

A 22¢ ROMANCE

A screenplay by Randi Allison Mayem

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FADE IN:

EXT - A RURAL STREET IN A SMALL TOWN IN NEW JERSEY - DAY

ALI ORTNER is riding an old red bicycle with a straw basket more suitable for a child than a young woman in her twenties. She peddles purposefully along, and although the streets are empty, she uses all the proper hand signals at every stop and turn. She rides up to a mailbox and stops, reaching into the straw basket for

A LETTER

which she handles with loving care.

ALI

takes one last fond look at the letter and drops it in. We follow the letter into the BLACKNESS of the mailbox and then

ROLL CREDITS to Frank Sinatra's "Someone to Watch Over Me"

as we follow Ali's letter through a series of quick cuts:

A PAIR OF HANDS EMPTYING THE MAILBOX INTO A BAG

A MAIL TRUCK DRIVING INTO THE LOCAL POST OFFICE

THE POSTMARK AND SORTING PROCESS

BAGS OF MAIL BEING LOADED ONTO ANOTHER MAIL TRUCK

A MAIL TRUCK ON THE TURNPIKE HEADING FOR NEW YORK

THE SAME MAIL TRUCK DRIVING THROUGH THE GATES OF A PRISON

END CREDITS

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP - A THICK BUNCH OF LETTERS ON THE LEDGE OF A CEMENT WINDOW

The letters are held together by a rubber band. There are bars on the window. Sinatra's swooning in the background, sounding tinny and scratched on an old phonograph. A man is singing over the record, loudly and quite nicely.

MAN

*There's a somebody I'm longing to see.
I hope she turns out to be...
someone who'll watch over me.*

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

INT - A JAIL CELL

The singer is FRANK SCAPPELLI, a handsome troublemaker in his early thirties. He has the kind of mischievous Jack Nicholson smile that makes you want to forgive him for anything. A devilish light dances in his eyes, more playful than threatening. His backstreet charm is irresistible. Even seductive. He's got Sinatra's moves down to a tee.

FRANK

*(still singing)
I'm a little lamb who's lost in the wood
I know I could, could allways be good...
to one who'll watch over me.*

He picks up the pack of letters and holds it over his head, flipping through it like a deck of playing cards.

FRANK'S P.O.V.

The letters are all from the same person. We see that her name is ALI ORTNER and she lives in New Jersey. There are at least a hundred letters, maybe more.

FRANK

Still singing, his untrained baritone voice belting across the cell block. Now there are various clapping, laughing, cheering, booing and grumbling sounds coming from the surrounding cells. Frank continues undaunted, even louder. Gradually, two or three of them join in. Then four, five, six. The whole cellblock. We scan

THE VARIOUS FACES OF THE SINGING PRISONERS

The riff raff and the scum of society, the bad and the ugly unshaven and in undershirts looking somehow quite lovable crooning through the bars of their cells. Off key.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK AND THE
PRISONERS

*Although I may not be the man
some girls think of as handsome,
to her heart, I'll carryyyy the key.*

Now some of the inmates stick their arms through the cell doors and gesture Las Vegas-style to the lyrics.

FRANK AND THE
PRISONERS

*Won't you tell her please to put on some
speed....follow my lead....oh, how I need
someone to watch over me.*

They sing the last chorus again, louder and slower. Then the record ends. The crooners turn back into criminals and retreat to the backs of their cages, feeling a little better and a little worse at the same time. Frank lights a cigarette and turns off the phonograph. His cell wall is papered with Sinatra memorabilia.

VOICE (O.C.)

MAIL CALL.

A buzzer goes off in the cell block and

ROWS OF CELL DOORS

open by themselves.

CUT TO:

EXT - PRISON YARD - DAY

Some of the inmates are playing basketball. Others are walking, smoking, staring out through the gates, sunning themselves. Frank settles down on the pavement, against the cement wall, to read his letter. Near him are two other inmates rubbing on suntan lotion, one on his chest, the other on his bald head.

BALD PRISONER

(offering a letter)

Tobias, I'll trade you my cousin
for your old lady.

TOBIAS

No way, man. I'm holding out for
Scappelli's pen pal.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK
You can't even read, Tobias.

TOBIAS
Well maybe for her, I'd learn.

FRANK
Get your own pen pal, Tobias.
Nobody reads my mail but me.

Frank goes back to his treasured letter in peace and quiet.

ALI (V.O.)
*Dear Frank....It's three years ago today that
I answered your ad. It's so strange, isn't it?
That we know each other this way, yet we've
never met. And never will. I feel as if I've
revealed myself to a total stranger, and yet
I believe sometimes I know you intimately.
I believe I am feeling your pain and loneliness.
It makes me think of Heathcliff, dark and
brooding. Outcast. Overcome by his own
obsessive passion for what he can't have
and what he can never be.*

FRANK
Hey, either of you guys ever heard
of Heathcliff?

TOBIAS
It's a candybar, isn't it?

ROBACHECK
No, he's that cat in the funnies.
Heathcliff. He's a cat.

FRANK
Oh, yea right.

ALI (V.O.)
*And what have I given you, dearest friend?
Only my related experience of freedom,
of living life to its fullest. You are
a caged bird, and I am the call of the
wild.*

CUT TO:

A TELEVISION SET

where Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom is exploring the mating habits of insects. Marlon Perkins comes on, talking from his library:

MARLON PERKINS

We hope you've enjoyed learning about
the mating ritual of the friendly preying
mantis...and that you'll join us again
next week.....on Mutual of Omaha's Wild
Kingdom.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

INT - ALI ORTNER'S LIVING ROOM

Ali and her long-time sweetheart, NORMAN MUNTZLEMAN, are sitting very properly on opposite ends of a plump caricature of a couch in an Ozzie and Harriet living room in a small middle class Jersey suburb. Ali (mid 20s) is a perpetually flustered and distracted young lady, who beneath the bangs and thick glasses is quite adorable. A virtually untapped source of passion. But she's completely unaware of herself, and that's what makes her so funny. Right now Ali is watching

NORMAN

who is mesmerized by the program. Norman Muntzleman is the kind of guy you either quite like or don't notice at all. He has the kind of well-organized midwestern face that reminds everyone of someone, but of noone in particular. Norman is centered, solid and safe. And he is hopelessly devoted to Ali.

NORMAN

Well. I certainly enjoyed that.

ALI

(yawning and unaware of it)
Yes. It was fascinating, Norman.

Norman takes Ali's hands in his, but then he looks at them and doesn't know what exactly to do with them. So he gives them back to her. Ali seems to know what's coming.

NORMAN

Ali, I think it's time we take a cue
from the friendly preying mantis.....
or manti.....mantises?....anyway, I
think it's time we ourselves fall prey...
(He laughs at the bad pun)
.....to the institution of matrimony.

(CONTINUED)

ALI

Norman. You're just feeling romantic because of the.....insects. Let's talk about it later, okay?
I've got to help Momma with supper, and I want to write some letters first.

NORMAN

(sighs)

Alright. I'll see you at work tomorrow.

He starts to walk toward the door, then stops.

NORMAN

But don't think I'll wait forever.

Ali smiles and pouts at the same time. She looks like a child.

ALI

How long WILL you wait, Norman?

Norman is thinking it over very carefully. He gets a sneaky look on his face.

NORMAN

When will you **decide**?

ALI

I'll think about it.
I promise.

NORMAN

You'll think about when you'll **decide**
or you'll think about **marrying** me?

ALI

What?

NORMAN

Ali, where is your life's agenda?

