

THE GODS OF COMEDY

by

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REV. FIRST DRAFT

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FADE IN:

INT. A SMALL, NEW ENGLAND CHAPEL - DAY

A storybook wedding in progress.

The BRIDE is luminous, the GROOM endearingly uncomfortable. Both MOMS weep openly. The DADS comfort them, misty themselves.

The ringleted FLOWER GIRL fidgets in her organdy frock, the cherubic RING BEARER yanks his little tux trousers out of his little butt.

The MINISTER smiles, and closes his Holy Bible.

MINISTER

...And so what God has brought together today, let no man put asunder. And now, it is with great joy, that I pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride.

The groom takes his bride in his arms, then:

BRIDE

The fuck he will!

Everyone gasps.

GROOM

(turns out, quipping)
Can we say that on TV now?

There is A ROAR OF LAUGHTER, like that of a live studio audience.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

CUT!

A BELL RINGS, and the chapel is flooded with make-up people, hair-people, and other assorted crew. PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

INT. STAGE 25 - CONTINUOUS

This is not really a New England chapel, but rather the three-walled swing-set of a chapel, on a soundstage in Hollywood.

The bride and groom are sit-com characters played by actors MEL CHENOWICK and BOB HANSON. This is tape-night for their primetime network show of nine seasons, *GO TO MEL*.

UP IN THE STUDIO AUDIENCE - Warm-up man JJ JACKMAN, grabs his microphone and bounces down the aisle.

JJ

What Mel just did there, folks, is technically known as a "blooper". Don'tcha love that word? Blooper. Blooper blooper blooper. Say it with me now, one-two-three--

STUDIO AUDIENCE

BLOOPER!

ONSTAGE

Bride Mel laughs, and waves to them.

MEL

I love you guys!

She collars Line Producer, STEVE GROSSMAN.

MEL

(continuing)

Shut them up, and get me Chuck!

She grabs a camera, and pushes her angry face into it.

MEL

(continuing)

CHUCK ZINBERG!

INT. NETWORK BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

NETWORK AND STUDIO EXECS, young, blonde, in black Banana Republic, drink white wine and make notes in their dog-eared scripts.

ON THE MONITOR, Mel's face is huge and distorted, like the Wicked Witch of the West in the crystal ball.

MEL

GET DOWN HERE NOW!

(turning away)

Where the hell is he? I'm going to rip him a new asshole!

CHUCK ZINBERG, late 40's, the man *ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY* once referred to as "The God of Comedy", twists his baseball cap.

CHUCK

Oh boy.

(rises)

Anyone else want to be Chuck Zinberg for awhile?

He zips his *GO TO MEL* show jacket, and heads for the door.

CHUCK

Last chance. There's a new asshole
in it for you.

He exits the booth.

INT. STAGE 25 - A MINUTE LATER

Chuck pushes through heavy padded doors, and enters the stage.

One of the blondes in black, network exec, KIM BARISH, 20's, catches him on the fly as he crosses UNDER THE AUDIENCE RISERS.

KIM

The Glenn wants that kiss, Chuck.
If you still want a shot at airing
on "Kiss and Tell Tuesday" in May
sweeps--

Studio VP, PAIGE MICHAELS, 20s, falls in with them.

PAIGE

We do!
(to Chuck)
The November "Kiss and Tell"
averaged a twenty-eight share. We
need those numbers.
(to Kim)
If he can get tongue, will you cut
it into the promo?

KIM

Can you get tongue?

CHUCK

Aw, jeez, guys. Lucy and Ricky
didn't do tongue. Archie and Edith
didn't do tongue--
(off their blank stares,
sighs)
I'll try for tongue.

He presses on. They watch him go.

PAIGE

Do we love that man, or what?

KIM
I'd jump his bones if his demos
were better.

Chuck passes WARDROBE. The WARDROBE MISTRESS, rushes out.

WARDROBE MISTRESS
Mayday, Chuck!

CHUCK
Sorry, can't stop. The network
wants tongue.

She trots alongside him.

WARDROBE MISTRESS
The Maid of Honor won't put on her
gown. She says she's bloated from
dinner.

CHUCK
Aw, nuts, her character turns the
whole second act.

He flags a pencil-thin P.A. who is standing nearby.

CHUCK
(continuing)
Renee, you used to be bulimic. Can
you help?

RENEE
Sure, Mr. Zinberg!
(enters the trailer
dressing room)
OK, have you ever forced yourself
to vomit before? Oh shoot, you've
got nail extensions? OK, I'll be
your fingers...

CHUCK
That girl's gonna run a show
someday.

He keeps winding his way toward the set.

ON THE SET, Mel, surrounded by HAIR, MAKE-UP, WARDROBE, yanks
her veil off, screaming:

MEL
No, I won't TAKE IT EASY! I want
Zinberg's sorry ass on this stage,
and I want it here THIS MINUTE!

Chuck swings around to the front of the stage, passing the producer's podium.

STEVE GROSSMAN
They're a-clankin' tonight, Boss.

CHUCK
Funny, I feel mine drawing up into
my body as we speak.

He looks up into THE AUDIENCE, and makes eye contact with--

His wife, JULIE ZINBERG, 40's and lovely, at her usual post,
front-row center.

She touches her heart, and gestures sympathy out to his.

Chuck thumps his chest, "message received", then turns back
to face the dragon.

CHUCK
(continuing; to Steve)
If I don't make it back, tell Julie
I loved her.
(takes a deep breath,
heading onstage)
Where's my girl? Where's my star?

FROM THE STANDS, JJ Jackman points Chuck out to the audience.

JJ
Ladies and gentlemen, Emmy-award
winning writer, and our esteemed
executive producer, Chuck Zinberg!

ON THE SET, Chuck gives the raging Mel a big, Hollywood hug.

CHUCK
Big funny tonight, Mel-o. Do I
smell another Emmy?

MEL
(pushes him away)
Hey, lick my ass some other time.
Did you know about him?
(points at co-star, Bob)
Did you know he's got a snot-
raging cold, and I'm supposed to
sing a duet with Celine at
Superbowl half-time this Sunday?

BOB

I told you it's not a cold, it's allergies--

MEL

It's MUCOUS, it's DISGUSTING, and I won't kiss it!

CHUCK

Honey, this is the wedding episode. We've been building up to it for nine years. Seventeen thousand *TV Guide* readers sent in postcards saying "Yes, they should get married." You've got to kiss him.

MEL

No.

He pulls her aside, confidentially:

CHUCK

You know how the ratings have taken a dive. We're on the bubble, here, about even getting our pick-up for next season. Now, the network's doing one of their big kiss nights for sweeps. They want us on it. If there's one thing I've learned in twenty-two years of television: You don't shit on the network. So, please, Mel--

MEL

No!

CHUCK

All right, I'm not asking anymore. As executive producer, creator, and the guy who saved you from Open Mike Night at the Comedy Store, I'm ordering you: KISS HIM, DAMMIT!

MEL

No!

(turns her back)

I'm not screwing with the Superbowl.

She sashays off to her dressing room.

Chuck desperately wants to strangle her bare-handed. But instead, he bites his tongue and walks away.

KIM
Are we going to get our kiss?

CHUCK
Can we live without it?

KIM
No.

Chuck stands very still for a moment, trying to put together a puzzle with pieces from different boxes.

CHUCK
I'm gonna grab a Coke.

He walks across the stage in silence. It's a long walk when all eyes are on you.

JJ
(hushed, into mic)
Ladies and gentlemen, Emmy-award
winning writer, and our esteemed
executive producer, Chuck
Zinberg... getting a Coke.

Chuck doesn't look up. He walks PAST THE RISERS, past the crew, past the Coke machine, and into:

INT. THE PROP ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Chuck closes the door, stands there in miserable silence for a moment. Then:

CHUCK
AAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!

He explodes, throwing lacquered bagels, foam dumbbells, starts throttling a huge papier mache Jack-in-the-Box.

CHUCK
(continuing)
I don't know! I don't know! I
don't know! I don't know!

He grabs a rubber knife and plunges it into his chest.

CHUCK
(continuing)
I DON'T KNOW! I--DON'T--KNOW!

He falls to his knees, banging his head on the cement floor.

CHUCK

(sobs)

I don't--

The door opens. Julie slips in.

She moves to her hyperventilating husband, holds him, covers him with her body.

JULIE

Shhh, it's okay.

CHUCK

It's not okay, Julie! I can't think, I don't know what to do! My vision started doing that horrible thing again, and all I could see was her giant red lips flapping. And now they're all waiting for me to think of something. And I don't know, honey, I really don't--

JULIE

Do you feel like you have to throw up?

CHUCK

What kind of question is that? I always feel like I have to throw up!

(checks himself)

I don't have to throw up.

He lays his sweaty forehead on the cool floor.

CHUCK

(continuing)

I just have to think of it. What's the matter with me?

JULIE

It's not you, it's this stupid business. I hate it, it's eating you alive! No one could do what they ask you to do anymore! Get out, Chuck. Come on, let's just get up and go out the side door right now, and--

CHUCK

Wait a minute, shhh!

(lost in thought)

What if--

He scrambles to his feet, finds a torn piece of paper flower. He grabs a pen from his pocket and scribbles on the tissue.

CHUCK

"Don't kiss me, don't kiss me..."

(begins to smile)

Yeah, this'll work--

(kicks open the door)

I need a secretary, STAT!

(to Julie)

You can go now, honey. I'm okay.

He continues his frenzied writing. She stands there. He glances up.

CHUCK

(continuing)

Really.

She stands there, watching him, sighs and walks out.

INT. STAGE 25 - MINUTES LATER

Chuck, strides onto the set, handing the new pages to Bob.

CHUCK

All right, Bobby-boy, you've got all the new words.

Mel tries to get a peek. He steers her away.

CHUCK

(continuing)

Unh-uh, I want to save that gorgeous voice for Sunday. You just stand there and be the most beautiful bride in the world.

MEL

And I don't have to kiss him?

CHUCK

Melly, you don't have to do anything you don't want to do.

INT. NEW ENGLAND CHAPEL SET - MINUTES LATER

As before. Luminous, radiant, etc.

MINISTER

...And now, it is with great joy that I pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride.

BEHIND THE CAMERAS, Chuck watches the stage intently.

IN THE AUDIENCE, Julie watches Chuck.

IN THE BOOTH, the blondes watch the monitor.

ONSTAGE, Bob steps back, away from Mel, tenderly touching a finger to her lips.

BOB

No. Don't kiss me. Please don't
kiss me. Because if my lips feel
yours, they may never let go. If I
taste your sweet breath, I might
never be able to breathe again
without it. If my heart feels
yours pounding next to it --

(pulls her close)

-- it might just stop.

(filled with emotion)

So please don't kiss me. Please,
please don't --

Mel can't help herself. She pulls Bob's face to hers and gives him a long, deliciously romantic kiss.

THE AUDIENCE cheers.

THE BLONDES in the network booth clink wine glasses.

DIRECTOR (OC)

And, CUT! Works for me. Moving
on!

Mel breaks away from the kiss, realizing she's been had.

MEL

(to Chuck)

You bastard.

Chuck smiles. It worked.

INT. CHUCK & JULIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A.M. Chuck sits up in bed, making notes in the script to the glow of an Itty Bitty Book Light.

Julie stirs, opens an eye.

JULIE

What are you doing?

CHUCK

Making a few cuts. The new scene
put us a minute over.

JULIE

Go to sleep. You had a terrible
night.

CHUCK

Are you kidding? I had a great
night. Did you hear that audience?
They went nuts.

JULIE

They didn't see you on the prop
room floor, shaking like a sick
dog.

CHUCK

(shrugs it off)
Part of the process.

JULIE

It didn't used to be part of the
process, honey--

CHUCK

I'm fine.

JULIE

And you used to talk to me when
stuff was bothering you.

CHUCK

Nothing's bothering me. I found
the fix, it worked, I'm happy. Go
to sleep.

Julie rolls back to her side, but she doesn't sleep.

INT. ZINBERG KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING

Breakfast. Baby GRACIE mashes goo on her high chair table.
12-year-old LUCY nukes some cold pizza. Julie nibbles a dry
bagel, while putting price-stickers on used paperback books.

JULIE

Is fifty cents too much for an old
SOUND AND THE FURY with a torn
cover?

Chuck comes in, wearing a *GO TO MEL* bathrobe.

CHUCK

Why do you do this? Just tell me how much you want to raise, and I'll write the library a check.

JULIE

I appreciate the sentiment, honey. But see, this way, we get the fifty cents, and someone maybe reads *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*.

CHUCK

Fine, have it your way.
(intercepting Lucy's pizza)
Hey, what's this? It's the first day of hiatus. Daddy's making breakfast.

He pulls bacon and eggs out of the refrigerator.

LUCY

Bacon? Duh, Dad, hel-lo? I haven't eaten anything with a face since I was like what, *ten*?

CHUCK

Bacon doesn't have a face.
(makes the bacon 'talk')
"Yeah, they put our face in the Spam."

LUCY

You're not funny.

CHUCK

(bacon voice)
"Sure he is. That was funny."
(slaps it into pan)
"Hey, what are you doing, Chuck? Stop, noooo!"
(dying bacon voice)
"We thought--you were--our friend."

Lucy and Julie can't help laughing.

CHUCK

(continuing)
Don't tell me I'm not funny.
(cracking eggs)
So where's Rob? Is he still eating faces these days?

JULIE

Your son's in his room, chained to his computer, and he's not coming out til his college application essay is written--

From the open window:

ROB'S VOICE (OC)

Oh, YEAH! Yeah, baby! Come on, COME ON!

CHUCK

Hunh. Do I sound like that when I write?

INT. ROB'S GARAGE BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ROB ZINBERG, 19, of the slacker persuasion, with wispy chin-hair, multiple hoops in both ears, and a t-shirt featuring life-sized female frontal nudity, lays face-down on his Mexican string hammock, bouncing strenuously:

ROB

Uh-huh, I'm in LOOOOVVVE! YEAH!

He rolls over onto his back, flushed from the rush.

REVEAL the object of his affection: A LAPTOP COMPUTER. ON THE SCREEN, a game of JEZZBALL, advanced to a top level. Dozens of balls being around like mad. A new high-score.

Chuck walks in.

CHUCK

What are you doing?

ROB

(slamming laptop shut)
Writing.

CHUCK

May I see?

ROB

Nah, it's still kinda rough.

CHUCK

Yeah, I never like to let anyone to see my stuff 'til I've had a chance to polish it up, either.

ROB
Well, later.

CHUCK
Later.

He turns to go. Then in a sudden move, fakes back, grabs the laptop, and flips it open. JEZZBALLS boing across the screen.

CHUCK
(continuing)
This is not an essay.

