opening night party has just begun: the usual potluck buffet and makeshift open bar, holiday music...it's a full house of love & mirth & cheer. HERE we catch a glimpse of acting teacher Mae Olinski holding court with several of her **STUDENTS**, including the ridiculous Wendy and the cardboard Pfeiffer... THERE we spot Off Stage Left **COMPANY MEMBERS** socializing as a group, among them their already-sloppy drunk artistic director, Mary Jane Miller...as well as other **AUDIENCE MEMBERS** enjoying the free food & booze.

We zero in on a sitting area near the dressing room, where Belle, Farley, Eileen, Kevin & Jack have settled, enjoying drinks and each other's company, along with a friendly debate.

JACK

You are so mistaken, there's no
comparison! The black & white
 beauty of the snow?! And Clarence
 Odbody, he's an *angel* for crissake!
 It's one for the ages!

BELLE

Uh, yeah, the *Stone Ages!*

KEVIN

Belle, I'm goin' with my husband on this one...

KEVIN

..."It's a Wonderful Life" defines the very *genre!*

BELLE

(drowning him out)
Ya'll are cracked in the cranial membranes, Wikipedia calls "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" a modern holiday classic! **Modern!** Hell-*O?! That means better!*

JACK

Mr. Farley, if you please? You're uniquely qualified to weigh in with an informed opinion.

KEVIN

Best Christmas movie ever, Mr. Farley. Regardless of era or budget or special effects.

All eyes are on Farley...who sips his cocktail, carefully considers, then intones his verdict.

FARLEY

"Elf." Ed Asner as Santa plus Bob Newhart as an elf equals genius. And that Will Ferrell kid, he's going places, mark my words.

The trio consider for a moment, then respectfully mumble their agreements.

KEVIN/JACK/BELLE

Sure, that's a good one./Solid film, absolutely./Yeah, I always bust a gut over him.

EILEEN

(dramatic)

*Ladies & gentlemen, a **star is born!***

Skyler has emerged from the dressing room to praise and affection from everyone who sees her. She joins her mother and friends, gushes and hugs ensue.

SKYLER

Alright, you guys are amazing for coming opening night, but I've gotta know: *whose bright idea to sit front & center?!*

Belle does a double-finger point to Farley.

FARLEY

My dear. When one shines, as you most certainly do, one must never be afraid to shine up close and personal!

SKYLER

(cringing)

You saw every dumb mistake I *made!* Oh God, like at the top of the funeral speech, I *totally* wasn't-

But Farley graciously places his holiday cocktail napkin over her mouth.

FARLEY

The Oscar nominee has spoken.

Skyler gives him a grateful smile.

INT. OFF STAGE LEFT HALLWAY - LATER

Kevin emerges from the men's room and makes his way down the hall. Passing the theatre office window, he stops when he spots Mary Jane Miller sprawled out in her second-hand desk chair, snoring like a buzzsaw with limbs splayed and empty Scotch bottle knocked over on her desk. Disgusted, he continues on...but does a double-take at the cluttered, junky cork bulletin board behind her. He goes into the office and stealthily slips past her to get to it.

INT. OFF STAGE LEFT GREEN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The party is in full swing, holiday music replaced by thumping dance tunes. Near the wall of company member headshots, Farley, Eileen and Mae are engrossed in conversation. Kevin returns, spots Skyler getting a drink and joins her at the bar.

KEVIN

So. You happy?

SKYLER

Yeah, I think we'll have a good run.

KEVIN

That's not what I meant.

SKYLER

Oh. Well sure, I guess. Are you?

KEVIN

You know me. I'm always happy.

SKYLER

I'd always be happy, too, if I lived in a Hollywood Hills treehouse with my veterinarian husband.

KEVIN

No, you wouldn't... 'cause that's not your path. That clichéd stuff your mom told you... it's true. And your path is... un-landscaped, it's... rocky & dangerous and it overlooks a cliff without guardrails. But it's yours, you're true to it. And furthermore, *at the end of the day*, to coin a hackneyed phrase, you know what I think?

Transfixed, Skyler shakes her head, sipping her drink. Kevin *whips out* a decade-old headshot of Cooper Harris which has been defaced with black-Sharpie mustache & devil horns, whited-out eyes and a plethora of pushpin holes in strategic places...

KEVIN

(perfect mimic)

*I think you **totally rock!!!***

...and Skyler *loses it*, collapsing in hysterics and the spit-take to end all spit-takes.

MAE OLINSKI

(disapproving)

*Oh **dahhhling...this is your moment!**
You must embody **decorum!***

But Skyler's having far too much fun to care.

FADE OUT.