ALI

I don't know. I guess I don't have one, do I?

NORMAN

That's what worries me. Life must have an agenda. You're born at dawn. Before lunch, you grow up. In the afternoon, you get married. At six pm you have children. At ten pm you retire. And at twelve midnight you---

(CONTINUED)

ALI
(playfully)
Turn into a pumpkin!

NORMAN
(frustrated)
I'm serious. Life's day is slipping
away from us. We're at six o' clock.
What are you waiting for?

Ali thinks.

ALI
The evening news. I...I just
feel like I haven't seen the
news yet.

Just then the evening news theme music begins on the television.

NORMAN
See you tomorrow.

Norman gives her a familiar tweak on the nose. She doesn't really notice. She closes the door after him and bolts up the stairs with curious enthusiasm. On the stairway, she almost bumps into

THE CAPTAIN

He's a crazy old man in an old pea coat and a sailor's cap. He moves out of her way.

ALI
Excuse me, Captain.

The Captain says nothing. He continues down to the last step on the stairs and stops, holding on to the railing, as if waiting for the floor to rock closer toward him. Then picks up one foot and very steadily lowers it across the air and onto the floor. He seems to think he's boarding a boat from the dock. Ali shakes her head.

CUT TO:

INT - THE ORTNER KITCHEN

PULL BACK from a schmaltzy old romantic movie on a small black and white TV on the kitchen counter. VIOLA ORTNER is weeping uncontrollably, so lost in the program she has peeled not only the skin but the entire carrot. She's left holding a carrot peeler in one hand and a carrot core in the other. And what used to be the carrot is in a pile in the sink. Viola turns on the garbage disposal, which never works, and the whole mess comes bubbling up into the sink. Then the disposal stops altogether, along with the lights, the TV and everything else in the house.

(CONTINUED)

VIOLA
Oooops. Here we go again.

The screen is BLACK for an instant, until we

CUT TO:

INT - ALI'S BEDROOM

Ali doesn't notice the power outage, because she has already lit several candles and placed them around her vanity, where she is getting ready to write a letter. She looks in the

MIRROR

The candlelight dances in her glasses. She opens a drawer and takes out a tattered newspaper clipping.

CLOSE UP - CLIPPING

INMATE SEEKS SINCERE FEMALE CORRESPONDENT
FOR MAIL AND FRIENDSHIP. PLEASE WRITE TO ME:
FRANK SCAPPELLI
BOX 788
OSSINING CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION
OSSINING, NY

Ali begins to write, speaking softly to herself.

ALI
Dear Frank.....

She stops and looks in the mirror again. The reflection looking back at her is now a gothic heroine. The glasses are gone. The hair flows loosely over the shoulders. The drab blouse is now lavender and lace. The face is Ali's, but the expression has changed. Even the voice is different. She continues to write.

ALI
*I still wonder if I'm what you expected
from your ad in the newspaper. What were
you looking for? You know so much more about me
than I know about you.
But I don't mind. You're like the Great Gatsby,
an eternal child, destroyed by his own tragic
innocence. And I'm like the green light at the
end of Daisy's dock, so close you can almost grasp
me, yet so far away and impossible, already
behind you in the vast obscurity of the past....*

CUT TO:

INT - PRISON LIBRARY

It's not much, but it has a few books. Frank and Robacheck walk in. There's a trustee reading behind the desk. He nods and buzzes them through to the books.

ROBACHECK

Gatsby? It's sounds like another comic strip to me. What the hell difference does it make? We're going to miss the first round of the match.

FRANK

Great Gatsby, Robacheck. We're not talking about some ordinary run of the mill Gatsby here. This is the Muhammed Ali of Gatsbies. Apparently.

FRANK

(to the trustee)

You know anything about a great Gatsby, Professor?

TRUSTEE

The Great Gatsby. Fitzgerald, F. Scott. Check back in the stacks.

ROBACHECK

This is too exciting for me. I'm going to catch the game. Gatsby. Jesus Christ.

There are about four stacks. Frank goes back to look for The Great Gatsby. Nothing but a few paperback spy novels and murder mysteries. On his way out, Frank turns again to the trustee.

FRANK

You ever heard of Heathcliff?

CUT TO:

INT - JAILHOUSE REC ROOM

There's an inmate talent show going on. The blues are blaring from the speakers on the stage, where Frank Scappelli and the Conettes are doing Sinatra's "That's Life" over the record. The Conettes are Robacheck and two other black guys all in drag, with long gloves, wigs and the works. The Connetees are having a terrible time with the choreography, especially in their high heels. The inmates are howling.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

That's life....

CONETTES

That's life....

FRANK

*That's what all the people say.
You're riding high in April,
shot down in May.
But I know I'm gonna change that tune,
when I get back on top, back on top in June.
I said that's life..*

The song continues under the following

MONTAGE OF CUTS:

Frank in the prison rec room watching a boxing match with the inmates.
The game ends and Frank gets out a clipboard and a wad of bills and begins handing out money.

Frank in the prison cafeteria, reading "Wuthering Heights".

Frank playing basketball in the prison yard.

Frank and Robacheck collecting bet money from everyone, including some guards.

Frank in his cell writing a letter. Sinatra fades under him.

FRANK (V.O.)

*Dear Ali....
Life just dealt me a lousy hand, that's all...*

CUT TO:

INT - PRISON REC ROOM

where Frank is dealing a black jack game. The voice-over continues.

FRANK (V.O.)

*....and I kept telling life to hit me,
and life hit me all right. And
the hand got worse. I know you've been
hearing me say this for the last three
years, but nobody gets ten to fifteen for
for running numbers. Nobody.*

(MORE)

FRANK (V.O. CONT'D)

*But the judge didn't like me. He warned me
the first time to stay outa trouble. I was
just a kid then, counterfeiting postage
stamps. Getting even with the the post office.
So he thought for sure I forged the lottery ticket.
But I had no idea it was a fake. I'm minding
my own business like any decent bookie and
the day they bust me I had to buy a bogus
lotto ticket. Life just dealt me a lousy hand,
that's all...*

But Frank wins this round, and he's grinning ear to ear, raking in the chips.

FRANK (V.O.)

*You take what you get. I guess I had it
coming.
Wish you were here.
Just kidding. Love, Frank*

CUT TO:

INT - THE DAILY NEWS BULLETIN "MORGUE"

Ali is reading the letter at her desk. The glass-partitioned newspaper library (known as the "morgue") is filled with stacks of newspapers ready to be clipped and filed away for future reference. Ali looks out through the glass at the

INT - NEWSROOM

It's the mythical newsroom. Clark Kent could work there. In various quick shots we see writers pounding out stories and puffing on cigarettes, reporters talking on the phone and taking notes, people eating junk food and telling bad jokes around the assignment desk. Ali looks at

NORMAN AT THE EDITOR'S DESK

He's going over a reporter's copy with a black grease pencil. He's very patient and gentle with the man.

NORMAN

No, Sidney. A non-essential clause **must**
be set off by commas. Example:
Vulcans who have pointed ears should
wear hats. No commas. The writer is
referring only to Vulcans with pointed
ears. Never mind that the writer obviously
doesn't know a thing about Vulcans,
who ALL have pointed ears.

(MORE)

NORMAN (CONT'D)

But, if the clause "who have pointed ears" is set off by commas, then the writer is saying that all Vulcans should wear hats. The fact that Vulcans have pointed ears is simply extra information. Got it?

Sidney's got it. He goes back to his typewriter with renewed enthusiasm. Norman sees Ali looking at him. He smiles at her. She smiles back.