ROB
No, no, of course not. That's just my warm-up. Yeah.
(taps his head)
The essay's all up here.

CHUCK
Ahh, warm-up. I get that.
(sits beside Rob)
Lots of writers need a warm-up, a little start-the-day ritual. Gore Vidal, I hear, never begins his writing day 'til he's enjoyed a cup of coffee and a good bowel movement. The only difference is, son, you've been warming up for a whole year, and it's still *all up here!*
(raps on Rob's head)
What's the matter with you? Get it out! If you're ever gonna get into college--
(raps on the laptop)
--it's got to be down there!

ROB
God, chill, Dad, it's not that easy, okay?! I'm not you!

CHUCK
You can be me. You got the genes, you got the environment, you got the tools. Come on, let's be me.
(takes laptop, opens file)
I start with my premise... Okay, why do you want to go to college?

ROB
...Uhhh.

CHUCK

Okay, okay, so we need to find the focus. All right, what do you want to do with your life?

ROB

...Uhhh.

CHUCK

Aw, come on, honeyboy, just anything to get us started. What do you want to do with your life right now, this minute?

ROB

Advance to the 13th level of Jezzball?

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Chuck walks in.

CHUCK

How did I ever get a son like that?

LUCY

You and mom shared a very special kind of hug--

CHUCK

Now, *there's* my little comedy writer.

(noogeys her head)

You gonna be a jokemeister like Daddy someday?

INT. GLENN TWOMBLY'S OUTER OFFICE RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Chuck nervously sips a Crystal Geyser, and chats up RUTH-ANN, the humorless receptionist.

CHUCK

"A special kind of hug", she says to me. Is that funny, or what? I have to have little Bridget say that on the show. Can you see Mel's reaction?

Ruth-Ann nods blandly. Chuck glances at the office door.

CHUCK

So do you know what this meeting's about, anyway?

(MORE)

CHUCK (cont'd)
Is it our tenth season pick-up?
You heard any buzz?

RUTH-ANN
I'm just a temp.

CHUCK
Oh. Well, you're doing a great
job.

GLENN "THE GLENN" TWOMBLY emerges from his office. He's a beefy, curt man, in a black suit and turtleneck.

GLENN
Come on in Chuck.

INT. THE GLENN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Chuck follows the Glenn into his lacquer-and-leather office.

GLENN
See 20-20 last night?

CHUCK
(shakes his head)
I was filming. Got that kiss you
wanted, though. Just a hint of
tongue--

GLENN
Great. Look at this.

He punches a remote, 20-20 comes on.

DIANE SAWYER profiles STACEY MORAY, 24, the youngest female head of programming in network history, ruthless and fetching in *FELICITY* curls and an *ALLY MCBEAL* mini.

STACEY (ON TV)
It's not about "niche programming",
Diane. It's not about "quality
programming". It's about getting
young eyeballs glued to the set.
And I'm sorry, but the Old Boys'
network, the Glenn Twomblys of the
world, haven't got a clue--

The Glenn hits the pause button, freezing Stacey's face, unflatteringly between-expressions.

GLENN
You know Stacey Moray?

CHUCK

Her dad and I started out together.

GLENN

Yeah, Barry wrote a couple seasons of *THE JEFFERSONS* for me.

(re: Stacey on TV)

His daughter's a twat.

CHUCK

I used to change her diapers. But, yeah, I have to agree with you.

The Glenn shuts off the TV.

GLENN

I'm canceling *GO TO MEL*, Chuck.

CHUCK

You're kidding?! Because of what she said?

GLENN

Not just her, the whole business. I got twenty-year-old media buyers jumping up my hole, screaming "Hip/hot/edgy/new". I gotta make room--

CHUCK

But we've anchored Tuesday night for nine years--

GLENN

Nine's old.

CHUCK

Seventeen Emmys--

GLENN

Old Emmys. They go stale, pal.

CHUCK

We still pull an audience--

GLENN

Blue hairs and hicks. Let 'em watch Lifetime.

(MORE)

GLENN (cont'd)

I've got a network to run here, and it's my dick on the chopping block if the Stacey Morays of the world go around grabbing all the young eyeballs while I keep airing boring, been-there, 90's snooze-fests like *GO TO MEL*--

CHUCK

Hey now, don't sugar coat it for me.

GLENN

"Don't sugar coat it"
(a rare smile)
You stink up the ratings, but you still make me laugh.

EXT. UBC BUILDING - MINUTES LATER

Chuck emerges, dazed, into sunlight.

ACROSS THE STREET -

TWO PAINTERS on a scaffold roll fresh primer over the huge *GO TO MEL* wall mural, making it disappear before Chuck's eyes.

MAN'S VOICE

And the body's not even cold yet.

Chuck turns around. It's BARRY MORAY, 50, fellow comedy writer, former partner, old friend.

CHUCK

You heard about the show?

BARRY

Yesterday. From my agent. Who heard from your agent.

CHUCK

This is not a fit business for humans.

They walk toward the parking lot.

BARRY

I can top that. Last week I had a pilot pitch rejected by my own daughter.

CHUCK

Stacey passed on you?

BARRY

I believe that's pronounced
"pissed". Apparently she already
has something similar in
development with a 24-year-old
Yalie. Ten-to-one, she's sleeping
with the little prick. See, being
her father, I can't pull that crap.
It might upset her mother.

He beeps open his ancient Mercedes.

CHUCK

You're a sick man, Barry.

BARRY

I'm not sick. Society's sick.
(gets in the car)
Well, at least I've got my
health...
(slams the door)
...insurance.

He drives off.

CHUCK

Ba-dum-bum-chh.

INT. ZINBERG KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Housekeeper LUPE, 8 months pregnant, folds laundry while
watching *SALLY JESSE RAPHAEL* in SAP on the countertop
Trinitron.

ON TV, the graphic reads "*Always Wanted To Be A Woman*". A
TRANSSEXUAL tearfully confesses in dubbed Spanish:

TRANSSEXUAL (ON TV)

Todo mi vida querido e ser a mujer.
Todavia e tener la corazon de
mujer.

Rob passes through.

ROB

Then get a weenie-chop, shake your
bootie, and quit bitching, ya
freak!

LUPE

(shakes head, chuckling)
Mr. Rob.

Rob clicks off the TV.

ROB
 Serioso, Lupe. Why do you persist
 in exposing su unborn nino to this?
 Quantos tiempos le dice: TV IS
 EVIL!

Lupe exits with the laundry basket, still chuckling.

LUPE
 Mr. Rob.

Chuck slumps in from outside, still dazed from his Glenn
 encounter.

CHUCK
 Why is TV evil?

Rob opens the fridge and takes out a whole Honeybaked Ham and
 a big jar of mayonnaise.

ROB
 You should know, you're one of it's
 flying monkeys.

He unscrews the mayo, and dips chunks of ham straight in.

ROB
 (continuing)
 What are you doing home anyway?
 Shouldn't you be out editing, or
 shooting, or pitching or something?

Chuck sits.

CHUCK
 My show just got canceled.

ROB
 Whoa. Bummer

CHUCK
 Yep... You were just a little kid
 when it started. I remember
 dropping you at Cub Scouts on my
 way to pitch it to the network. Now
 it's all gone. I've got nothing.

ROB
 Gee, what's a workaholic to do?

CHUCK

Is that all I taught you about empathy?

ROB

Nah, I picked that up from the other dads at Scouts. You taught me--

(reassuringly)

It'll be okay, Big Guy. We've still got each other.

(hugs his dad)

CUT! PRINT! Quickly now, let's get one more for insurance!

CHUCK

Now see, if you could just put some of that wit into your college essay.

INT. MAPLE DRIVE RESTAURANT - DAY

Power agent, NORMAN BOORMAN, sits across from Chuck, dredging a breadstick in olive oil. Chuck's breadsticks sit untouched. He cannot believe what he's just been told.

CHUCK

Not one network wants me?

NORMAN

I made the calls. I sat on them hard. The Glenn's on his quest to out-youth Stacey Moray. CBS likes you, but they want to push their demographics down, too. ABC, FOX, WB, all 18-34--

Stacey Moray passes the table.

STACEY

Greetings, Norman, Chuck.

NORMAN

Hello, Stacey.

He indicates Chuck, with a subtle "how about it?" gesture.

Stacey shakes her head "no" behind Chuck's back, pulling an imaginary "Father Time" beard. She moves on.

STACEY

Good to see you, Chuck!

NORMAN

So you see my dilemma...

EXT. DRIVING RANGE - DAY

Chuck and Barry Moray hit a bucket of balls.

CHUCK

Since when does it make one rat's fart of a difference how old the writer is?

BARRY

What are you, some Nippon soldier who just crawled out of the jungle and still thinks it's WW2? This youth crap's been killing all of us. Remember Marty Levine?

CHUCK

(nods)

We were story editors on *LAVERNE & SHIRLEY*.

BARRY

I can't believe you didn't hear this. His FOX show got canceled two seasons ago. Went through his money, lost his house, wife took the kids. Put a gun in his mouth and pow!

CHUCK

Jesus.

BARRY

Yep. Missed his brain-stem by this much. Now he's living in a condo in Van Nuys. Completely 3-P.

(off Chuck's look)

Poor, paralyzed, and pissed.

CHUCK

You enjoy this, don't you?

BARRY

Hey, tragedy is comedy when it happens to somebody else. And by the way, to set the record straight, I enjoy nothing.

They continue hacking at golf balls.

EXT. LIBRARY - DAY

The used-book sale is in full swing. Julie lugs a carton of encyclopedias for a customer.

A scruffy STUDENT holds a paperback *WAR AND PEACE* for 65-cents.

STUDENT

I'll give you fifty cents for this.

JULIE

Oh come on, it's one of the masterworks of world literature. Is sixty-five cents really too much?

Chuck walks up, behind the student.

CHUCK

I'll give you a thousand dollars for it!

JULIE

What are you doing?

Chuck writes the check.

CHUCK

This is bullshit! Just because Tolstoy isn't current, just because he's not young and hip and cutting edge, doesn't mean he doesn't have value!

He rips out the check and hands it to his wife.

CHUCK

(continuing)

Here. Now you've got a thousand dollars.

He takes the book and hands it to the scruffy student.

CHUCK

(continuing)

And now you've got a book that's worth a thousand dollars. Read it.

He takes Julie's elbow.

CHUCK
(continuing)
You've made your quota. Let's go
have lunch.

He pulls her off, leaving the student standing there,
speechless.

EXT. PINK'S HOT DOG STAND - DAY

Chuck downs a foot-long, fully-loaded and dripping.

CHUCK
God, I needed this. On the way
back, we'll stop and get some
liquor and cigartettes, too

JULIE
Please don't do this to yourself,
honey. It's gonna be okay--

CHUCK
What's going to be okay, Julie?
Which part? That I have no job, or
that I'll never work again?

JULIE
I don't know! But maybe this is
all happening for a reason. It's
not like TV has exactly been so
wonderful to you lately. Maybe
this is about you finally getting a
chance to do something new--

CHUCK
What? What can I do? TV is all I
know! I can't perform surgery. I
can't swing a hammer--

JULIE
You could teach comedy. Write a
book about it--

CHUCK
That's what people do who can't do
it anymore--

JULIE
--Spend more time with your family--

CHUCK
--I can still do it!

JULIE

Maybe I don't want you to do it!
 Maybe I'm sick of the late nights,
 and the cold sweats. The lousy
 moods when the ratings come in.
 Maybe I want a husband around
 besides just during hiatus. Maybe
 the kids need more of a dad--

CHUCK

(stands up)
 I need another hot dog.

He gets in the long line. Julie follows.

JULIE

Did you even hear what I just said?

Chuck's attention is focused on the MOTLEY CHARACTERS waiting
 in line, for a hot dog at Pink's.

CHUCK

Look at this bunch. There's a
 series.

He gets that faraway, glazed "thinking" look in his eyes.

JULIE

What are you doing?

He smooths out his hot dog wrapper, and clicks open his pen.

JULIE

(continuing)
 Stop it.

He begins scribbling notes.

JULIE

(continuing)
 Don't do it, Chuck. Please, don't
 write another show!

INT. CHUCK'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Chuck crosses to his computer, sits right down, and types:

"FADE IN, ACT ONE, SCENE A...".

INT. CHUCK'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

THE PRINTER spews pages.

Chuck, stubbled and exhausted from writing all night, catches a page, reads it.

CHUCK

Ecch.

He tosses it, reads the next page, tosses that.

Reading the third page as it prints out, he gives up, and just slides the wastebasket right underneath the printer.

INT. JERRY'S DELI - DAY

Chuck shares a booth with Barry Moray. His BLT sits untouched.

CHUCK

"Hip, edgy". What is that? I can't write that. I'm just a dried up old turd, and I suck, and I'll probably never write anything again.

BARRY

Attaboy, you come to the dark side. We got a membership card, t-shirts, and everything.

CHUCK

That's funny... I used to be funny.
 (picks at sandwich)
 I did this bit with bacon.
 (bacon voice)
 "He'd make us talk, see?"

Barry shakes his head sadly.

BARRY

Chuckles, I'm gonna give you a piece of advice a very wise man once gave me.

Barry takes a pen out of his pocket, and scribbles on a Jerry's Deli napkin: "WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW".

CHUCK

Did I say that?

BARRY

No, my Uncle Al. I said a wise man.

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - DAY

Chuck faces the monster blank screen again.

"FADE IN, ACT ONE, SCENE A:"

He looks at the crumpled Jerry's Deli napkin on his desk.

CHUCK

Who cares what I know? No one
wants to buy what I know.

THE PHONE RINGS. Chuck picks up, annoyed at the distraction.

CHUCK

(continuing)
Yeah, what?

INTERCUT: CLOSE ON ROB, on the telephone.

ROB

Dad I need you to come get me.

CHUCK

Rob, I'm trying to work--

ROB

This is kinda major.

INT. POLICE STATION HOLDING CELL - A SHORT TIME LATER

An officer unlocks the cell door.

CHUCK

Two-hundred-and-forty-eight parking
tickets in a year?
(flips through tickets)
When did you even park two-hundred-
and-forty-eight times?

ROB

My case exactly, man. These people
find a long-hair kid with a deep-
pocket dad, and pile on every other
deadbeat's unpaid violations--

CHUCK

Don't make it worse. Just let me
pay these and take you home. I'm
in the middle of writing--

POLICE OFFICER

I think you need to take your boy's offenses little more seriously, Dad.

CHUCK

I take them very seriously, sir, but--

ROB

Why are we jumping to the conclusion that these are even *my* offenses, Officer--

(checks the badge)

Clotworthy? I ask you, sir, where's the bloody glove?