CUT TO:

INT - THE ORTNER'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

"Mr. Ed" is on the television. Viola is sitting on the couch knitting. The Captain is at a table working on an elaborate model ship. Ali is sitting in a stuffed chair writing on a note pad.

VIOLA

How's it coming along, Captain?

He hears something, but doesn't seem to know what it was.

VIOLA

He's really done such a beautiful job. Don't you think, dear?

ALI

Momma, what does he do every day? How does he pay you?

THE CAPTIAN

**There's rough water ahead mates!
All hands on deck! Batten the hatches!**

VIOLA

Now look, Ali. You've gotten him all excited.

Ali looks at the Captain's ship, then goes back to her letter.

ALI (V.O)

Dear Frank.....I'm at the shore right now, watching the ships. I don't know why, but I always come back to this place. The sea has a calming quality that soothes the restless, passionate side of my nature. From here, the ships seem hardly to be moving at all. They're simply frozen on the horizon. Perhaps they remind me of you.

CUT TO:

INT - FRANK'S JAIL CELL

Frank is lying on his cot staring at the ceiling. He looks at his watch. Then he hears footsteps and gets up. A guard and another man approach the cell. The guard unlocks the door and lets the other man enter ahead of him. Frank is a little anxious, trying not to let it show.

FRANK
Good Morning, gentlemen. Please.
Come in. Make yourselves at home.

The guard cracks a smile and then stops himself. Frank is relaxing.

FRANK
Can I offer you anything?
Coffee? Tea? Cappucino?
We have a wonderful espresso.

CLYDE MORGAN shakes his head affectionately. He's short and stout, with Benjamin Franklin spectacles and a mustache on a kind, weathered face. He's smiles knowingly at Frank, and Frank smiles back.

CLYDE
It's your day, Scappelli. It came through.

Frank lets out a hoot. Then the rest of the cell block begins hooting back, and Clyde and the guard stand there patiently waiting for the commotion to die down. Frank regains his cool. Tenfold.

FRANK
Check out time already, fellas?
Gee wiz, I was hoping to take another
dip in the pool. They got a great
pool here, Clyde.

GUARD
(under his breath)
YOU had a great pool, Scappelli.

That registers with Clyde Morgan. His speech is slow and southern.

CLYDE
Frank, my boy, we've got a few things
to talk about before I put my autograph
on your walking papers.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Walking papers. Listen to him.
Mark Twain meets Al Capone.
My parole officer. Alright.
Play it again, Sam.

Clyde Morgan is impossibly patient. He closes and opens his eyes very slowly and hands Frank a slip of paper.

The two men lead Frank out of the cell and we watch as he struts down the corridor to freedom, Clyde's voice trailing off as they go.

CLYDE

Before you pick up your earthly
possessions, turn in your tuxedo
and check out of here, I want to
remind you about a few things, my
friend. You check in once a week.
Get yourself an honest-to-God job.
No, I say NO gambling, for God's sake.
And don't cross the goddamn state
line. You want to meet that little
pen pal of yours, you wait until
you're clear. They'll throw you right
back in here if you mess up.
You hear me?

But we can't hear them now. The inmates are awake, but the cellblock is quiet.

CUT TO:

EXT - GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE - AFTERNOON

A sign says "LAST NEW YORK EXIT". Then "ENTERING NEW JERSEY".
Frank is on his motorcycle, crossing the state line into New Jersey.

Sinatra's singing "Takin' a Chance on Love".

CUT TO:

EXT - NEW JERSEY SUBURB - LATE AFTERNOON

Ali's on her bike, riding home from work, a grocery bag in her basket. The streets are old and neatly organized, the houses in simple shapes and sensible colors like the people inside them.
Ali passes the Captain, walking the opposite direction. He's carrying a duffle bag. He sees her and waves frantically at her, looking very concerned.

CAPTAIN
Ahoy there!

ALI
(politely)
Ahoy, Captain! Where are you going?

CAPTAIN
TRIM THE FORESAIL!
YOU'RE GONNA CAPSIZE!

Ali laughs and passes him. The captain stops and shakes his head with a helpless sigh.

CUT TO:

MOVING SHOT - EXT - LATE AFTERNOON - FRANK RIDING HIS MOTORCYCLE

through the streets of Ali's neighborhood, his stuff packed up and tied on to the back of the bike. He stops at a sign and checks his location with a map. Just before he takes off again he notices the bright yellow daffodils in someone's front yard garden. He gets off his bike and bends down to pick some.

ALI
That's Mrs. Hurly's garden! What are you doing?

ALI

has stopped her bike just past Frank, and she's looking back at him sternly.

FRANK

stands up and looks her over. A strange woman-child in a full skirt and a long square cotton sweater, with her hands firmly gripping the handlebars of a bicycle that's not even moving. The sun reflects off her glasses, so he can't see her eyes. He puts his hands in the pockets of his denim jacket.

FRANK
Is this Mrs. Hurly's garden? Damn.
Boy, it's a good thing you stopped me!
I can't believe I had the wrong garden.

He takes out his map and pretends to fumble through it. Ali watches him, squinting.

ALI
What garden are you looking for?

(CONTINUED)

FRANK
Mrs. Gern's. She called us to come pick up
a flower donation.

ALI
Flower donation?

FRANK
Salvation Army. A lot of people
don't know it, but we handle flowers as
well as used clothing and furniture.
Bet you didn't know that, did you?

Ali shakes her head, but she doesn't believe him. Frank folds up the map,
gets back on his bike and revs it up, startling her. Frank grins. She
ignores him and starts pedaling home.

FRANK
Thanks!

But she doesn't look back. Frank picks only one of the daffodils, stuffs it
into his pocket, and rides away, enjoying the fresh air on his face.

CUT TO:

INT - ORTNER KITCHEN

where the appliances are staging a revolution. The lights are going on and
off again. The garbage disposal is erupting like a volcano, with a molten
lava of produce spraying up from its core. The dishwasher is leaking foam
and water all over the floor. Viola is groveling from one catastrophe to
the other when Ali comes in through the kitchen door with the grocery
bags.

ALI
Oh no, not again.

VIOLA
Get some more towels. And the mop.
I think we may have another blackout.

ALI
Where did the Captain go?

He moved out. VIOLA
/ Called to sea, he said.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
 (sarcastically)
 Can you believe our luck?
 If anyone understood crossed
 fuses, it would've been him.

The power goes off altogether. Ali turns on the tap water and sticks the mop under it. Then the power goes back on, and the garbage disposal erupts in her face.

CUT TO:

EXT - THE ORTNER FRONT PORCH

where Frank Scappelli is standing, holding the daffodil. He reaches for the bell, but doesn't ring it. Instead, he sits down on the porch step and has a practice conversation with the flower.

FRANK
 Hello. Is Ali home? (BEAT)
 Hello. May I please speak with Miss
 Ali Ortner? (BEAT)
 You must be Mrs. Ortner. Viola, is it?
 (then, playfully.....)
 Hey, Vi baby! Frank Scappelli.
 I just got outa the slammer, and I'm
 here to meet your lovely daughter!

CUT TO:

INT - KITCHEN

The revolution is over, but the battlefield is destroyed. Ali and Viola are trying to clean up.

ALI
 Mom, have you ever heard of Salvation
 Army taking flower donations?

Then the door bell rings. And rings. And rings some more. It's broken too.
 On the

EXT - THE FRONT PORCH

Frank is trying to make the doorbell stop ringing. He can't.

(CONTINUED)

INT - THE FRONT DOOR

Ali opens the door, and there in living color is Frank's grinning face. Then he recognizes her from Mrs. Hurley's garden and the smile disappears. He shakes his head in disbelief, but a moment later a genuinely warm smile opens on his face.

FRANK
It's you, isn't it?

ALI

is speechless. She just stands there looking confused, with carrot peels and cucumber skins and other indistinguishable flotsam all over her arms and chest. The doorbell is still ringing.

FRANK

is suddenly as cool as one of the cucumbers on Ali's blouse. He stuffs the daffodil up the back of his jacket.

FRANK
Hello Ali. (BEAT)
I'm Frank.

Ali doesn't move. Or breathe. She just stares. And Frank smiles. He is as charming as she is petrified. The doorbell finally stops.

FRANK
Oughta fix that.
Can I come in?

Ali has lost her comprehension of English. She tries desperately to grasp the meaning of Frank's question, sounding it out to herself.

ALI
~~May~~ Come in?

Frank waits a beat and then comes in anyway. He looks around, nodding his head as if agreeing with himself. The daffodil falls out of the back of his jacket.

FRANK
Some doorbell you got there.

He heads toward the living room, looking around some more. Ali, still in a trance, closes the door behind him. She looks at the daffodil on the floor, wondering how it got there.

ALI
Thank you. Would you like to come in?

(CONTINUED)

Frank looks at her, laughs affectionately. She has gunk from the garbage disposal all over her glasses and her blouse.

FRANK
I never pictured you wearing a salad.

Ali tries to wipe some lettuce off her sleeve, but the lettuce will not cooperate. Strange noises are coming from the kitchen. That seems to snap her out of it. Desperation registers on her face.

ALI
You're not Frank. He's in jail.
Not the Salvation Army.

FRANK
I'm out on parole.

ALI
Parole? But you haven't
served your whole sentence yet.

FRANK
That's usually the way it works.

Ali looks as though her whole world has fallen to pieces and someone is teasing her about it.

FRANK
I'm your flesh and blood buddy for good.

ALI
But I don't. I don't want a...a...a
FRESH AND BUD BLOODY.

FRANK
(laughing at her mistake)
Don't blame you.

Frank walks casually over to the couch and takes a seat, making himself quite comfortable, thank you.

ALI
You...you...you never told me
you were.....

FRANK
I didn't want to count on it.
I never count on anything.
And I wanted to surprise you.

(CONTINUED)

He flashes another one of those NicholSEN grins.

FRANK
Are you surprised?

VIOLA (O.C.)
Who was that at the door, Ali?

Ali is horrified. Frank comes to the rescue, not taking his eyes off Ali as he talks to the voice from the kitchen.

FRANK
Hello, Mrs. Ortner. I'm Frank Scappelli
from the Bronx. Just moving back to
the old home town today.

Viola appears in the living room. Frank stands up.

VIOLA
Well how nice! How long have
you been away?

Ali is mortified, but Frank is enjoying this.

FRANK
Oh, it's been years.

He looks at Ali.

FRANK
(continuing)
Decided to look up the prettiest girl
in Miss Olsen's first grade class.
I proposed to Ali in the coat closet
on Valentine's Day. She wouldn't have
me.

Viola looks at Ali, who smiles weakly, and then at Frank, who smiles
brilliantly.

(CONTINUED)

VIOLA
Won't you stay for dinner, Mr. Scappelli?

ALI
Mr. Scappelli was just leaving, Momma.

FRANK
Thanks all the same, Mrs. Ortner....

He looks at Ali's blouse and all the vegetables that adorn it.

FRANK
(continuing)
...but it looks real good.

VIOLA

goes back to the kitchen, looking perplexed yet pleased about her daughter's strange caller.

FRANK

starts poking around the room, picking things up off the mantle and examining them, etc.

ALI

has had enough.

ALI
What are you doing here?

Frank looks at her for what seems like a long time, checking her out. Somehow her defensiveness is cute. She senses his intrigue. It excites her. And it scares the hell out of her.

ALI
You shouldn't have come here.

FRANK
Why not?
I got a lead on a job at a garage here.
It's even got a room. (BEAT)
Seems like a nice place to start a
clean life. And I've a got friend here.
Don't I?

That gets to her slightly. Frank heads very casually and slowly toward the door. She follows. He turns to her. She jumps.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Look. What do you say I call you up
and we'll go out and celebrate
my newfound freedom?

ALI

NO. Thank you. Really. I'd rather
not.

Frank puts his hand under her chin and lifts up her face. She freezes.

FRANK

You tell your thoughts and dreams
to a guy all these years and you
won't even go out with him?

ALI

I'm sorry. Really.....I just....
I think it would be better if....
I didn't plan on mmmmm....
I just wanted someone to....

FRANK

I know what you wanted.

He smiles, not taking his eyes off her as he walks out the door backwards.
She swallows.

CUT TO:

INT - ENTRANCE TO THE DAILY NEWS BULLETIN - MORNING

VELMA, the buxom black security guard, whose head seems to be
permanently shaking at something, watches with curious fascination as
Ali scurries in. She stops to sign in.

ALI

Norman come in yet, Velma?

VELMA

He's been here a couple of hours
already. In the photo lab. He said
something about some gravestones,
I could've sworn.

ALI

Oh. Those are Norman's dead relatives.

Ali goes in, leaving Velma shrugging her shoulders.

VELMA

How could I forget.

CUT TO:

INT - NEWSPAPER PHOTO LAB

Norman's face is barely visible in the darkness. He is utterly absorbed with what he's doing. A mad scientist.

NORMAN

Come on Aunt Geraldine. Come to me.

Norman is talking to

THE DEVELOPING TRAY

Norman rocks the tray back and forth, sloshing the developing liquid back and forth over the photograph. A GRAVESTONE is slowly becoming visible. GERALDINE MUNTZLEMAN 1802-1865 is etched in the marble.

NORMAN

Aunt Geraldine, you look great....

He gets a flash of comic genius, and laughs outloud.

NORMAN

Especially for a woman whose
been dead for 120 years!!!!

Ali suddenly bursts in, letting in a deadly ray of light.

NORMAN

Ali, you've just exposed Aunt Geraldine!

ALI

Oh, Norman. I'm sorry.

Norman takes the underexposed Aunt Geraldine and pins her up to dry. There are several other gravestones on the line to keep her company.

ALI

I'm sorry, Aunt Geraldine.
(BEAT) Norman, I've got to talk to
you. Can we go out to lunch today?

NORMAN

Well, I WAS planning on spending my
lunch hour finishing up Aunt Geraldine's
entire branch of the family tree. All I need
are Uncle Morris and the Muntzleman twins
from Ohio. (BEAT) Gosh, I hope they develop
as well as Aunt Geraldine. Of course, I shot
Aunt Geraldine with a wide angle and the sun
directly over the cemetery. I'm worried the
twins may be a little shadowy.

(CONTINUED)

Somewhere toward the end of this Ali cozies up to Norman, lovingly adjusts his tie and plucks some imaginary lint from his shirt, which is immaculate.

ALI
Norman, darling. They're dead.
They're not going anywhere.
Please?

NORMAN
That's a good point.

He puts his arms around her in the dark room, softening.

NORMAN
You're really cute when you're logical,
you know that?

He gives her another one of those tweaks on the nose.

NORMAN
Lunch it is. Now scram.
Aunt Geraldine needs me.

Ali turns to leave.

ALI
Bye, Norman.
Bye, Aunt Geraldine.

NORMAN
Bye, Ali.
(then, in an old lady voice:)
Bye, Ali.