CHUCK

Shut up, Rob--

ROB

Can you prove that I parked with my rear tire in the red zone? Or is it within the conceivable realm of possibility that some gas-guzzling SUV came along, thought he'd squeeze into a tight space, and shoved my poor vehicle back, hmmmm?

CHUCK

Can we please sort through this later? I really need to get back to--

(falls silent, staring at Rob)

ROB

And how many of these others--

(riffing tickets)

Loading zone? Taxis only?

Handicapped zone-- oh, now

that's defamation of

character! I not only respect

the physically challenged, I

have been known to actually

lift one out of his

customized van, and carry

him, drooling, on my back

into Borders bookstore, for a

bagel and decaf frap--

(off a ticket)

Hey, that was this day! You

can't nail me for that one!

Help me out, here, Dad.

Chuck has that faraway "thinking" look...

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - LATER

Chuck types in a frenzy: "INT. POLICE STATION - DAY. JARED,

A 19-YEAR-OLD DUDE PROTESTS HIS 248 PARKING TICKETS."

His fingers fly over the keys.

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Julie walks in, with a plate of food. Chuck holds up a hand.

CHUCK
No dinner for me.

He continues to write with a passion.

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - MORNING

Lucy exchanges a plate of breakfast for his untouched dinner.

LUCY
Mom had to go in early. You're supposed to drive me to school.

CHUCK
I'm almost to act break. Give me a minute--

Lucy smiles. She knows what that means.

LUCY
Sure!

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Julie comes in and sets baby Gracie on the floor.

JULIE
Honey, I know you're working, but you have to see--

CHUCK
Just a sec, I'm in the middle of a monologue--

Gracie pushes up to her feet, and takes her first few, open-armed, wobbly steps to Daddy.

Chuck, glued to his monitor, misses it completely.

He stops typing, just as the baby collapses on the rug.

CHUCK
(continuing; looks up)
Okay, what?

Julie picks up Gracie and leaves, disgusted.

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - DAY

THE PRINTER shoots out *THE UNTITLED CHUCK ZINBERG PILOT*.

Chuck reads them over, satisfied.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Chuck strides in, with a fresh script.

CHUCK

I'm finished. I love it.

JULIE

Great. Lucy missed an algebra test, Gracie took her first steps, and we now have ants in your office. But I'm glad you love it.

She walks out.

CHUCK

Did I do something?

INT. JERRY'S DELI - DAY

Barry finishes reading the script, and smiles at his old friend.

BARRY

I hate your guts, you fucking sonofabitch.

CHUCK

Now see, why couldn't my wife be supportive like that?

INT. STACEY MORAY'S OFFICE - DAY

The youngest female network head of programming sits atop her desk wearing artfully ripped jeans, her legs crossed Indian-style, as if she had a kitten in her lap.

Her MALE IVY LEAGUE MINIONS ring the room, with steno-pads and sharpened pencils.

Chuck enters, *THE UNTITLED CHUCK ZINBERG PILOT* under his arm.

CHUCK

Thanks for seeing me, Stacey--

STACEY

I'll be frank, this meeting is a favor to my dad. He's still pissed about his pilot, and I want someplace to go for Thanksgiving.

(brightly)

So whatcha got?

CHUCK

Well. This is a show--

STACEY

Dan, pass me the bowl.

YALE GRAD DAN passes Carrie a bowl of Chinese munchie mix.

STACEY

(continuing)

G'ahead.

CHUCK

--about this young guy--

STACEY

One sec.

(leans back on desk,
pressing intercom)

Jeff, confirm one o'clock, Ivy,
with Dreamworks.

(clicks off, back to
Chuck)

Okay, here's my problem with your
premise, Chuck--

CHUCK

I haven't said the premise yet.

STACEY

--What would you know about a young
guy?

INT. CBS - ANOTHER DAY

Chuck answers ANDREW GREENBERG, even younger network exec.

CHUCK

Well, I was one. And I have one.

ANDREW

Nineteen's a whole different thing
than it used to be.

CHUCK
 If you could just take a few
 minutes to read it--

INT. FOX - ANOTHER DAY

T'FILA BROOKS, the youngest African-American female network executive answers in the negative.

T'FILA
 I'm way too busy to read, unless I
 know upfront it's gonna work for
 us.

INT. COMEDY CENTRAL - ANOTHER DAY

SEAN PALMER, who graduated early to become a TV exec, shakes his head:

SEAN
 When old guys write young, it's
 just weird.

CHUCK
 But if I wrote about a guy my age--

SEAN
 Fine.

CHUCK
 But you wouldn't buy it?

SEAN
 No. But it wouldn't be weird.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

The family eats. Chuck paces and rants.

CHUCK
 The Laff Channel, for Chrissake,
 Julie. The goddam Laff Channel
 won't even read it! It's the best
 thing I ever wrote, and now I can't
 even get it read because I was born
 before 1980!

ROB
 I was born in 1980.

CHUCK
 We remember Rob. We were there.

ROB
I bet I could've sold it for you in
three seconds.

JULIE
Don't be smart. Daddy's had a hard
enough--

She sees that Chuck has the "thinking" look again.

JULIE
No.

ROB
"No" what?

INT. ROB'S GARAGE ROOM - LATER

ROB
No way! I was yanking your chain,
Dad! I'm not gonna say I'm a shit-
com writer!

CHUCK
Just for one meeting. Just so
they'll read it.

ROB
Forget it. I'm busy. I'm working
on my college essay.

CHUCK
How many favors have I ever asked
you?

ROB
I hate TV! It's a slap in the face
of my moral righteousness.

CHUCK
Your moral righteousness, Rob, is
Penthouse magazine, boogie boards
and Jezzball--

ROB
Each of us walks a different path
on our journey to Godself.

CHUCK
--Not to mention, the two-hundred-
and-forty-eight parking tickets I
paid for!

(MORE)

CHUCK (cont'd)
Where does *that* eight- thousand and
change come from, Mr. Morally
Right?

ROB
I said I'll wash your car--

CHUCK
Every week for the next *twenty*
years? Okay, wait, here's a plan.
You do this for me, I'll pick up
your parking fines.

ROB
...All right, you got my beak wet.
What else?

EXT. DRIVEWAY - EVENING

Chuck hauls a bucket of soapy water out to Rob's car, a beat-
up '68 Barracuda. He begins sponging off layers of grime.

INT. ROB'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rob sits on the john, reading *THE UNTITLED CHUCK ZINBERG*
PILOT.

He finishes the script and flips it under the sink.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Chuck hears THE SOUND OF ROB'S TOILET FLUSHING.

CHUCK
He finished reading already?

Rob emerges from his garage bedroom.

CHUCK
(continuing)
Well?

ROB
You left some suds there on the
back left tire--

CHUCK
Did you read the script? What did
you think?

ROB
But if you don't rinse it off
completely, it streaks--

CHUCK

About the script! Did you like the script? Did it make you laugh? Come on, *tell me!*

Rob takes the hose and squirts off the tire, taking his time.

ROB

Well, Dad, I have to admit, at first, I thought it was going to be just another one of your mind-numbing bourgeois canned-laugh yock-fests...

(cracks a smile)

But that was some really funny crap!

He puts down the hose and shakes Chuck's hand.

ROB

(continuing)

Rave on! Way to go, man! I will be proud to lie and call your words my own.

CHUCK

Oh, that's great! Just great. Great, great, great, great! So you thought it was edgy enough, huh? It's cool? It's hip?

ROB

Now see, when you do that, you start to look old.

CHUCK

Sorry, sorry. But you do think you can sell it to the network, right?

ROB

(stricken)

Sell it? You want me to *sell* it?

(then, grins)

Duh, yeah, Dad. I think it's a no brainer.

CHUCK

Heyy...

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - DAY

The printer shoots out a new cover page.

THE UNTITLED CHUCK ZINBERG PROJECT is now titled *NO BRAINER*.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Chuck and Rob review *NO BRAINER* over bowls of Cheerios.

CHUCK

Okay, now when you get into the network-- don't get milk on that, it's my only clean copy-- there may be some questions about the soft blow at the out.

ROB

The what in the who?
(spills milk on it)
Shoot.

CHUCK

Isn't that what I just asked you not to do? Nevermind, I can print out another. Anyway, the blow-off to the second-act block-comedy set-piece. You may have to pitch some punchier payoffs.

ROB

Oh, sure, no problem.

He leans down and slurps the puddle of milk off the script.

CHUCK

Do you even have the faintest idea what I'm talking about?

Rob sits back up, with a milk moustache.

ROB

Do I look like one of those ads?

INT. FAMILY ROOM -- MINUTES LATER.

Chuck grabs one of a half-dozen remotes, and clicks on the TV.

CHUCK

Comedy Writing 101. We begin.
"Blow" is short for "blow-off".

ROB

In my circle, we use it differently.

CHUCK

Yeah, mine, too. But in TV, "blow" is your big laugh that comes right before the commercial.

ROB

Okay, blow.

(then)

If you put the other one on TV, maybe somebody'd watch.

CHUCK

Focus. You need to know these terms. Network people love lingo. It makes them feel like part of the secret priesthood.

ROB

It's good to know you haven't been sucking up to a bunch of dorks all these years.

CHUCK

Ah!

He stops flipping the channels at *I LOVE LUCY*.

Lucy and Ethel are smuggling John Wayne's footprints from Grauman's Chinese Theater...

CHUCK

(continuing)

Quick, name that blow.

ROB

Crash, smash.

(Lucy's 'spider take')

"ULLL".

CHUCK

That's my boy. Moving on.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - LATER

A *SEINFELD* rerun plays, muted. Chuck is in full swing. Rob is OD'ing on half-hour comedies.

CHUCK

Now we always like to duck out of the scene on a 'ha ha' or an 'uh-oh'. So here, the 'ha-ha' is--?

ROB
Seinfeld's puffy shirt. Yawn.

CHUCK
And the 'uh-oh' would be--?

ROB
I don't know, his big butt,
whatever! Man, no wonder TV's such
an idiot- fest. "Jack it up, blow
it off, ha- ha, uh-oh--", I got it,
all right? I'll go in tomorrow,
I'll jack off--

CHUCK
You'll *what*?

ROB
Isn't that what you call it?

Chuck sighs. Back to the drawing board...

INT. FAMILY ROOM - - LATE

So late, the only comedy on is *CAR 54, WHERE ARE YOU?*

CHUCK
So if you're ever in doubt,
storywise, just remember the
universal law of sitcom: The Great
Unspoken. The Big Lie. The thing
that, if Tootie just told Muldoon,
the show's over and everyone hugs.
Save it, build to it. Put Tootie
through hell. But don't let him
tell Muldoon the truth 'til after
the last commercial--

Julie comes in, ready for bed.

JULIE
Why are you doing this?

CHUCK
We're working, honey.

JULIE
You're working.

She indicates Rob on the sofa, fast asleep, mouth-breathing.

JULIE

(continuing)

Look, he's just a big baby.

(blots some drool from his
chin)

We really should have had his
adenoids taken out when he got ear-
tubes.

(covers him with a throw
blanket)

I'm worried that he can't handle
the TV world, Chuck. Look what it
did to you.

CHUCK

Hey, I'm fine. I'm bouncing back.
Besides, have you considered that
this could be a good thing for him?
I mean, how long have you been on
me to get him off his ass? Maybe
he'll see how it feels to put on a
suit and make things happen. Maybe
it'll inspire him to get it
together, finish his education, and
become a player. Have you looked at
it from that perspective?

JULIE

I'm not a writer. I only see it
from a mother's perspective.

She walks out.

INT. ZINBERG KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING

Julie, Lucy, and Gracie are having breakfast. Chuck comes
in, holding two ties.

CHUCK

Red or blue?

Rob follows, wearing Chuck's Armani suit, sans tie.

LUCY

OhmiGod, it's Little Dad.

CHUCK

My lucky suit. We leave nothing to
chance. Red.

He knots the tie around Rob's neck.

CHUCK
(continuing)
I wore it the night I won the
Writers Guild award.

JULIE
(to Rob)
Are you okay in that, sweetie?

ROB
(choked gasp)
No-- too tight-- can't breathe--
Lassie, get help!
(grins)
No really, I'm fine.

LUCY
He scares me.

ROB
Don't be a-feared, Missy. Big
Brother's jest a-fixin' to save the
farm--

Chuck pushes him to the door, hands him the script.

CHUCK
Now remember, just listen and nod--

ROB
Y'all take care of the young'uns,
Ma--

CHUCK
--if you don't have the answer, say
you'll get back to them--

ROB
--And Pappy, you jest quit a-
frettin', set on the porch, chaw a
tetch, and pray the Lord Almighty
that your only li'l boy don't fuck
up.

He leaves.

LUCY
He said the "F" word. God, you
guys never punish him.

EXT. ZINBERG HOUSE - DAY

The garage door opens and we hear:

MUSIC: BIG BAD VOODOO DADDY blasts 'GO, DADDY, GO', as Rob's beater Barracuda backs out of the garage with a screech.

EXT. PALISADES STREETS - A MINUTE LATER

Rob zips through the neighborhood, windows down, volume up. Chuck's lucky necktie is too confining. He loosens it.

EXT. BEVERLY BOULEVARD - SEVERAL MINUTES LATER

Rob drives through Beverly Hills, pounding the beat on the steering wheel. The tie is gone.

He starts to feel a little warm, so, steering with his knees, he wiggles out of the Armani jacket, almost totalling his car in the five-way stop.

EXT. WILSHIRE BOULEVARD - MINUTES LATER

Rob puts his left foot on the gas pedal, so he can peel off his right shoe and sock.

INT. ZINBERG KITCHEN - DAY

Chuck stares at the clock on the wall.

CHUCK

He should be there. Oh, God,
please don't let him be a doofus.

INT. UBC CORRIDOR - DAY

THE ELEVATOR DOOR OPENS and a dozen Armani-clad EXECUTIVES emerge. Behind them, in the back of the elevator, we find:

ROB, feeling himself again in a cut-off mesh muscle-tee, baggy cargos, and a pair of astroturf flip-flops, chugs a Big Gulp.

ROB

Let's grind.

END MUSIC.

INT. GLENN TWOMBLY'S OFFICE - DAY

The Glenn ushers Rob in, to a room full of DARK-SUITED EXECS.

GLENN

Come on in, Rob.
(re: his clothes)
Going to the beach?

ROB
No. You going to a Mafia funeral?

The execs all look to the Glenn for his reaction.

GLENN
(laughs)
He's nineteen, folks!

They all laugh.

ROB
(laughing along)
And you're not!
(spurred on, he yanks the
Glenn's tie down)
C'mon, relax this thang, Glenner.
Scientific fact, you can't talk if
you can't breathe.

INT. ZINBERG KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Chuck paces.

CHUCK
Did I blow it? Is this a huge
mistake.

JULIE
Oh, now's a good time to ask.

INT. THE GLENN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Execs have their ties undone, jackets off. Rob pulls off
female exec, Kim Barish's binding four-inch heel.

ROB
It's your foot, Kim. Not some
ancient Chinese sex-toy.

He tries to sneak a peak up her mini. She shifts her legs.

ROB
(continuing)
It's okay, I'm a doctor.

INT. ZINBERG KITCHEN - DAY

Chuck sits at the table, head in his hands.

CHUCK

What's happening in there? It's been too long. God, my stomach hurts.

Julie slams a bottle of Maalox down on the counter.

CHUCK

(continuing)

Don't do that, please. Just give me one of these--

He touches his heart and gestures out.

JULIE

I don't have one of those for you right now. I have one for Rob, but we don't know where the hell he is! Maybe he's not home yet because they found out he's a phony and he's stuck in there with the all the evil suits, back-peddling like crazy, trying to cover your butt. Is that what you're imagining in your writer's brain, too? Or are you just worried about your script?

CHUCK

Oh, I am so sick of that! Of course I'm worried about Rob! But how can I worry more than you? You suck up all the worry in the room! All you ever do is worry about those kids!

JULIE

Are you accusing me of being a good mother?

CHUCK

Well how about *me* for a change?

JULIE

It does me no good to worry about you, Chuck! I can't do anything about you!

CHUCK

You can give me a Maalox for my stomach which is killing me!

JULIE

Fine! Here's your damn Maalox!

She picks up the Costco-sized container, and heaves it at him. He ducks, and it hits the wall, smashing open. Thousands of little pink tablets scatter.

CHUCK

Thank you.

Rob struts in.

ROB

All hail the new God! UBC is fast-tracking *NO BRAINER* Thirteen on-the-air for Fall. Tori Spelling, sniff my crack!

He struts out. Chuck and Julie watch, feeling like idiots.

CHUCK

...Sorry.

JULIE

...Yeah.

They pick up Maalox tablets from the kitchen floor.

INT. ROB'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rob is on his knees, slam-dunking his Little Tykes basketball into it's three-foot hoop.

ROB

(electronic voice, a la
NBA JAM)

"Good shot! He's on fire!"

(blocks his own slam)

"Re-jected!"

Chuck opens the door and comes in.

CHUCK

Thank you.

Rob slam-dunks again.

ROB

"He scores!"

Chuck sits.

CHUCK

Feels pretty good, huh?

Rob sits on his toy basketball, facing his dad.

ROB

Yeah... Sort of like that great feeling, just after you pinch off a loaf, and your butt slams shut. But it's still kinda resonating... And you're at peace with yourself.

CHUCK

I've never heard it put quite like that.

ROB

But am I right?

They share the sense memory.

INT. MAPLE DRIVE RESTAURANT - DAY

Norman Boorman's "A" table.

NORMAN

They love your kid, Dad! Don't take it wrong, I always thought he was a bit of a schlubb. But then, I never knew he had a script like this in him.

CHUCK

Well now that everyone's so happy with it, I can tell you. He doesn't, Norman.

NORMAN

What?

CHUCK

I wrote it.

NORMAN

(this sinks in)
Oh no. You didn't. You *schmuck!*

CHUCK

I had to get it read--

NORMAN

God, I hate writers!

CHUCK

I was desperate! I couldn't think of what else to do!

(MORE)

CHUCK (cont'd)

I knew it was risky, but it's the best thing I ever wrote, and I couldn't get anyone to look at page one!

NORMAN

Why are all writers such schmucks? This is fraud, Chuck! This is you getting kicked out of the Guild, me losing my license for misrepresentation! This is such an unprecedented load of shit on the Glenn's fat face if ever finds out--

CHUCK

If he loves the script, what difference does it make?

NORMAN

Schmuck! He loves the script written by Rob! He loves that he has a script that he loves written and produced by a nineteen year old that he loves.

CHUCK

But Rob can't write and produce!

NORMAN

They must never know that, Chuck. Or it's dead. And I'm dead. And trust me, schmuck, you're dead.

INT. CHUCK'S CAR - DAY

Chuck pulls away from the restaurant, on his car-phone.

CHUCK

Lucy, put Rob on real quick...
Well, where is he?... Oh, Jesus.

INT. LAZERSTAR LASER TAG & ARCADE - A HALF-HOUR LATER

Chuck feels his way along the wall of the big, blacklit space.

CHUCK

Rob? Rob Zinberg?

YOUNG GUYS run past him in the dark, shooting lasers. One of them smashes into him.

CHUCK

Ow! Excuse me!

KID
Rob's dad?

CHUCK
AJ?
(squints in the dark)
I've got to find Rob.

AJ
Good luck, man, he has the stealth
of a Jedi.

Rob springs out of the shadows on the ramp above.

ROB
HAH!
(blasts him; Japanese sci-
fi voice)
You and your puny Earthling laser.
are no match for the death ray of
Lord Rob!
(fires laser point- blank)
Bam! Bam! Bam!

CHUCK
We've got to go. There's a big
casting meeting in the Glenn's
office in less than an hour.

ROB
So?

He spins, blasting another friend, SAM, who's sneaking up
behind.

ROB
(continuing; Sci-fi)
HAH! You forgot my third eye would
sense your presence, Major Dickwad!

SAM
Just take him, Rob's dad. He's
obnoxious.

INT. LAZERSTAR ARCADE - DAY

Chuck drags Rob out of the Mission Room, through the arcade.

ROB
This better be good. I was on my
way to Player of the Month. That's
two free rounds--

TASHA, a pimply counter-girl in a space uniform, waves.

TASHA
Where you going, Lord Rob?

CHUCK
The Lord's got to run a network TV show. They love him. They only want him. We're late.

He pulls Rob out the door.

TASHA
(after them)
Okay, but no credit for aborted missions.

INT. MALL - CONTINUOUS

Chuck hustles Rob onto the escalator.

ROB
Have you totally lost it? I'm not dementing the whole rest of my life for some cheese TV show of yours!

CHUCK
You said you liked it. Remember, pinching off the big loaf?

ROB
But not every day! No asshole can take that abuse!

CHUCK
Hey, pally, I've taken it for twenty years! And p.s., it's fed you, put clothes on your back, and bought you how many rounds of Laser-Tag? *Free?* It wouldn't hurt you to do a little work for a change.

Rob walks off the escalator.

ROB
Oh, I get what this is. "It wouldn't hurt you to do a little work, *loser-boy.*" It wouldn't hurt you to put on the Armani suit of armor and get on the wheel with the rest of the lab-rats.

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)
It wouldn't hurt you to bag
everything you care about and turn
into Chuck No-Life Workaholic, Jr.!
(sinks to the rim of a
fountain, dropping his
head)
Sorry, if I'm a little flipped out
here. It's just that I never
thought Satan would show up at the
mall, dressed as my dad!

No answer. Rob looks up.

Chuck is scribbling fervently on the back of his parking
stub.

ROB
(continuing)
What are you doing?

He grabs the stub from Chuck's hand and reads it.

ROB
(continuing)
"Lab rats... Satan..." This is
what I just said.

CHUCK
I'm sorry, I--

ROB
Did you even hear me?

CHUCK
(indicates the stub)
Every word.

ROB
That's not hearing, that's
stealing! Jeez, get a life, and
give mine back!

He crumples the ticket and throws it in the fountain.

Chuck looks at it, Rob's words blurring as it drowns.

CHUCK
You're right. I crossed the line.
I'm sorry.

He sinks to the fountain rim.

CHUCK

(continuing)

I don't know what I'm doing anymore. I've never not known what I was doing so much in my life.

(dialing cell-phone)

I should've never dragged you into it.

(into phone)

Chuck Zinberg for Norman Boorman.

(to Rob)

I'll have him call and tell Glenn the truth. Whatever happens, they sue me, bounce me out of the Guild, whatever, I'll deal with it. You couldn't have pulled it off much longer, anyway.

Rob takes Chuck's cell-phone.

ROB

Fuck you.

As he snaps it shut, it fumbles and falls into the water.

ROB

(continuing)

Oops. Sorry.

He fishes it out, and hands it, dripping, back to Chuck.

INT. GLENN TWOMBLY'S OUTER OFFICE RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Chuck and Rob wait with their Evians and trade papers.

CHUCK

(whispers)

Now, you're gonna be just fine in there. I'll be with you the whole time. Just sit right next to me so I can knee the hell out of you if you start to screw up.

ROB

Yeah, this sounds way more fun than Laser Tag.

The office doors open. The Glenn comes out.

GLENN

Rob, good to see you. Come on in.

Rob does. Chuck starts to follow. The Glenn blocks him.

GLENN
 (continuing)
 Thanks for bringing him by, Chuck.

CHUCK
 No problem, I'm free this
 afternoon. I told my boy I'd hang
 in, lend the ol' voice of
 experience, smooth over any rough
 spots--

GLENN
 Thanks. But we like the edges.

He goes inside. The doors swing shut in Chuck's face.

INT. GLENN TWOMBLY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The Glenn takes his seat, sticks his feet on the desk, and
 cracks out a big cigar.

GLENN
 Okay, folks, let's nail this puppy
 to the wall.

Everyone flips open their much-notated scripts. Exec Kim
 Barish scoots over to share hers with Rob.

ROB
 Uhh, but... My dad--?

GLENN
 He'll wait. Let's do it.

ART KLAFFT, a broad and shiny-faced man, shakes Rob's hand.

ART
 Rob, Art Klafft, V.P., Casting.
 Let's start by talking concept on
 our lead.

ROB
 Okay.
 (a beat)
 Oh, me talking. Okay...
 (to Kim)
 That scent you're wearing is really
 tasty.

ART
 So who is he? Who *is* Jared?

ROB
Um. Well. He's like, this dude...

He looks at the door. His father is just on the other side with the answer. He stands.

ROB
(continuing)
I think I should go to the bathroom.

He starts for the door.

GLENN
Mine's right there.

He points to his private bathroom. Rob, stuck, turns to it.

ROB
Thanks, Glenn.

He opens the door, then turns back to the room:

ROB
(continuing)
Now don't anyone listen.

INT. THE GLENN'S PRIVATE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rob locks the door, then fills a glass with water, and starts pouring it down the toilet to simulate the sound of peeing, while flipping wildly through Kim's script with his free hand.

ROB
Jared, Jared, Jared... AH!

INT. GLENN TWOMBLY'S OUTER OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Chuck leafs through a trade, not seeing the print on the pages. He tosses it on the coffee table.

CHUCK
You wanna just buzz in there and see how it's going?

RUTH-ANN
(shakes her head)
I'm just a temp.

INT. GLENN TWOMBLY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Rob emerges from the bathroom, confident.

ROB
 Okay, sportsfans. So Jared is like this "nineteen-year-old dude who's committed to not committing. His basic needs are met by Honeybaked Ham and the Penthouse Forum, and his goal in life is to advance to the thirteenth level of Jezzball".

He sits, pleased, at having accurately rendered the written description.

They look at him, waiting for more. Rob checks his script.

ROB
 (continuing)
 Yeah, I said it right. See?

He shows the script.

GLENN
 He's a virgin, folks.

ROB
 (smiling at Kim)
 Hey, only technically.

KIM
 He means it's your first show.

ART
 (as if to a kindergartener)
 When we ask your take on a character, Rob, we want to know how you see the part? Who do you see playing it?

ROB
 Oh.

He looks longingly at the outer office door. His father...

ROB
 I think I left my water out there.

He stands to go for it.

ART
 Your water's right here.

Rob sits.

ROB
Very observant, Art.

He drinks all the water down. He stands.

ROB
(continuing)
I'll just go grab myself a fresh
one.

Kim hands him another bottle of water.

ROB
(continuing; sits)
This is a helpful place.

ART
So when you wrote Jared, did you
have any prototypes in mind?

Rob stands again.

ROB
I really have to go to the
bathroom, guys.

GLENN
You just went.

ROB
(re: water)
fluid ounces, Glenn. She gotta go
somewhere.

INT. THE GLENN'S PRIVATE BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Rob unzips and relieves himself.

INT. GLENN TWOMBLY'S OUTER OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Chuck jumps to his feet.

CHUCK
You've got to buzz him out here for
a second! I just remembered he
needs his insulin. It's very, very
important I get it to him
immediately!

The temp holds out her hand.

RUTH-ANN
I'll take it in.

Chuck pats his pockets.

CHUCK

Oh, shoot, I left it in the car.

(sits)

Well, nevermind, it can wait.

INT. THE GLENN'S PRIVATE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rob is still relieving himself.

ROB

Boy, I really did have to.

INT. GLENN TWOMBLY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

As Rob comes out.

EXEC 1

I see Jared kind of wild-man-ish.

Young Tim Allen, pre-*HOME*

IMPROVEMENT.

EXEC 2

No, more crazy-ish. Early Jim

Carrey, *IN LIVING COLOR*.

EXEC 3

Yeah, but sexy, like George Clooney

on the first season of *ER*.

GLENN

I wanna hear Rob's thoughts.

ROB

That's all you're looking for? A

bunch of names of people I thought

were dead already? Okay, how about

young Abraham Lincoln? He was

funny in that Gettysburg Address.

No wait, young Elvis-- he can sing.

I can keep going here. Young

Captain Kangaroo, young Floyd the

Barber, young The Three Stooges,

young Joint Chiefs of Staff--

GLENN

I completely agree.

ROB

With *what*?

GLENN

We've never seen a character like Jared on TV, and the last thing we want to do is stuff him into some b.s. network prototype. If we're gonna make this thing right, we've got to dump everything we know in the crapper, and say, "Yeah, we may know how to make TV--"

INT. UBC CORRIDOR - A SHORT TIME LATER

The elevator doors open. Rob and Chuck step out.

ROB

(quoting)

--but only Rob knows how to make *NO BRAINER*." Then he gave me this.

(puffs a huge cigar)

It's what Castro smokes.

Chuck yanks the stogie out of his son's mouth.

CHUCK

Your mother would kill me if she saw you with this!

(then, off cigar)

Hey, we're really gonna pull this off!

He puts the fine cigar in his own mouth, and puffs with satisfaction.

INT. ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT SET - DAY

Rob and The Glenn are being interviewed by MARY HART.

GLENN

I give Stacey Moray credit, Mary. She had the vision to hire a guy fresh out of college to write for the youth market. I just did her one better, and got me a kid who just graduated high school.

MARY HART

You *did* graduate, didn't you, Rob?

ROB

It was a squeaker, Mare. I ditched a bunch of trig.

The Glenn and Mary laugh.

INT. STACEY MORAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stacey sits up in bed, watching *ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT*.