CUT TO:

INT- NEWSROOM

Ali walks past them all, virtually unnoticed--a demure librarian amidst a throng of hyperactive newshounds.

INT - THE MORGUE

Ali sits down at her desk, and just as she begins to clip that day's paper, in walks a reporter. He's eating a Ding Dong. His notebook is bursting out of his shirt pocket, and his stomach is bursting out of his shirt. He looks like a serial killer. His jowls billow over his collar. His words are barely audible through the Ding Dong.

(CONTINUED)

REPORTER
Got anything on "ferris wheels"?
Or "ride safety"?

Ali smiles politely at this creature.

ALI
I'm sure we do. And you might
check "carnivals" as well.

The reporter bends down and scans the rows of file drawers. Ali notices his rear end pouring disgustingly over the sides of his belt. She still tries to be nice.

ALI
I certainly hope The Bulletin
isn't going to make you test
that ferris wheel yourself.

The reporter, having found his file, stands up, closes the drawer with a thud, swallows some more Ding Dong, burps and glares at Ali accusingly.

REPORTER
Why not?

ALI
Well, I.....I just wouldn't want you
to get hurt.....(BEAT).....or anything.

REPORTER
Why not?

The reporter is looking at Ali, and Ali is looking at the reporter and they are both thinking about this.

ALI
I don't know.

He just glares one more time and then leaves. And then Ali looks up and sees, through the glass window at the back of the Morgue,

FRANK AT THE GUARD DESK

He's sitting on Velma's desk, which she doesn't seem to mind one bit. They're apparently getting along beautifully. He's smiling and talking. She's giggling. Velma is actually giggling. Then she's pointing toward

ALI

who ducks in horror, and staying below their line of visibility, waddles out of the Morgue and into the newsroom, looking something like E.T.

(CONTINUED)

ALI'S P.O.V.

as she scans the feet on the newsroom floor. Sneakers. Loafers. Boots. Hush puppies. Pumps. And finally

NORMAN'S SHOES

Big brown wingtips.

ALI

crawls over to Norman's wingtips. We hear him talking to the Ding Dong reporter. The camera pans up to

NORMAN AND THE REPORTER

They're at the copy desk, going over a story. The reporter has finished his Ding Dong, but there is evidence of the snack on the corners of his mouth.

NORMAN

Unique is unique. Something does not have "a uniqueness all it's own". Unique is inherently exclusionary. There are not degrees of uniqueness.

Looking at the Ding Dong reporter's chocolate-smeared jowls, Norman appears to question that logic for just a second. Ali stands up and begins tugging at Norman, pulling him toward the back of the newsroom. She's looking behind her nervously.

ALI

(hushed)

Norman, can we go to lunch now? I'm starving.

NORMAN

(whispering back)

Now? It's not even eleven. Why are we whispering?

She looks over her shoulder and sees

ALI'S P.O.V.

Frank heading into the newsroom, obviously looking for her.

BACK TO ALI AND NORMAN

ALI

(desperate)

Norman, please. We have to go now.

(CONTINUED)

She's tugging him out of the newsroom.

NORMAN

Okay. Okay. Calm down.
But why are we going out the
back door? We've got to sign
out at the front desk with Velma.

ALI

We'll sign out when we get back.
Come **on**, Norman. I'm hungry.

NORMAN

(after a thought)
But then when **will** we sign **in**?

ALI AND NORMAN

going down the back stairway. She's practically shoving him.

ALI

Norman, it won't make any difference
if we don't sign out just this once.

NORMAN

I don't know, Ali. You don't sign **out** once.
Then maybe you forget to sign **in**.
Pretty soon everyone's ignoring the social
contract. The whole fiber of civilization
begins to unravel....People will be going **out**
the **in** door, going **up** the **down** stairs....
Stopping for green lights, going for red
lights.....

ALI

Norman, this is a special occasion.
And I want you to take me somewhere
special.

CUT TO:

INT - THE SIZZLER

Ali and Norman are seated at opposite ends of a bright orange formica table. Norman is intently cutting his steak into individual bite-sized pieces with remarkable precision. His knife makes a rhythmic CLICKING sound on the plate. Ali can't take her eyes off this meticulous procedure.

ALI

Norman?

(CONTINUED)

NORMAN
(still watching his knife and fork)
Hmmm?

ALI
Why do you do that?

NORMAN
Do what?

ALI
Cut it all up first.

Norman looks up from the plate and back down again.

NORMAN
Well.....
(he thinks)
because when I'm eating I like
to concentrate on eating. And when
I'm cutting I like to address myself
completely to that.

Ali considers.

ALI
Do you eat everything together,
or do you eat one thing at a time?

NORMAN
Ali, you've been watching me eat
for at least fifteen years. Our
mutual dining experiences probably date
back to strained carrots straight from
the jar. Why on earth do you ask?

ALI
I don't know. (BEAT) I just never noticed
the cutting thing before, really.

Norman has now finished the cutting thing and begins the eating thing. For
just a second, Ali has second thoughts about what she's going to say next.

ALI
Norman. I want to get married.

Norman isn't listening.

NORMAN
One thing at a time.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
What?

NORMAN
One thing at a time. First the steak and then the potatoes and then the peas. Although once in a great while I do eat the potatoe and the peas together. But that's different somehow.

ALI
NORMAN, LET'S GET MARRIED.

Norman stops eating.

NORMAN
You mean it?

ALI
I've had long enough to think about it, Norman.

Norman is overjoyed, beside himself in his Sizzler chair.

NORMAN
Oh, Ali. We'll be great. Oh. Boy. We'll grow a whole new branch on the family tree. And I'll make you happy. You know I will.

ALI
Let's do it soon.

Norman is embarassed.

ALI
I mean let's get MARRIED soon.

NORMAN
(relieved)
Oh. Right. The sooner, the better. Mr. and Mrs. Norman Lewis Muntzleman.

ALI
Normie. You really are romantic, aren't you?

And with that Norman moves on to the potatoe portion of the plate.

CUT TO:

INT - NEWSROOM

The future Mr. and Mrs. Muntzleman return to work, where Frank Scappelli has become the center of attention. The tall handsome stranger the with the mischievous grin has almost the entire staff in stitches. Even the Ding Dong reporter. They're flocked around him like charmed disciples.

Ali and Norman try to make out what the commotion is all about. There's some kind of bet going on. And just as Ali spots Frank, Frank spots Ali. He drops the shenanigans and walks over to her, all eyes still glued to him. Ali freezes.

ALI AND FRANK

FRANK

Hi there.

Frank beams at her with suspect sparkle in his eyes. Norman looks from Frank to Ali and from Ali to Frank, visibly perturbed that this character is speaking to his betrothed. Ali is speechless. Again.

NORMAN

Ali, who is this (BEAT) person?

Ali looks at Norman. Then she looks at Frank. Norman in his button-down shirt and knit tie. Frank in his denim splendour. One a little rough around the edges. The other with no edges at all. The men size each other up.

NORMAN

Ali, do you KNOW him?

Frank is smiling at Ali, relishing in in her predicament. He sees the situation is in need of some fiction, and fiction is Frank's forte.

FRANK

(holding out his hand to Norman)
Frank Scappelli from Schenectady.
I'm Ali's second cousin on her Mother's side.

Norman's face lights up. He grabs Frank's hand excitedly.

NORMAN

Schenectady?????Maybe you know
the Schenectady Muntzlemans.....
Fred and Louise?

(CONTINUED)

FRANK
Well, I'll be! You must be-----

NORMAN
(embarrassed)
Norman Muntzleman, that's right.
So, I guess old Uncle Fred's been talking
about me.