STACEY
Goddammit, Goddammit!

ERIC, her 24-year-old Yalie writer, emerges from under the sheets, bare-ass first.

ERIC
Y'know, if you're not into this,
Stacey, just say so--

STACEY
Shut up! You're old!

INT. AEROBICS CLASS DAY - DAY

MUSIC DRIVES, a pulsing reggae rock.

Stacey sweats through a punishing cardio-funk work-out.

STACEY
Where did he come from? Why didn't
I get him? Where's *my* 19 year old?

PULL BACK TO REVEAL her Ivy League minions, forced to go for the burn with their boss.

DAN
(barely able to speak)
He's Chuck Zinberg's kid.

STACEY
Fine, Get me the number of every
old has-been who's got a kid. I
want a list!

INT. THE GLENN'S OFFICE - DAY

The champagne's broken out. Boss and staff celebrate.

GLENN
She's busting her hump to find a
kid like Rob! Every network in
this town is. But I got the
original! That goofy kid's gonna
put us back on top!
(buzzing secretary)
Get me Rob on the horn.
(to staff)
(MORE)

GLENN (cont'd)
 Anything he wants, guys. Office,
 writing staff, the moon!

INT. ROB'S ROOM - DAY

Rob is on the telephone.

ROB
 Really? Whoo!

He hangs up, and yells through the open window.

ROB
 (continuing)
 Hey, Mom, they're giving me a Gold
 Card!

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Julie gives Chuck a death-look.

CHUCK
 It's just for a few weeks...

INT. JERRY'S DELI - DAY

Chuck shares a large booth with old writer friends, Barry,
 JACK HUMPHREY, MORT SCHWARTZ, and at the end of the table,
 MARTY LEVINE, in his electric wheelchair.

CHUCK
 Gentlemen, the reason I called us
 all here today is, my son just got
 a pilot order from UBC--

MORT
 The little pisher?

JACK
 I've passed stones bigger than him.

BARRY
 Now they're giving our jobs to
 teens.
 (to passing waitress)
 Could we get five orders of
 strychnine?

CHUCK
 Let me finish. So they've given
 him the green light to staff it,
 the works.

(MORE)

CHUCK (cont'd)

The writing doesn't need a lot of help, but I figured as long as there's a budget for writers anyway-

-

He gestures to them. The booth explodes with happiness, tears.

JACK

You're kidding. Us?

MORT

Oh my God, I can get my dental reinstated! I've had such an abcess!

JACK

You're not kidding, Chuck? Say you're not kidding.

BARRY

If he is, I'll borrow Marty's gun and finish the job on both of 'em!

MARTY

(holds sound transmitter to his voicebox)

You're such a prick, Barry. It'll be a joy to work with you again!

Rob walks by, following the HOSTESS.

ROB

Yo, Dad.

CHUCK

Hey, honeyboy. What are you doing here?

ROB

Just takin' a little working lunch with my new writing staff.

He gestures back to his slacker buds, Sam, AJ, and twins MAX AND MILES, who are all gathered around the pie carousel, pulling out whole pies.

SAM

(calls over)

Anything we want, Rob?

ROB

Pig out, dudes. It's on the nitwork!

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)
 (flashes his new corporate
 VISA)
 Nyuk-nyuk!

Rob's friends laugh and pound each other.

Chuck and his cronies deflate.

INT. STACEY MORAY'S OFFICE - DAY

A script goes hurtling across the room

STACEY
 Bogus Yale-grad wannabe teenspeak!

She hurtles a script across the room.

Eric ducks to avoid it.

STACEY
 (continuing)
 If you can't do a decent dialog
 rewrite, why don't you find a staff
 who can? Rob Zinberg got himself a
 whole roomful. I'll bet they're
 cranking out the pages!

INT. ROB'S NEW OFFICE - DAY

A fabulous executive suite, overrun by high-testosterone
 teenaged boys.

MUSIC BLASTS from the stereo.

Twins MAX and MILES play the latest *ZELDA* on HDTV.

AJ and SAM have a heated round of foosball.

Rob reclines in a rolling leather massage office chair, it
 still has the tags on. A YOUNG SALESMAN hovers nearby.

ROB
 Excellent use of the thousand tiny,
 vibrating spherical nodes.

SALESMAN
 (pulls a lever)
 And its the only office chair on
 the market that reclines to a full
 one hundred and eighty degrees.

ROB
 Nice feature. If I flip over, will
 it do my dick?

TODD
Try the rapid-pulse setting.

They knock fists. Rob flips onto his belly, and uses the handheld remote to adjust the rollers.

ROB
(vibrating)
Heeeey, boooyss, IIII'm in loooove.

Chuck walks in, carrying a thick roll of blueprints.

CHUCK
What the hell is going on here?

ROB
Weee're woorking, Daaaad.

CHUCK
Oh, please.
(snaps off the stereo)
I could hear you guys down in the parking lot!

He jerks the plug on Rob's chair, and pulls him to the mini-bar, out of earshot.

CHUCK
You want to blow this whole damn thing?

Sam shambles over to grab a microbrew from the fridge.

SAM
Dude, whassup?

CHUCK
Nothing's up! Everything's fine. I just swung by with the blueprints Rob was revising for the set designer--
(unrolls them)
See? So he can make the changes, and put up the set just like Rob wants it.

SAM
(couldn't care less)
Oh. I thought maybe you brought pizza.

He starts off with his beer. Chuck grabs it, and replaces it with a Pepsi.

CHUCK
You're working.

Sam moves off, disappointed.

ROB
Lame, Dad.

CHUCK
No, you know what's lame, Rob?
(gestures to the room)
This is lame. You think this is
what a writing staff does? You
think it's all a big party? *That's*
what a writing staff looks like!

He points to the window.

OUTSIDE, down below, A GROUP OF WRITERS-- pasty and pudgy,
haggard from being up all night-- walk back from a run-
through, twisting their scripts, shaking their heads,
frowning.

CHUCK
Coming up with jokes is hard,
laborious, all-night, brain-
draining work.

ROB
Maybe that's why TV sucks so hard.

INT. COMMISSARY - DAY

Rob and Chuck navigate the salad bar.

ROB
Personally, I think they like what
I do way better.

GLENN
Hey, Rob!

ROB
Yo, dude.
(to Chuck)
Check it out.

The Glenn walks over, with a throng of EXECES, all wearing
big, happy smiles at the sight of their boy wonder.

GLENN

(giving Rob pound)
How's it goin', bud? Havin' fun?
You dudes pushing the envelope?

ROB

Big time, babe. Hey, I don't know
if we can get away with it, but I
had this extreme idea for the
second act where Jared is psychin'
some major Blink rave, and starts
like kicking with these total
horndog X-freaks.

He cracks himself up.

The execs all glance around to see if anyone else has a clue.

ROB

(continuing; quickly)
Unless you guys want to go more
mainstream?

GLENN

No, no! If it cracks you up, let's
go for it.
(moving off)
You the man!

ROB

All right man, late!

The execs leave, happy. If Rob says it's hip...

Chuck can't believe what he's witnessed.

CHUCK

You're just jerking him off.

ROB

Wrong, Dad. He's jerking himself
off. He's just thinking of me
while he does it.

INT. STAGE 32 (THE NO BRAINER SET) - DAY

Rob unrolls Chuck's revised blueprints for Set Designer, DON
ANGELO.

ROB

So here's my changes, Don. Enjoy.

He's out of there. Don stops him.

DON

If you could just take a sec to go over them with me, page by page, so I know exactly what you're going after, before we start pounding nails--

Rob stares at the pages of complex drawings, and even more complex red markings his dad made.

ROB

Ahh, you're the guy who went to set college. Just do what you want.

He hurries off.

DON

(to his assistants)

That's the smartest producer I've ever met.

INT. NORMAN BOORMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

CHUCK

He's out of control, Norman! He makes stuff up, he tells people to do whatever the hell they want!

NORMAN

I know it's not how you're used to doing things--

CHUCK

The inmate is running the asylum!

NORMAN

--but it's working. They're over the moon!

CHUCK

Dazzled by his youth. What about when we have to actually put on a show?

NORMAN

Hey, if we can dazzle the network, surely we can blow it by America... Oh, by the way, the WB's desperate to develop for the eleven-to-fourteen-year-old girl's market. Do you think your daughter might be interested in fronting something for mid-season?

INT. STACEY MORAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Stacey's fist smashes a foam-board scale model of a set.

STACEY

His script is better, his set is up, and he's five years younger! I can't stand it!

(she sweeps the model off her desk)

This morning I got a call from Bronte Reynolds. The East Coast is hearing plenty of buzz on Rob Zinberg's show, and zip on ours. If I don't turn things around, he'll bounce my ass back to the Laff Channel so incredibly fast--

ERIC

Don't worry. You know we're gonna nail them in casting.

He holds up an 8x10 of young actor, CHAD KERWICK.

ERIC

This kid's amazing, and we've already started negotiating a deal.

INT. ZINBERG FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Rob holds the same 8x10 of actor CHAD KERWICK.

His audition video plays on the TV.

CHAD (ON TV)

(doing a perfect Rob)

"...I not only respect the physically challenged, I have been known to actually lift one out of his customized van, and carry him, drooling, on my back into Borders bookstore, for a bagel and a decaf frap."

Chuck freeze-frames the video.

CHUCK

He's the one.

ROB

I'm scared.

CHUCK

Why?

ROB

I agree with you.

Chuck takes Chad's 8x10 from Rob.

CHUCK

Wait a sec, what's this?
 (peels a PostIt from the
 back of the glossy)
 Damn. Damn damn damn!

ROB

What?

CHUCK

He's signing a deal with Stacey
 Moray at nine a.m. tomorrow.

ROB

So? Let's sign him tonight.

CHUCK

Yeah, right. It's eight o'clock.
 We're supposed to find the Glenn,
 audition him, get him approved, and
 negotiate a whole new deal by
 morning?

(sighs heavily)

We'll just have to find another
 guy. Let's go through all the tapes
 again.

He pulls a video from a mountainous stack.

CHUCK

(continuing)

Pop this one in, Rob...

(no response)

Rob?

We hear THE SOUND OF ROB'S BARRACUDA, taking off outside.

INT. ZINBERG KITCHEN - LATER

Julie is giving baby Gracie a bath in the sink. Chuck paces.

CHUCK

Where is he? I hate this! You'd
 think he'd have the courtesy to at
 least call.

JULIE

The transformation is complete.
He's become you.

From the other room.

LUCY (OC)

Ohmygod. OH. MYGOD! You guys, get
in here, NOW!

INT. FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Chuck runs in. Julie's on his heels, wrapping a towel around
the dripping Gracie.

The Lakers game is on TV.

CHUCK

What?

LUCY

Hang on a sec. There!

She points to the TV SCREEN.

IN THE BACKGROUND, behind the action of the game, we can see
the Glenn sitting courtside, his attention not on the game,
but on Rob and actor Chad Kerwick.

CHUCK

Jesus H--

INT. STAPLES CENTE - CONTINUOUS

The Glenn shakes Chad's hand.

GLENN

Welcome aboard, dude.

On the court, Shaq slam-dunks. The crowd goes insane.

DYAN CANNON jumps out of her seat, hugs Rob's neck.

INT. ZINBERG FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CHUCK

The little pisher.

INT. STACEY MORAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Stacey paces in a rage, jabbing her IVY LEAGUE MINIONS with
her Jungle Red fingernail.

STACEY

You're fired! You're fired! Your
fired!

DAN

Why?

STACEY

You're fired! Rob Zinberg signed
Chad Kerwick last night. Right out
from under me, in the fourth
quarter! Well, that's the last
time I get screwed by him!

EXT. THE IVY - DAY

Stacey and Rob share a patio table for two.

STACEY

It's so much fun to finally have
lunch with you! I am *such* a major
fan of your work!

ROB

What work?

STACEY

Your pilot script! "What work"!

ROB

Oh, yeah. That's good, isn't it?

STACEY

You're funny!
(leans close)
I love writers.

She draws the lime wedge from her water, rubs it slowly
around the rim of her glass, then lets it fall back, and
slowly licks her fingers.

Rob is mesmerized. He shifts in his seat.

STACEY

(continuing)
What?

ROB

(hides a smile)
Nothin' I can tell you.

ON THE STREET -

Marty Levine rolls by The Ivy in his electric wheelchair.

After a moment, the chair rolls back into frame in reverse.

Marty looks closely. That is Rob Zinberg having lunch with Stacey Moray.

He rolls off again, as fast as his chair will move.

ON THE PATIO -

Stacey leans closer, more cleavage exposed.

STACEY

What would it take to get you to
come do something for me?

ROB

Well, I sure liked that thing with
the lime.

EXT. PAY PHONE - DAY

Marty Levine strains from his low chair to reach the buttons on the telephone.

INT. CHUCK & JULIE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Julie changes Gracie's diaper, while talking on the phone.

JULIE

He's not home right now, Marty.
Call his cell.

EXT. PAY PHONE - CONTINUOUS

Marty steels himself, strains up, and dials again.

EXT. THE IVY - CONTINUOUS

STACEY

What would you say if I offered you
a hundred thousand dollars just to
take a look at a script?

ROB

Well, duh.

She pulls 24-year-old Eric's pilot (24/7) out of her Kipling backpack, and hands it across the table.

Rob thumbs through it, then hands it back.

ROB
 (continuing)
 I think you got yourself a winner,
 Stacey. Will that be cash or check?

STACEY
 Cute. Actually, I was looking more
 for character notes, dialog punch-
 ups, restructuring--

She hands the script back to him.

ROB
 Oh. Okay. Let's see.
 (opens the script, a long
 beat)
 ...Page one...

INT. CHUCK'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

CHUCK
 Thanks, Marty. I owe you.

Chuck slams down his car-phone, speeds into the intersection
 as the light turns red, and screeches into a U-turn.

EXT. THE IVY - CONTINUOUS

Rob stares at page one. He doesn't have a clue what to say.

He closes the script and hands it back to Stacey.

ROB
 You know I can see where this is
 gonna be an awful lot of work--

STACEY
 I'll pay you two-hundred-and-fifty
 thousand.

Rob takes the script back, and slowly opens it.

ROB
 Page two...

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Chuck is pulled over, explaining to the CHP Officer.

CHUCK
 I didn't see the "No U-Turn sign"--

EXT. THE IVY - A SHORT TIME LATER

Rob pretends to study the script.

ROB
That was another goodie.
(turns the page)
Page three...

A shadow falls across the page. Then, THE STERN VOICE OF AUTHORITY:

CHUCK
What are you doing?

Rob looks up to see his father standing right behind him.

ROB
Um, helping out a friend?

Chuck closes the script in Rob's hands.

CHUCK
You are contractually obligated to another network. Your creative services are committed exclusively to them during this period, no exceptions.

Rob feigns anguish.

ROB
DAMN!
(hands the script back to Stacey)
Sorry, man. And I just thought of a really good thing.

EXT. VALET PARKING STATION - DAY

Chuck hands their parking tickets to the VALET.

CHUCK
What the hell were you doing having lunch with Stacey Moray anyway?

ROB
She called, and I was hungry.

CHUCK
That is completely inappropriate.

Stacey comes out, hands her ticket to the valet.

STACEY
The red Corvette.

ROB
She has a 'Vette, Dad!

She tosses Rob a fetching smile. Rob smiles back.

CHUCK
Cut it out!

ROB
What? Now my exclusive contract
doesn't let me smile at people?

CHUCK
(whispers)
Stacey Moray isn't a person, she's
a shark! She's got this big
fishtank in her lobby, Rob. They
say she swims through it with her
mouth open at night, when she's run
out of young writers to feed on!

ROB
You don't really know her, Dad.
She's an entirely different person
with some water and a wedge of
lime.

CHUCK
Don't make me smack you.

Stacey approaches them, handing Rob a to-go container.

STACEY
You left before your Tiramisu came.

ROB
(to Chuck)
Isn't that sweet?

CHUCK
Yeah. Here's your car, get in.
I'll see you at home.

He pushes Rob into the driver's seat. Stacey leans down.

STACEY
You know, Rob, the Emmys are this
Sunday.

(MORE)

STACEY (cont'd)
I was thinking, maybe if UBC's
lawyers wouldn't consider it a
breach of exclusivity, you might
like to be my date?

Rob looks past her, to Chuck. Chuck's eyes scream "NO!"

Rob looks at Stacey, eyes can't help but drop to her
cleavage.

ROB
Bitchen, I'm there.

INT. GLENN TWOMBLY'S OFFICE - DAY

The Glenn is apoplectic.

GLENN
That's *my* teenager! She can't have
him! Call legal!

INT. JERRY'S DELI - DAY

Barry Moray and Marty Levine have lunch.

BARRY
She's always been a talent-whore.
Just like her mother.

INT. CHUCK & JULIE'S BATHROOM - DAY

Julie shoves a People magazine photo-spread in Chuck's face.

JULIE
Look at these! She goes through
boys like M&Ms!

INT. ROB'S OFFICE - DAY

Rob's friends chant, as they cabbage-patch around him.

GUYS
Go Robbie, go Robbie!

INT. STACEY MORAY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Stacey sits on her bed, smoothing sheer black stockings up
her leg as she talks on the phone.

STACEY
Yes, Bronte. I'm very close to
closing a deal...

INT. ROB'S ROOM - DAY

CHUCK
You're not going.

Rob comes out of the bathroom, pulling on his tux jacket.

ROB
Yeah, I am.

CHUCK
Listen to me, Rob. I don't know
why she asked you--

ROB
How 'bout cause I'm so cute and fun
to be with?

CHUCK
Yeah, right. Listen, as your dad,
as a man who's been in this
business a long time, as a friend,
I'm asking you, please, just please
call and cancel.

THROUGH THE WINDOW, we see a MERCEDES STRETCH LIMOUSINE pull
into the driveway.

ROB
I can't. She's here.

CHUCK
We can say you have diarrhea. Mom
always does that for me when I have
to get out of something.

OUTSIDE, Stacey climbs out of the limo. We get the full
effect of her very long legs and very short lace skirt.

ROB
Hey, I'd go even if I *had* diarrhea.

He heads out.

INT. ENTRY - CONTINUOUS

Julie stands in the doorway, blocking Stacey's entrance.

JULIE
I'm sorry this is so last-minute,
but, well... Rob's got diarrhea.

Rob struts out.

ROB
I'm ready, let's book.

STACEY
But I thought--

She looks at Julie. Julie looks away, she's a terrible liar.

STACEY
Well, if you're sure you can make it. I mean it's a long ride, and sometimes there's a line for the bathroom--

ROB
(realizes)
Mom!

JULIE
What?

INT. LIMO - DAY

In the back seat, Stacey keeps some distance from Rob.

ROB
Really, I'm okay. Rumors of my diarrhetic condition are greatly exaggerated.

INT. ZINBERG KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

CHUCK
I can't believe you let him out the door!

JULIE
I can't believe you let him out of his room!

INT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

STACEY
Well then why did your mom say that? Didn't she want you to go? Does she hate me or something?

ROB
Wow, when you said that, you sounded just like a real girl.

STACEY
I am a real girl.

She scoots over closer to him.

STACEY

Just cause I'm the youngest female
head of programming in network
television history doesn't mean I'm
not a girl, too.

She stretches across Rob to pour Dom Perignon into a pair of
fluted champagne glasses.

INT. CHUCK & JULIE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The closet door is open. Chuck throws a beaded evening dress
onto the bed.

CHUCK

Put it on.

He unzips a garment bag, and pulls a tux out.

JULIE

What are you doing?

CHUCK

We're going to the Emmys.

INT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

Rob drains his champagne glass.

ROB

Y'know after awhile, the throat-
burn kinda wears down.

Stacey now sits very close to Rob, her champagne-wet lips
whispering in his ear.

STACEY

I love the way you put things.

ROB

It kinda morphs into a throat-*glow*.
(looks at her)
Like that one?

STACEY

Mmm.

She runs the tip of her tongue along his earlobe.

ROB
(voice cracking)
Cool.

INT. CHUCK'S CAR - DAY

Bumper to bumper on the 405.

Julie tries to put on her make-up in the visor mirror.

JULIE
This is insane. What are we going
to do when we get there?

CHUCK
I'm thinking, I'm thinking.

INT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

Stacey kisses Rob.

Slowly, her hand slides down the front of his pants.

ROB
(a beat)
Um, I don't mean to be ungrateful,
but I could do that for myself.

STACEY
How about this?

She starts to lower her head toward his lap.

ROB
Not unless I was in the circus.

CHAUFFEUR'S VOICE (OC, ON INTERCOM)
We're here.

THROUGH THE CAR WINDOW, we can see that they have arrived at
THE PASADENA CIVIC AUDITORIUM.

Stacey straightens up instantly, fixing her hair and
lipstick.

ROB
Dang, this is how my dreams always
end, too.

INT. UNDERGROUND PARKING - CONTINUOUS

Chuck looks for parking amidst all the limos and town-cars in
the city.

JULIE

We don't even have tickets. How are we supposed to get in?

CHUCK

I'll handle it.

JULIE

Like you've handled everything else?

EXT. PASADENA CIVIC AUDITORIUM - DAY

Chuck and Julie stand at the entrance in full formal attire.

CHUCK

(pats his pockets)
I can't believe I left them at home. I'm Chuck Zinberg, I produce *GO TO MEL*. I go to these things every year--

ATTENDANT

(polite, but firm)
Then you should know, sir--

CHUCK

Not "sir". "Mr. Zinberg", not "sir".

ATTENDANT

--we can't admit anyone without a ticket. It's for your own protection, Mr. Zinberg.

JULIE

Let's just go, Chuck.

CHUCK

See, she called me "Chuck". Why would she do that if I wasn't who I say I am?

Julie pulls him away.

JULIE

You're being pathetic.

ATTENDANT

(going back inside)
Have a nice evening.

As the glass door swings shut behind him, Chuck spots:

ROB AND STACEY, INSIDE, laughing and partying with TV's hottest and youngest.

Chuck just watches, his nose pressed against the glass door.

CHUCK

...I go every year.

INT. PASADENA CIVIC AUDITORIUM - LATER

AN USHER leads Stacey and Rob to "A" seats, way down front, among the superstars.

INT. UNDERGROUND PARKING - CONTINUOUS

Chuck and Julie slog through the parking structure.

JULIE

You didn't even check which level
you were on?

INT. LIMO - NIGHT

Three hours later, Rob and Stacey climb back into the stretch.

ROB

That was awesome!
(he throws himself on top
of her)
Now where were we?

Stacey laughs, pushing him off.

STACEY

Not here, you nut.

ROB

But I've been planning it out for
the last four hours--

STACEY

Limosex is just so something our
parents would get off on--

ROB

Sure, it's a classic!

STACEY

I want us to be more creative. I
bet you can think of something.

ROB
Well, you gotta go a long way to
beat limosex, but...

INT. CHUCK & JULIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Chuck sits up in bed.

CHUCK
I hear a car.

INT. ROB'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rob opens the door.

ROB
...I'll bet you've never done it in-
-
(flips on the light,
gesturing)
A Mexican string-hammock!

STACEY
Ooh, that's wild. Have you?

ROB
Uhh, sure. Many times. Among
other places. Many other places...

INT. CHUCK & JULIE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Chuck and Julie peer through the blinds.

WE HEAR THE LIMO, pulling away.

JULIE
I couldn't see. Was he alone?

CHUCK
Too dark to tell. But he must have
been. There's no way he'd bring
her back to that pig sty.

INT. ROB'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rob steps over mounds of junk, leading Stacey to his hammock.

INT. CHUCK & JULIE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

JULIE
I think you should go check.

INT. ROB'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rob sweeps Stacey up off her feet, and lays her on his hammock, a slackerly young Rhett Butler.

ROB
This is one of my top five
fantasies.

He kneels beside her, takes her face in his hands, looks deep into her eyes, and begins to croon the love theme from *TITANIC*:

ROB
(continuing)
NEAR, FAR, WHEREVER YOU ARE, I
BELIEVE THAT THE HEART DOES GO ON,
ONCE MORE, YOU OPEN THE DOOR, AND
YOU'RE HERE IN MY HEART, AND MY
HEART WILL GO ON AND ON--

He gently, romantically, lays her back on the hammock.

Her head bangs into another load of junk piled there.

STACEY
Ow.

ROB
Oh. I'll take care of that.

He scoops up a double-armload of dirty clothes, Penthouse magazines, empty microwave popcorn bags, etc., and disappears with them into the bathroom.

INT. CHUCK & JULIE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

CHUCK
What do I do if she's in there?

JULIE
Kick her bony ass out of there!

CHUCK
She's head of programming.

JULIE
He's your son.

INT. ROB'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rob slams all his junk into the cabinet under the sink.

He stands, gives himself a once-over in the mirror, checks his breath.

ROB

Eee.

He rips the cap off some Extra-Strength Listerine, while tearing off his tux pants.

INT. CHUCK'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Chuck grabs a robe from the hook.

INT. ROB'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rob sniffs his armpits, searches for deodorant, soap, anything.

STACEY (OC)

Rob?

ROB

Be right there!

He spits some Listerine into his hand, and rubs it into his pits.

For good measure, he rubs some inside his Jockeys, too.

ROB

(continuing; hopping from
foot to foot)

Ah, ah, ah!

EXT. ZINBERG HOUSE - NIGHT

Chuck walks out through the kitchen door, heading for Rob's room.

INT. ROB'S ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

Rob emerges from the bathroom, in his t-shirt and briefs.

Stacey lays in his hammock, wearing nothing but his velveteen Grateful Dead bear blanket.

ROB

(suave)

I've always liked that on you.

He crosses to her, stepping gingerly. The Listerine stings below.

EXT. ROB'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Chuck turns the doorknob.

INT. ROB'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stacey slips past Rob.

STACEY

Back in a sec

Just as she disappears into the bathroom...

Chuck walks in, from outside.

CHUCK

Hey.

ROB

(spinning around)

AHHH!

CHUCK

We heard you come in. Just wanted
to see how it went.

INT. ROB'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hearing Chuck's voice, Stacey backs up against the sink.

INT. ROB'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ROB

Fine. It was a lot of fun.

He surreptitiously kicks Stacey's clothes into the corner.

FROM THE BATHROOM: THE SOUND OF SOMETHING FALLING to the
floor.

CHUCK

What was that?

INT. ROB'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stacey picks up Rob's Listerine, silently sets it back on the
sink.

INT. ROB'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ROB

Nothing. Probably a bird banging
into the window.

(MORE)

ROB (cont'd)
 Birds are so stupid.
 (yawns)
 Well, I'm really tired, Dad.

CHUCK
 Right. And you've got your first
 table reading in the morning.

ROB
 Yeah, I should get started on that
 sleep, all right.

CHUCK
 I'll leave you alone.
 (starts out, then)
 I'm glad you're home. I should
 have trusted you.
 (crosses back, kisses
 Rob's forehead)
 You're a good kid.

ROB
 That's so queer, Dad.

Chuck leaves.

Stacey appears in the bathroom doorway, enticingly draped.

STACEY
 Are we alone?

ROB
 Yah.
 (reclining on the hammock)
 Just you, me, and Mr. Happy.

She runs over and jumps him.

The hammock flips, and dumps them both on the floor.

ROB
 (continuing; sits up)
 I knew I should've gone for that
 limosex.

STACEY
 That's okay. I've heard good
 things about floorsex, too.

She pulls him to her.

INT. CHUCK & JULIE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Chuck comes in.

CHUCK
Everything's fine. Go to sleep.

INT. ROB'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rob and Stacey go for it on the floor

INT. ROB'S ROOM - DAY

Early morning sunshine streaks the room. Rob is fast asleep, mouth-breathing, on the floor.

Stacey moves his arm off of her, gets up, wraps his Grateful Dead blanket around her, and goes into the bathroom.

INT. ROB'S BATHROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Stacey, sitting on the commode, reaches back for some toilet paper. The roll is empty, just a clinging shred of the last sheet.

STACEY
Boys.

She gets up to hunt around for another roll. None on the sink. She opens the cabinet underneath.

The junk Rob stashed there last night comes tumbling out.

She pushes the clothes and magazines away, searching for TP.

Something catches her eye. A folded-over script. She picks it up, recognizes the "248 parking tickets" scene from *NO BRAINER*.

She unfolds the script. The title page reads *THE UNTITLED CHUCK ZINBERG PILOT*.

STACEY
(stares at it)
What the hell--?

She stashes the script under the bear blanket, and slips out.

INT. EXT. BOCCE BALL COURT - DAY

Stacey stalks across the lawn, in last-night's black Emmy dress, smeared mascara, and pillow hair.

STACEY
What do you know about this?!

She throws *THE UNTITLED CHUCK ZINBERG PILOT* at her father, interrupting him, mid-bocce-roll.

Barry leafs through it.

BARRY

It's Chuck Zinberg's pilot. The one no one, including you, would ever read.

STACEY

I just now found it in his son's bathroom cabinet! This is Rob Zinberg's show! This is *NO BRAINER*, word for word, verbatim!

BARRY

You're kidding! They pulled the ol' switcheroo?
(bursts out laughing)
Oh, my God. Jane, you ignorant slut, you boffed the wrong Zinberg!