FRANK
(shaking his head)
Well, you know old Fred. What a guy.

Norman and Frank are both nodding their heads, amazed at this unlikely coincidence. Ali can't believe what she's just witnessed. She's livid.

NORMAN
So I guess I'll see you at the wedding,
Mr. Scappelli.

It takes Frank a few beats to register.

FRANK
Norman, my man! You and the little
cuz tying the big knot? Well, hell.
That's just too much.

He gives Norman a man-to-man shove in the shoulder.

FRANK
(continuing)
Congratulations!
(then, to Ali:)
Just wait till I tell the folks.

NORMAN
Well, I've got to get back to work.
It was nice to meet you Mr. Scappelli.

They shake hands.

FRANK
Hey, we're almost family. Call me
Frank!

Ali and Frank are left alone. Ali glares at him and then begins walking back to her desk. Frank follows her.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK
So. When do you and Dagwood
do the honors?

Ali stops walking.

ALI
His name is Norman.

FRANK
Norman. (BEAT) Not exactly the
type of guy I'd have pictured you with.

ALI
What are you doing here? Why are
you doing this to me?

FRANK
Hello? Ali? It's me. Frank?
They guy who knows your deep dark
secrets and fantasies? (BEAT)
And I gotta tell you something.....that
Norman sure doesn't seem like
what you've been holding out for, not
according to what you told me, anyway.

He begins quoting, doing his best Sarah Bernhardt:

FRANK
(continuing)
*"a man of DEPTH and PASSION.....
strong enough to be gentle.....
and possessing an inner flame so
brilliant it burns into the the very soul
of the woman he loves. "----*
Isn't that how it went?

Ali's eyes widen with terror as she realizes she's hearing her own words.

FRANK
I hate to be the one to point it out,
but I think Norman was short-changed
in the inner flame department.

ALI
(furious)
Norman is a....a....a wonderful,
dependable man. And a law-abiding
citizen. I've known him almost
all of my life---

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

So how come you never wrote about him? And how come he doesn't know about your old pen pal?

ALI

I want my letters back.

FRANK

What, are you kidding?
I'm going to make a fortune when I sell the publishing rights to Harliquin.

ALI

(her voice quivering)
They're my letters....and my words.
And I demand them back. Now.

FRANK

You think I carry them with me everywhere I go? (TWO BEATS)
You really going to marry him?

Ali starts back to her desk again.

ALI

I am not continuing this conversation.

Frank runs after her again.

FRANK

Hey, hey, hey. Wait.
I was just kidding about Harliquin.
I'm sorry.

Ali stops to listen.

FRANK

(his tone softens)
Those letters kept me smiling the whole time I was in that zoo.
They were great. I would never sell them to anyone.

ALI

Well, I don't know why I should listen to you. You're a...a...a con artist and a booker and a---

FRANK

BookIE not bookER.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
You're a criminal either way.

Frank loses a few killowats of sparkle, and Ali looks a little guilty. Neither knows what to say for a few seconds.

FRANK
Tell you what. I've got your letters over at the garage. It's on the corner, across from the library. Why don't you come down there, and I'll give you the letters back. If you want. And I won't bother you anymore.

ALI
No, that's okay. They're your letters. You keep them.

Frank reaches into his pocket.

FRANK
I brought you something.

He pulls out a two-inch plastic wind-up toy. He hands it to her. It's a duck. She stares at it.

FRANK
It's a duck. You like ducks, right?

ALI
Yes. Thank you.

She looks up from the duck. Frank smiles.

FRANK
Well, thanks for writing.

ALI
(almost mumbling)
It was nothing.

FRANK
Well then. Goodbye, Ali.
And good luck to you. And Norman.

ALI
You too.

Frank nods his head and starts to leave. Ali watches him.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
FRANK!

He turns around. Ali doesn't seem to know what she wanted to say.

ALI
Stay out of trouble.

He smiles again, bows a final farewell and walks out of the newsroom, getting several warm nods from the staffers he earlier entertained. Even the Ding Dong reporter. Ali watches until he's gone. She goes into the

INT - MORGUE

She sits down at her desk, winds up the duck, and watches it waddle across the desktop. The duck goes all the way to the edge and falls straight into the waste basket. Ali looks into the waste basket for a second. She fishes out the duck and places it back on the desk.

CUT TO:

INT - MOVING SHOT - A PAIR OF BIG FLUFFY DUCK SLIPPERS

walking down a hallway. PULL BACK TO REVEAL that they are Ali's feet, and with the duck slippers, she's wearing a flannel nightgown and a bulky bathrobe. She goes to

INT - VIOLA'S BEDROOM

Viola is in bed with curlers on her head and cold cream on her face. She is reading TRUE CONFESSIONS and sobbing uncontrollably. Her face contorted with pain, she looks up from the magazine at Ali. Her white face and anguished expression make her look like a clown in a tragedy.

VIOLA
Turning in dear?

Ali sits down on the edge of the bed.

ALI
I've decided to marry Norman.

Viola bursts into tears. Of joy, presumably.

VIOLA
I don't believe it. My Ali is getting married. It's wonderful.

Ali and her mother embrace, Viola still sobbing. Ali looks somewhat concerned. There's some deep thought going on under those thick glasses.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
Momma?

VIOLA
What is it sweetheart?

ALI
What was Dad like when he was a
young man?

P.O.V. SHOT

The picture of EARNEST ORTNER on the nightstand. He looks like Larry Bud Melman from Late Night with David Letterman. Or like one of those dentists who advertises in the TV guide.

BACK TO ALI AND VIOLA

Viola seriously considers her daughter's question while Ali stares at her cold-cream white face.

VIOLA
He never really WAS.....a young man.
(BEAT) Your father was born an old
fart, bless his heart. (BEAT)
They don't change, you know.
After you marry them, they just.....
marinate.
(laughs)
Listen to me. You'd think I was talking
about a pot roast.

Viola stops laughing and then shrugs as if it wasn't such a bad analogy after all. Ali appears to be comforted.

ALI
Thanks, Momma. Night.

VIOLA
Goodnight, dear.

Ali leaves, and Viola goes back to TRUE CONFESSIONS.

CUT TO:

INT - NIGHT - ALI'S BEDROOM

Ali sitting on her bed with a box of letters. She fishes around, looking for one letter in particular. Then she pulls it out of its envelope and begins to read. We hear what Frank wrote, as we

CUT TO:

EXT - NEXT MORNING

Ali riding her bike through the streets of this small town.

FRANK (V.O.)

*Dear Ali..... it was great to get your letter.
I got four or five replies from the ad, but
you stood out from the rest. I never knew
anybody could have so much to say. And you're
practically from Hoboken. That's where
Sinatra's from. He's the greatest. I'm not
as good a writer as you, but I'm a good listener,
and I'm sure as hell not going anywhere.
So, tell me whatever you want.
I'm going to be here a long time.
Love, Frank.*

The camera pulls back from Ali's face. The streets are empty of cars, but Ali stops and signals at every turn just the same.

INT - GARAGE - MORNING

It's a typical small town garage, overcrowded with racks full of tools and parts and cans of things. The walls are plastered with tattered sales posters for wheels and tires and mufflers. The sign says SOMETIMES OPEN ON SATURDAY. Someone is singing "Strangers The Night" *a cappella* hamming it up. The acoustics are great.

Ali wanders in tentatively. She spots the

WORK SHOES

sticking out from under the car where the singing is coming from.