STACEY

No one can know about this!

She snatches for the script. He won't let go.

BARRY

Chuck's my best friend.

STACEY

I'll give you a pilot and six on the air, mid-season.

Barry gives up the script.

BARRY

You're family.

INT. ROB'S ROOM - DAY

Rob, a new man, opens his eyes and stretches luxuriously.

He stares at the hammock above his head.

ROB

Wow, the colors are a little brighter.

(looks under the cover)

We're up!

(no answer)

Stacey?

He gets up and jogs into the bathroom.

INT. ROB'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

ROB
Stace--

He sees the jumble of dirty clothes and junk on the floor.

ROB
(continuing)
Damn, she found out I was a slob
and booked!
(kicks the pile)
Wait, she must have left a note!

Looks on the mirror, for a lipstick note. Nothing.

INT. ROB'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rob runs in and shakes his pillow. Nothing pinned to it.

Chuck enters, holding a typed page.

CHUCK
Good, you're awake. I want to go
over some alternate blow-offs real
quick, in case the joke at the end
of act two doesn't work--

ROB
I'm busy.

Rob shakes the Grateful Dead blanket. No note.

CHUCK
I just need you to focus for a
second--

Rob hurls stuff around, searching in vain.

ROB
I'm focusing on something else
right now, okay?

Chuck grabs the pillowcase out of Rob's hand.

CHUCK
Well, you'd better focus on this,
Rob, or you're gonna go into that
table reading this morning, and
fall right on your ass!

ROB
Who cares?

CHUCK
Me! This is money time! Now sit
down and memorize these jokes!

ROB
Forget you! I'm sick of being your
puppet!

CHUCK
Hey, that's the deal here. Me,
Gepetto, you, Pinocchio--

ROB
No, Dad. I've been to Pleasure
Island. I'm a real boy, now.

CHUCK
Hey, I've seen the movie, kiddo.
They don't turn into boys, they
turn into jackasses!

ROB
You're the jackass with your stupid
jokes! Jeez, God, that's all you
care about! You're not a father,
you're a joke robot!

CHUCK
On table reading day, yeah--

ROB
Every day! All you ever give a
shit about is your stupid show!
You never even came to my 6th-
grade graduation, cause you were
out of town, filming some stupid
show! Other dads got off work for
the whale-watch trip. Not mine,
he's got camera-blocking. Mom came
to everything. Mom closed the
whole library to see me in *Oliver!*.
But you were too busy writing some
stupid, boring *jokes!*

CHUCK
Hey, those stupid, boring jokes got
you a ride to the Emmys last night!

ROB
What are you talking about?

CHUCK

You think Stacey Moray took you
just cause you're so cute and fun
to be with?

(smacks the page of jokes)

This is what she wants, mister! The
"stupid, boring" jokes!

ROB

She wants me!

CHUCK

She wants *me*, she just thinks it's
you!

ROB

Get real, you're just a pathetic
washed-up old hack who couldn't
even get a script read unless his
little boy took it in for him!

Chuck lunges at Rob. Rob ducks out of the way. Chuck
plunges into the hammock, getting tangled in a mess of
Mexican string, velveteen blanket, and debris.

ROB

(continuing)

Now that's funny.

He walks out, leaving his father flailing in the junk.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

CHUCK

I don't have to take that from him!

JULIE

Yes you do.

CHUCK

Why?

JULIE

Because someone has to be the grown-
up!

CHUCK

You be the grown-up. You take his
shit! I've done every ounce of
work, he's taken every bit of
credit, and what does he turn
around and do? Blames me!

(MORE)

CHUCK (cont'd)
Says I'm not funny! What am I
supposed to do with that?

JULIE
You say "So what if I'm not funny.
I'm still your father. I may not
be funny, but you still need me".

CHUCK
Oh, now you think I'm not funny,
too?

JULIE
Oh, Jesus, Chuck, just grow up!

THE TELEPHONE RINGS. Julie answers.

JULIE
(continuing)
Hello?... Just a minute.

She hands the phone to Chuck.

INT. STACEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Stacey lounges across her chair, twirling the telephone cord.

STACEY
Hi, Chuck, I know this is kind of
last minute, but I have a show
going up this week, and you're the
only man I know who's funny enough
to fix it. I'll give you free
rein, full credit, whatever it
takes. I really want you.

INT. ZINBERG KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Chuck listens. He has that glazed look on his face.

JULIE
What? What's she saying?

CHUCK
(into telephone)
I think we can probably work
something out.

JULIE
Work out what?

CHUCK

Give Norman Boorman a call, he'll handle the details... Great, see you in a bit.

He hangs up.

JULIE

What was that? What did she say?

Chuck rises.

CHUCK

I just got a job on another show.

JULIE

You *what*?

CHUCK

It starts today.

JULIE

What about your show?

CHUCK

They don't even know I exist. Let 'em have their teenager. Stacey Moray want me.

He heads for the door.

JULIE

If you go, you're bailing on your son.

CHUCK

If I don't, I'm bailing on myself.

He leaves.

JULIE

(after him)

Oh, well by all means, choose yourself!

INT. ROB'S ROOM - DAY

Rob is on the phone.

ROB

That's okay, I can keep holding.

INT. STACEY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

STACEY

(on the phone)

...Thank you, Norman. It's been a pleasure doing business with you.

She hangs up. Her secretary buzzes in.

SECRETARY (OC)

Rob Zinberg's still holding on two.

STACEY

Tell him I'm in a meeting, but good luck with his pilot today.

She clicks off and smiles.

STACEY

(continuing)

Not bad, huh? In one sweet move, I save my little show, and torpedo theirs. That's why they pay me the big bucks.

(sits up)

Now let's hear your pitch.

REVEAL BARRY, sitting on the sofa, clutching his portfolio, looking utterly wretched.

EXT. ZINBERG KITCHEN - DAY

Rob comes in, dressed in a polo shirt and khakis.

ROB

I'm leaving now.

JULIE

You don't have to do this, honey. I can make a call--

ROB

I'm not saying I have diarrhea, Mom.

JULIE

It's not your responsibility. It's your father's show, he made his choice--

ROB

It's my show now.

He kisses her and walks out the door.

INT. STAGE 32, THE *NO BRAINER* SET - DAY

First reading. A balloon bouquet adorns a long table surrounded by director's chairs. P.A.'s slap down fresh white scripts and sharpened pencils at each seat.

Network, cast, studio and Rob's slacker "writing staff" mingle over bagels and Starbucks.

Rob looks completely lost.

STEVE GROSSMAN

Whenever you're ready to start the reading, Boss, just give 'em the word.

ROB

Okay... What's the word?

The Glenn passes, shouting.

GLENN

Let's park our butts and read this mother before Rob turns twenty!

STEVE GROSSMAN

That'll do.

The company assembles.

INT. STAGE 17, THE *24/7* SET - DAY

Chuck settles into his seat, at the head of his table. This is like coming home for him.

CHUCK

Please turn to page one in your hymnals.

Everyone opens their scripts.

CHUCK

(continuing)

Here we go.

(reads)

"Fade in. Act One. Scene A..."

INT. *NO BRAINER* SET - DAY

A half-hour later.

Rob's table rocks with laughter and applause. The Glenn wipes tears from his eyes.

GLENN

That's the funniest reading I've ever seen. Just punch that act-two blow-off, Robbie, and let's shoot the bitch.

INT. STAGE 17 - DAY

Chuck's table is a morgue.

CHUCK

Well, it's not the worst reading I've ever heard... I'm kidding, yeah, it is.
 (pats writer Eric)
 The good news is, it can only get better.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Julie is on the phone, behind the main desk.

JULIE

(cold)
 Rob's reading went just fine. He only has to fix one joke.

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

CHUCK

(into phone)
 See, I told you he'd be okay. This script, on the other hand, needs a bit of work.
 (tosses the 24/7 script into the garbage)
 I might be home kind of late.

INT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

JULIE

Maybe you should just sleep at the office.

She hangs up.

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Chuck stares at the phone, then drops his head into his lap.

CHUCK

Shit!

INT. ROB'S OFFICE - DAY

Rob sits at his computer.

ROB

One joke... Just one little joke.

His friends sit on the floor, enjoying a sumptuous Thai lunch.

MILES

Bag it for later, man. This Thai rocks.

AJ

Sammy, pass that peanut stuff.

SAM

No way, you'll be unleashing weapons of mass destruction the rest of the day.

ROB

Could you guys dial it down? I'm trying to write a joke here.

THE GUYS

(whisper)

Wooooooooo.

ROB

That's it! EVERYBODY OUT! NOW!

They scramble out the door, laughing.

Rob turns back to his computer.

ROB

(continuing)

Now I can work... All right, one joke...

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - DAY

Chuck issues orders to his staff like a military commander.

CHUCK

Okey-doke, you guys beat out that new "B" story, we'll fold it back in, after I restructure act two.

(MORE)

CHUCK (cont'd)
(points to two guys)
You and you punch up the kitchen
scene. It really laid there.
(points to another pair)
Are you two a team?

WRITER 1
No.

CHUCK
You are now. Come back to me with
five new cold openings.
(checks his watch)
You've got twenty minutes, go!

INT. ROB'S OFFICE - LATER

Sun is setting, shadows are long. Rob is still staring at
his computer.

ROB
Just one joke...

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - LATER

Chuck's new writing staff perch on his desk, lean over his
shoulder, sit at his feet, watching with admiration as he
reads over their material, nodding, laughing, making notes.

INT. ROB'S OFFICE - LATER

Night has fallen, the room is dark. Rob still sits, staring
at the monitor. It reads:

ONE STUPID JOKE

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - DAWN

Chuck ushers his exhausted young staff out the door.

CHUCK
Good work, guys. We'll see it on
it's feet after lunch.

Eric stops in the doorway.

ERIC
Good work? That was awesome, man,
we cranked! I've never written
like that in my life!

CHUCK
You're new. Give it time.

ERIC

I have to admit, Chuck, I got kind of pissy when Stacey said she was bringing in some old guy to fix my show. But after spending this night with you--

(hugs him)

You are the God, man. Rob's so lucky. I wish you were my dad.

CHUCK

(peeling him off)

Get some sleep.

He sends the young writer on his way.

Chuck walks over to the phone. He dials.

INT. CHUCK & JULIE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Julie lays awake in bed. She lets the machine pick up.

CHUCK'S VOICE (ON ANSWERING MACHINE)

Leave a message, we'll call you right back.

CHUCK'S VOICE (ON TELEPHONE)

Julie, pick up... Honey, I want to talk to you... Julie, please...

She reaches over, picks up the receiver, and then sets it back down in its cradle, cutting him off.

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Chuck hangs up the phone. He pours himself a tall Glenlivet, and knocks it back.

He pours another, walks over to the couch, and lays down.

CHUCK

I am the God...

He covers himself with his jacket, and just lays there, staring at the wall.

INT. STACEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Stacey pages happily through Chuck's new draft (blue pages), while talking on the phone.

STACEY

I agree, Bronte, *fabulous* rewrite.
I've always felt there's no
substitute for experience.

INT. GLENN TWOMBLY'S OFFICE - DAY

The Glenn turns to the end of Rob's blue-page script.

GLENN

Hey, where the hell is my new joke?

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Rob sleep-deprived, and looking like hell, hunches over a
copy of *MILTON BERLE'S PRIVATE JOKE FILE*.

Julie brings over another large stack of books.

JULIE

Here's everything else from the
humor shelf, honey.

ROB

Is this funny?

(reads)

"He quit smoking cold turkey. The
feathers made him gag."

(off her look)

"What are you, an audience or a
jury?"

(realizes)

I'm doing Berle, Mom. I'm
thrashed.

He gets up and walks out of the main reading room.

ROB

(Berle)

"We will now pray silently for the
jokes that just died..."

EXT. LIBRARY PAY PHONE - DAY

Rob sighs, shuts his eyes.

ROB

(into phone)

Just tell her I called again.

INT. 24/7 SET - DAY

Stacey's eyes shine as she watches Chuck in action on the set.

He's energy in motion, moving actors around the stage, the ultimate pro.

CHUCK

Hey, it might be very funny if we--
No, no, wait, I've got a better
idea-- No, I want to use that
later. Ooh, I got it, I got it!
(calls)
Can I get a secretary over here?

INT. THE GLENN'S OFFICE - DAY

The Glenn flips to the back page of Rob's yellow script.

GLENN

Still no joke?! What is this, some
kind of pissing contest? I asked
the little punk for one goddam new
joke! A week ago, he was throwing
them off like body heat. Now, all
of a sudden, he turns into a prima
donna?

INT. ROB'S ROOM - DAY

Rob flings junk everywhere, searching.

ROB

There was a whole page of them
somewhere!

INT. NO BRAINER SET - DAY

Chad Kerwick throws Rob's script on the floor.

CHAD

Eat this suck joke! It ruins my
whole character!

ROB

I'm working on it--

CHAD

You say that every day!

ROB
Well I'm working on it every day,
so just shut up!

CHAD
You shut up!

ROB
Bite my dick!

CHAD
That's it!

He starts throwing punches. Rob retaliates. Jim Burrows and Steve Grossman have to pull them apart.

INT. CHUCK & JULIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Rob holds an ice-pack on his shiner.

ROB
I don't know what happened, Mom! I don't know what I said, I don't know what to do! And you're pissed, and Dad's gone, and Stacey hasn't called, and my eye hurts, and everyone's yelling, and I haven't slept, and Milton Berle just keep going through my head-- "He's so short, when it rains, he's the last to know", "I never forget a face, but in your case, I'll make an exception", "I asked my secretary to take a letter. She picked 'N'"--

He breaks down, sobbing.

JULIE
(picks up the phone)
I'm calling your father.

ROB
(grabs it away)
NO! I don't need him.
(dries his eyes)
I can do it myself.

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Rain falls outside the window.

CLOSE ON CHUCK'S SLEEPING FACE, mushed and mottled from the tweed of his sofa pillow.

A CHILLED DOM PERIGNON BOTTLE touches his cheek.

Chuck opens his eyes to see:

STACEY, kneeling on the floor beside him. She wears a rain-dampened trenchcoat, and we don't know what underneath.

STACEY

(softly)

Your agent's being a hardass about closing your series deal with me. I thought maybe I could incentivize you to incentivize him.

Chuck comes to full consciousness immediately.

CHUCK

Uh, what are we talking about here?

Stacey leans in and kisses him.

JULIE comes around the corner.

JULIE

Chuck, I've got to talk to you about--

She sees them, stops cold.

CHUCK

Julie!

JULIE

Nevermind.

She turns and runs out.

CHUCK

Julie, wait!

He runs after her.

INT. LOBBY - NIGHT

Chuck runs through the lobby, catching Julie's arm in front of the massive circular aquarium.

CHUCK

Nothing happened! She came in while I was sleeping--

JULIE

Well isn't that just the old sit-com writer's dream-come-true? She's young, gorgeous, and she can keep you on the air forever. The hell with your family, you've got it made!

She jerks her arm free, and bolts out of there.

CHUCK

JULIE!

EXT. NETWORK BUILDING - NIGHT

Chuck bursts through the door. He runs through the parking lot in the rain.

CHUCK

Julie, don't go!

She speeds past in her mini-van, splashing him with dirty rainwater.

As Chuck stands there, watching her disappear, it begins to pour.

CHUCK

(looking up)
Perfect.

Stacey approaches, holding her umbrella over both of them.

STACEY

Anything I can do?

CHUCK

Just go home. I'm gonna get some coffee.

STACEY

I'll drive you.

CHUCK

No, it's a nice night for a walk.

He begins to walk, in the driving rain.

INT. JERRY'S DELI - NIGHT

Quiet, for two in the morning.

Chuck, thoroughly soaked, takes a seat at the counter, wrings out the bottom of his wet t-shirt.

The WAITRESS knows him, brings a bowl of mushroom barley soup and a cup of coffee right away.

WAITRESS
Your rye toast'll be up in a sec.

CHUCK
Thanks.

He sighs a wretched sigh.

At the other end of the counter, SOME GUY coughs a lousy, rasping cough.

Chuck glances at the guy, hunched over his own bowl of mushroom-barley, wet, hacking, pathetic.

CHUCK
Need some water?

The guy looks up. It's Rob, coughing too hard to answer.

CHUCK
Jesus. Rob!

Chuck hurries to him, with a glass of water.

CHUCK
(continuing)
What are you doing here?

Rob drinks the water, finds his voice.

ROB
Having soup. You?

CHUCK
Same.
(re the soup)
Good soup, huh?

ROB
Yeah. Hot.

CHUCK
Sometimes I have to put an ice cube
in.

ROB
I like it hot.
(eats a spoonful)
HAHH!

The steam pours from his mouth. He swallows anyway.

ROB
(in pain)
Good.

CHUCK
So, how's the show?

ROB
Great. Yours?

CHUCK
Great.

ROB
Good.

CHUCK
Well, good... Say, did you ever
find an act two blow-off? Cause I
had this funny idea the other day
while I was driving along--

ROB
That's okay. I don't need anything
from you.

CHUCK
Oh. Well. Good, then.

ROB
Your soup's getting cold.

CHUCK
I'm not hungry anymore.

He walks back to the other end of the counter, throws down a
five, and walks out.

Rob sits there, alone, eating soup that's too hot.

EXT. VALLEY STREET - NIGHT

The neat little North-of-the-Boulevard houses are all tucked
in and fast asleep.

Chuck walks back along the dark, quiet street, head down against the light drizzle that now falls on him.

He passes a house with a light in the window. He glances in.

INSIDE, a YOUNG FATHER walks in circles, holding A NEW BABY to his chest, lulling it back to sleep in the early morning hours.

Chuck watches, and remembers:

INT. STUDIO CITY HOUSE - NIGHT

YOUNG CHUCK in a LAVERNE AND SHIRLEY cap, coming in from a late-night re-write, tenderly takes their wakeful BABY ROB from a sleepy YOUNG JULIE.

She shuffles off to bed.

He walks the floor in circles, and soothingly croons:

CHUCK
TWO-FOUR-SIX-EIGHT SCHLEMIEL,
SCHLEMAZEL, HASSENPFEFFER
INCORPORATED, WE'RE GONNA MAKE
IT...

Chuck sings on, fading into the memory of...

CHUCK, NOW, standing in the rain, staring into someone else's window, watching someone else's life.

INSIDE THE HOUSE, The young dad turns out the light.

INT. CHUCK'S OFFICE - DAY

Unforgiving daylight. Chuck rolls on the stiff couch, trying to find comfort.

Barry barges in, frantic.

BARRY
Why aren't you picking up your
phone?

CHUCK
(waves him off, foggy)
I took it off the hook. I've got a
show in a little while--

BARRY
Julie just called, Rob didn't come
home last night!
(MORE)

BARRY (cont'd)
 He's not at the studio! They can't
 find him anywhere!

Chuck is instantly alert. He's on his feet, grabbing his pants.

CHUCK
 I just saw him at Jerry's a few
 hours ago--

BARRY
 Was he okay? The damn show's been
 killing him--

Chuck jumps into his pants, shoves his feet into his shoes.

CHUCK
 He didn't say a word! Dammit, I
 should've seen it! I shouldn't
 have left. I should have known!

He runs out. Barry runs after.

INT. HALLWAY/STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Chuck sprints down the hallway, and into the stairwell, taking the stairs three at a time, Barry on his heels.

BARRY
 It's my fault! I should've told you
 Stacey knew--

CHUCK
 Knew what?

BARRY
 Uhh...

CHUCK
 (grabs Barry's shirt)
 What?

BARRY
 Everything, Chuck. She found your
 script in his bathroom the morning
 after the Emmys. She only hired
 you here because she wanted to
 cripple *NO BRAINER*.
 (crying)
 I wanted to tell you, but she gave
 me a pilot and six to keep my mouth
 shut. And now look what happened
 to me!

CHUCK

To you?

BARRY

Yeah, you're not the one going to hell!

Chuck drops him, and keeps running.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Stacey steps off the elevator, holding the door for MR. BRONTE REYNOLDS, 50's, silver, and East Coast elegant.

STACEY

...This place I'm taking you, Bronte, is one of the most exclusive sushi bars on the Coast--

Chuck shoves through the stairwell door.

STACEY

Oh, Chuck, hi! Join us for sushi? This is Mr. Reynolds. He just flew in from New York to see your filming tonight--

CHUCK

That's great. Nice to meet you. Let me know how it went.

He bolts past them.

STACEY

Where are you going?

Barry appears in the stairwell door.

BARRY

To save his son, bitch!
 (to Mr. Reynolds)
 Pardon my French, I can say stuff like that, I'm her father.
 (to Stacey)
 He knows what you did.

Stacey implodes.

STACEY

Shit!
 (screaming after him)
 Get back here, Zinberg!

Chuck doesn't slow a beat.

STACEY

(continuing)

We've got a contract! YOU'RE IN BREACH! You walk out of here, I'll sue your ass so hard, you won't know where to sit! You won't get work on a puppet show in Des Moines!

Chuck stops. His hand on the door, he makes a decision.

He turns, and walks back into the lobby.

STACEY

(continuing)

Good. You've come to your senses.

CHUCK

Yeah.

He picks her up, and dumps her into the enormous fishtank.

CHUCK

Enjoy your sushi.

He dashes out.

Stacey flounders in the cold, fishy water, clawing the glass, as the fish swim down her blouse and up her skirt.

INT. LAZERSTAR - DAY

Counter-girl Tasha shakes her head. She hasn't seen Rob.

Chuck tears out of there.

INT. JERRY'S DELI - DAY

Chuck pushes through the line of people, combing the booths, scanning the counter.

He flings open the door to:

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - DAY

He rushes down the lanes, knocking into bowlers.

EXT. PALISADES HOUSE - DAY

Twins Max and Miles shake their heads. They haven't seen Rob all week.

INT. GLENN TWOMBLY'S OFFICE - DAY

The Glenn rants to his execs.

GLENN
Where the hell would he go?!

The execs haven't a clue.

INT. CHUCK'S CAR - DAY

Chuck sits there, his mind racing, frantic.

CHUCK
Where would I go?

Suddenly, it comes to him.

EXT. STUDIO GUARD GATE - DAY

Chuck's Lexus whips up to the booth. THE SLOW OLD GUARD ambles out.

GUARD
Can I help you, sir?

CHUCK
Just open the gate!

GUARD
Do you have a drive-on?

CHUCK
Yeah, see?

He smashes through the gate-arm, and speeds toward the stage.

INT. STAGE 32 - DAY

Chuck bursts through the padded stage-doors, rushing across the busy stage, dodging the pre-show bustle.

Steve Grossman catches up, runs alongside him.

STEVE GROSSMAN
Chuck, what are you doing here?

CHUCK
Finding Rob!
(to gaffer above)
Tilt that can, you're gonna get a boom shadow.

STEVE GROSSMAN

No one's seen him all day. God,
have we needed you!

ANGLE ON CHAD, on the set, freaking out.

CHAD

Am I still supposed to do this
joke? What if no one laughs?

CHUCK

(rushing by)

Don't play the laughs, play the
reality. Jared doesn't know he's
funny!

Chuck crosses off the set, hurrying past Wardrobe. Diane,
the Wardrobe Mistress holds two jackets.

CHUCK

Go with the solid. That
herringbone's gonna strobe.

He continues past Craft Service, past the Coke machine, to--

THE PROP ROOM DOOR.

Julie is pounding it with her fists.

JULIE

Rob, are you in there? Let me in!
You're scaring me!

CHUCK

Scoot over, Julie.

He backs up, and slams his shoulder into the door.

CHUCK

(continuing)

Owww.

The door swings open.

INT. PROP ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Chuck walks in, alone.

CHUCK

Rob?

He flicks on the overhead, and sees--

ROB huddled in a corner, blinking from the sudden light, like the Man In The Iron Mask.

ROB
(dazed, confused)
Dad?

Chuck crosses to him, falls to his knees.

CHUCK
What are you doing in here?

He sees a book laying open on Rob's lap. He picks it up and looks at the cover -- *MILTON BERLE'S PRIVATE JOKE FILE*.

CHUCK
Oh, honeyboy.

He wraps his arms around his son.

CHUCK
Come on. We're gonna get you out of here.

Rob allows himself to be lifted to his feet.

ROB
(beaten, delirious)
I tried. I really tried.

CHUCK
I know you did. Come on, Daddy's taking you home.

ROB
I don't want to do it anymore, Daddy. I want to write my essay. I want to go to college.

CHUCK
Just lean on me now.

Chuck supports Rob's weight, and walks him to the door.

ROB
"His nose was so big it had its own zip code".
(weeping softly)
Why is that funny?

CHUCK
It's not, honey.

INT. STAGE 32 - CONTINUOUS

Chuck and Rob emerge from the Prop Room, into the noise and confusion of the stage.

JULIE

Rob!

CHUCK

He's gonna be okay. Let's just get him out of here.

Suddenly, from nowhere, the Glenn is in their faces.

GLENN

All right, where is it?!

CHUCK

Excuse us, Glenn.

Chuck guides Rob around him. The Glenn blocks them again.

GLENN

I want my joke, and I want it now!

Chuck pushes the Glenn aside, and keeps moving.

CHUCK

I'm taking Rob home.

The Glenn follows, apoplectic.

GLENN

You can't just walk out! He owes me! I'LL CALL LEGAL!

CHUCK

(spins around)

Oh, get in line! You can all sue me for everything I've got! Take my house, my career, take my goddam socks and shoes, but you can't have my son, I am taking him home!

The Glenn grabs Rob and pulls, a childish tug-of-war.

GLENN

Not until he gives me my joke!

STACEY'S VOICE

He doesn't have it, you idiot!

ROB
 (in his stupor)
 Stacey? You came back.

She pushes through the gathered crowd, her face twisted in fury, her hair and clothes lank from the earlier dunking.

ROB
 (continuing)
 Whoa, who trashed you?

STACEY
 He did.

She points a shaking finger at Chuck.

STACEY
 He trashed all of us, Glenn. He trashed the whole industry, and played us all for a bunch of fucking saps! This is the nineteen-year-old wunderkind who wrote your precious *NO BRAINER!* This is your boy genius!

GLENN
 (turns to Chuck,
 dumbfounded)
 Is it true?

CHUCK
 Yeah.

GLENN
 Then you give me the joke!

The Glenn smiles, that was easy.

CHUCK
 No, Glenn.

GLENN
 What?

CHUCK
 No more jokes. I don't have anymore jokes. I don't want anymore jokes. I just want to take care of my son, and I can't because I'm still holding for the joke! And the real joke is, *the joke doesn't matter!* You know what matters, Glenn?

(MORE)

CHUCK (cont'd)

Here's what matters: When you have a baby, and you hold it in your arms for the first time. And for the first time in your life, you feel connected. *That* matters. And then, then, I don't know, all this stuff get in the way. Your career, his grades, your schedule. Your disappointment in him, his disappointment in you. Everything pushes you apart, and it's insane, because all you should be doing is working night and day, doing everything you can, to *keep the connection*. To hang together, and remind each other that no matter how old or hairy or sarcastic you both get, this thing is still true: He's still your baby, and you're still his dad. And you don't need jokes. You just need to say I love you.

THE GATHERED CROWD is silent.

Chuck's eyes meet Julie's.

She touches her heart and sends it to him. He holds his hand on his chest, keeping it there.

ROB

Dad?

Rob looks glazed and faraway.

CHUCK

What is it, honey? Rob, are you okay?

ROB

I've got the joke! I got it!
I-I-I *I GOT THE JOKE!*

GLENN

Now that's all I asked. Was that so hard?

INT. JARED'S GARAGE BEDROOM SET - DAY

JARED'S DAD sits beside JARED (CHAD) on his hammock, mid-speech.

JARED'S DAD

"...We just need to remember, Jared, that no matter how old or hairy or sarcastic we both get, one thing's still true. You're still my baby, and I'm still your dad. And every once in awhile, I have to remember to tell you, I love you.

TV dad hugs his TV son tightly.

THE STUDIO AUDIENCE is riveted. You could hear a pin drop.

JARED

That is so queer, Dad.

THE AUDIENCE cracks up.

JIMMY'S VOICE

And we're out! That's a wrap, folks!

BEHIND THE CAMERAS - Rob and Chuck watch the stage, smiling.

CHUCK

Nice save, Rob.

ROB

You too, Dad.

The Glenn and Stacey cross, heading for the Green Room.

GLENN

You know, if this show's as big as I think it's gonna be, I'm getting bumped to CEO. How'd you like to come be the youngest girl president of a number one network?

STACEY

After all I did?

GLENN

Because of all you did. I'd rather have you inside the tent, pissing out.

STACEY

(smiles)

You're old, but you're cool.

They disappear into the Green Room.

ROB
There goes the beginning of a butt-
ugly friendship.

CHUCK
Rave on.
(then)
Let's go home.

He walks his son offstage.

As they go, Chuck puts his arm around Rob's shoulder.

ROB
Queer, Dad.

Then, after a beat, Rob puts his arm around Chuck's shoulder,
too...

And arm-in-arm, THEY EXIT THE STAGE.

FADE OUT:

THE END