ALI

bends down and pokes her head under the car. We see

FRANK'S P.O.V.

Ali's upside down face wearing upside down glasses.

ALI'S P.O.V.

Frank's grease-streaked face grinning up at her. He slides out from under the car on a roller.

FRANK
(overly dramatic)
I knew you'd come.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK AND ALI

He stands up in front of her. Ali looks at her shoes.

FRANK
They're very nice.

Ali looks up questioningly. He tries to smear off a little grease from his face with his sleeve. He even looks good in grease.

ALI
What?

FRANK
Your shoes. Very nice.

They both look at

ALI'S SHOES

As sensible as shoes can be. Then back to

ALI AND FRANK

ALI
I came to ask.....I was thinking that,
you know, if you really didn't mind
....I'd like to have those letters. It's not
that.....it's just that I'm getting married
soon, and-----

FRANK
And I'm a walking diary, right?
With a big mouth. You're afraid I'm
going to tell Sherwood he's not what
you ordered from the good fairy.

ALI
His name is NORMAN.

She starts to leave.

ALI
(continuing)
I didn't think you'd understand.

Frank grabs her arm to stop her.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK
 Why do you keep doing that?
 (softer now)
 Hey. I'm a man of my word believe it
 or not. I mean it hurts me deeply,
 mortally, that you don't trust me
 after all these years. Now that I'm
 unleashed.

ALI
 It's not that I don't trust you.
 It's just that I don't feel, I don't
 feel....comfortable....with---

FRANK
 Okay. I said I'll give you back the
 letters. Just let me spend some of
 my first honest paycheck in two years
 on you first. We'll go do something.
 Then you and Wilfred live...comfortably
 ever after.

ALI
 You and Norman.

FRANK
 No, you and me.
 Norman's not my type.

CUT TO:

EXT - MOVING SHOT - JERSEY - FRANK AND ALI ON THE MOTORCYCLE.

ALI
 (yelling over the wind)
 Where are we going?

FRANK
 Back in time.

CUT TO:

A DANCE FLOOR

It's identified as the COCOBOWL, where you can "*swing with Ray Tormel's tunes.*" The place is an anachronism, and so is Ray Tormel. Several spunky silver-haired couples are doing the tango in grand fashion.

(CONTINUED)

We PULL BACK TO REVEAL the rest of the

INT - THE CLAM HOUSE IN HOBOKEN

The place is swimming in fish. Mounted fish, fishtanks, fish wallpaper, fish paintings. There are blow fish wearing glasses with noses attached dangling from the ceiling. There are fish nets, fish hooks and seashells. There is even a statue of a mermaid in the middle of a fountain that is also the home of several fish.

FRANK

I bet this place hasn't changed since
Sinatra was here.

ALI AND FRANK

are sitting at a hatch cover table with a view of the Hudson shipyards and the New York skyline. In the center of the table is one of those tacky tropical drinks that comes in a giant sea shell with a paper umbrella and two straws sticking out, and lots of artificial smoke. Ali looks very self-conscious. Frank is a happy man.

ALI

When was that?

FRANK

After he split up with Tommy Dorsey.
With the Hoboken Four.

He looks out at the City.

FRANK

And then on New Year's eve in 1942
he crossed the Hudson to the
Paramount theater, stole the spotlight
from Benny Goodman and swooned his
way to stardom.

She smiles. Then she leans forward to takes a sip of the smoking cocktail.

FRANK

So why wouldn't you send me
a picture? You could've had Norman
take one.

ALI

Norman doesn't take those kinds of
pictures. He takes.....historic pictures.

There's an awkward moment of silence.

(CONTINUED)

ALI

You never wrote me that you sang.
Where did you learn to sing like that?

FRANK

I don't know. I taught myself.
My old man sang, too. He was a
singing loan shark. Sang his way
right out of the house when I
was seven. Never saw him again.

ALI

But your mother.....she sounded so
wonderful.

FRANK

Lucky for her she didn't live to
see me go to jail. She woulda blamed
herself. My mother could've been a
rich lady in Brooklyn....all she had to
do was expand the business. Laundry and
Guilt Service. Wash your clothes and
clean your conscience. (BEAT)
She was a good woman.

ALI

No brothers or sisters, right?

FRANK

Nope, just Frankie. Same as Sinatra.
(BEAT) Same as you.

A moment of silence. Ray Tormel is playing Benny Goodman. The waitress
brings two more cocktails, this time in separate glasses with separate
umbrellas. Frank holds his up. Ali follows suit.

ALI

To what?

Frank considers.

FRANK

Yea. Good idea. Here's to what.

Their glasses clink together.

FRANK

Like to dance?

ALI

I've got two left feet.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Whatdaya know. I've got two right
feet. So, we'll dance sideways and
noone will know the difference.

He smiles one of those smiles, and gestures his head toward the

INT - COCOBOWL DANCE FLOOR

The dancefloor is already filled with several swinging couples in their sixties, having the time of their lives. Ali and Frank can't help but marvel at them, dancing the way people can only dance after almost a half-century together. A silver-haired lady is sitting alone, at a table near the dance floor, watching her friends. The record ends. The couples clap.

RAY TORMEL

And now ladies and gents, a little
gem from one of our favorite sons
here at the Cocobowl.

It's Sinatra's "Put Your Dreams Away." Frank gets up and, without a word, goes to the front of the dance floor. He lipsynchs the song flawlessly.

FRANK

*Put your dreams away
for another day,
and I will take their place
in your heart.
Wishing on a star
never got you far,
and so it's time to make
a new start.*

He does all the Sinatra moves, taking off his jacket and swinging it over his shoulder, tilting an imaginary hat, turning his body one way and his head another.

FRANK

*When your dreams at night
fade before you,
then I'll have the right to adore you.
Let your kiss confess
this is happiness, darling,
and put all your dreams away.*

As the violins slide into the number, Frank goes over to the little lady sitting alone by the dance floor. He holds out his hand to her. She lights up. Ali's eyes are glued as he twirls her gently all over the dance floor. The woman beams. Then the song ends and everyone applauds. Frank bows to the woman and leads her back to her seat. Then he lifts Ali out of hers. The next record is pure swing.

CUT TO:

FRANK AND ALI

tearing up the floor. Frank's dancing on the edge, with Ali holding on for dear life as he pushes and pulls and swings and dips her at whim. He's in complete control of her body. Until the final twirl. She spins too fast, and her glasses go flying off.

For a second she just stands there, too dizzy to move. We see the wild look in her eyes, the hidden beauty in her face. A trace of the gothic maiden. Frank sees it too.

CUT TO:

EXT - THE DOCKS OF HOBOKEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Ali and Frank are walking very slowly along the waterfront.

ALI
You really didn't tell me very much
in your letters. I think I did all the
telling.

FRANK
(teasing)
That's for sure.

ALI
What do you mean by that?

FRANK
(quoting melodramatically)
*"A perfect stranger, and yet
you're the keeper of my thoughts.
The warden of my woes."*
(laughs)
I liked the jail buzz words. And I'm not
perfect.

Ali is dying of embarrassment, but she's not mad this time. There's something affectionate about his kidding.

ALI
It's just that I felt so.....so anonymous.

FRANK
(telling as much as asking)
And that's why no pictures, no visits.

They stop walking now and just stand there, with the ships and the skyline in front of them.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
 I never thought of you as a person.
 I mean I thought of you as a person,
 but not the sort of person I would know.

Frank smiles and watches Ali dig her own hole.

ALI
 (continuing)
 What I mean is I never thought I
 WOULD know you. So I felt you were
 someone I could be known BY.....

FRANK
 I know. I know what you thought.
 I know why you did it.
 I kind of liked being known, too.
 I just don't write letters too good.
 So I have to be known in person most of the time.

He looks at her so piercingly she looks away. A very pregnant pause. Then Ali sees something in the bay she can't believe.

ALI'S P.O.V.

The Captain is steering a ferry boat out into the Hudson.
off Ali's reaction of amazement, we

CUT TO:

INT/EXT - THE GARAGE - EARLY EVENING

Frank opens the sliding entrance and motions Ali in.

ALI
 Do you really live in here?

FRANK
 It's not bad. No bars on the windows,
 anyway. (BEAT) Come on up. I'll get
 your letters. We can, you know, reminisce.

We can see from Ali's face, she doesn't believe that's what he means. He's already on his way up the stairs. Ali glances behind her to the garage entrance, where her bike is parked.

ALI'S P.O.V.

Her bike, old and faded red with its straw basket. Next to it is Frank's bike, a big black motorcycle with a lot of miles on it. She looks up at Frank.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Come on up.

ALI

No. I can't. I have to....(BEAT)
go. I have to go.

CUT TO:

EXT - EARLY EVENING - ALI ON HER BIKE

She's peddling home as fast as she can. Only this time, she uses no hand signals. And she deliberately rides right through a STOP sign.

CUT TO:

INT - MUNTZLEMAN HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

These transplanted Midwesterners live in early hodge podge decor. It's a garage sale goers paradise. Trinkets and mementos and odds and ends and all kinds of junk fill every possible nook and cranny. Nothing matches. Nothing has been dusted for decades. Seated at the dinner table, all babbling away at once, is the entire Muntzleman menagerie. We see them one by one, and we find out why Norman goes out of his way to be normal:

MRS. MUNTZLEMAN

is a very large woman with too many chins and too much to say about everything. She looks like a Campbell's Soup lady.

MR. MUNTZLEMAN

is a tall and gangly old man who, after years of not getting a word in edgewise, generally keeps his mouth shut, but makes very expressive faces.

ROSEMARY

is Norman's younger sister, as awkward and abominable as adolescents come. She looks like a bird. Her head is always poking into things.

MORTON MUNTZLEMAN

Is Norman's older brother. He's actually rather ordinary for this family, but his wife makes it up for him.

LOIS MUNTZLEMAN

Morton's wife sports a bleached blonde country western bee-hive. She could make a killing doing detergent commercials, but she's not smart enough, AND FINALLY.....

(CONTINUED)

MAMAW MUNTZLEMAN

The grandmother. An old farm girl with thick skin who knows at least a dozen different ways to grumble.

INT- MUNTZLEMAN HOME - DINING ROOM

Ali and Viola are seated at the dinner table as well, and everyone is smiling at Ali.

MRS. MUNTZLEMAN

Let's have a toast to my future daughter-in-law. Welcome to the family, Ali.

They all raise their glasses.

ALI

Thank you, Mrs. Muntzleman.
Norman makes me very happy.

MRS. MUNTZLEMAN

Have some more turkey, dear.
Mamaw cooked it special.

ROSEMARY

How does Norman make you happy?

Ali is trying to think of an answer for Rosemary when Mrs. Muntzleman reaches over and dumps an enormous piece of turkey onto Ali's plate.

MAMAW

(grumbling)

Dang bird had me all over the yard trying to catch him. Mr. Magoo didn't know who he was dealing with.

Ali almost chokes at this.

ALI

We're eating Mr. Magoo?

VIOLA

Who is Mr. Magoo?

ROSEMARY

(whining)

How does Norman make you happy, Ali?

NORMAN

Mamaw, I told you Mr. Magoo was Ali's favorite turkey.

(CONTINUED)

MAMAW
And that's why I cooked him.
The old monster.

Mamaw grumbles.

MORTON
Speaking of birds, where are you two
love birds going on your honeymoon?

ROSEMARY
Will somebody PLEASE tell me howcome
Norman makes Ali happy?

NORMAN
"Howcome" is not a word, Rosemary.

Mrs. Muntzleman's mouth is full, but that doesn't stop her from speaking.

MRS. MUNTZLEMAN
Rosemary, if you don't behave, you'll go to
your room and you'll miss your father's and
Norman's slides.

At this Rosemary glares at Norman. And believe it or not, Norman sticks
out his tongue to Rosemary. Luckily, Ali isn't watching. She's noticing that
Norman's father cuts and eats his food exactly like Norman does.

LOIS (the beehive)

looks up from her plate for the first time.

LOIS
Are we going to look at family pictures?
I just ADORE family pictures.

CUT TO:

INT - THE MUNTZLEMAN LIVING ROOM

It's dark, and there's a slide projector HUMMING away on the coffee table.
The family is seated on the couch and on various mismatched chairs, all
looking at the

WALL

where the image projected is the rambling lawn of a cemetery. Norman
and his father are posing on either side of a gravestone.

MR. MUNTZLEMAN
This is in West Virginia, isn't it
Norman?

(CONTINUED)

INT - MUNTZLEMAN LIVING ROOM

Viola can't believe her eyes. She looks around at the rest of the audience to see if anyone else finds this slide show a bit odd. Apparently not.

NORMAN

Yup. That was where we tracked down Uncle George. He was a Confederate who spied for the Yankee army. Never got caught, but then he went to jail five years after the war for having three wives.

MAMAW

(grumbling)

They shoulda divided him up in three pieces.

The slide changes to another gravestone. Norman is standing next to it, smiling like he was posing with his best friend, his arm around the headstone's shoulder.

NORMAN

That's my favorite.
Merrill Muntzleman the Third. We'd been looking for him for five years.

MAMAW

(sarcastically grumbling)

And what do you know. He was there the whole time, sneaky old wart.

As Norman continues his presentation, we see

ROSEMARY HIDING BEHIND THE COUCH

She's right behind Lois, and unbeknownst to her, is busily planting pick-up sticks into the woman's beehive. The colorful skinny sticks are protruding out all over the head, creating an almost new-wave spiked effect.

LOIS

is oblivious to her headpiece. She turns to Ali, who's sitting beside her on the couch.

LOIS

I know it's a very odd family,
but you'll get used to it.

Ali looks at Lois with the pick-up sticks in her beehive and nods her head politely. She seems distracted, not really noticing anything peculiar about Lois. The lights go on.

(CONTINUED)

INT - LIVING ROOM

As Norman's audience begins to stretch and yawn, Viola notices what Rosemary has done to Lois. But no one says anything, so she doesn't either.

NORMAN

Before anyone leaves, I have a surprise
for my fiancée.

Ali looks down at her ringless left hand and smiles.

NORMAN

Ali, I present to you and your future
family, my wedding gift to you.
Lights please.

Someone turns off the lights again, and Norman turns on the projector. On the

WALL

is the image of yet another cemetery. But there's some unused lawn space right in the middle of the picture, obviously the photographer's main interest.

NORMAN

Ladies and Gentlemen. I give you
the final resting place of Mr. and Mrs.
Norman Muntzleman. Reservations
bought and paid for at Forest Lawn,
right here in New Jersey.

NORMAN

beams with pride at his brilliant gift.

ALI

smiles back at him, feeling very safe and secure. But it seems some part of her is a million miles away.

CUT TO:

INT - NEWSROOM

Viola Ortner strides purposefully into the newsroom, looking very sporty with her hair all done and her face made up very nicely. She spots her daughter through the glass that separates the Morgue from the newsroom and taps, scaring

ALI

half to death

ALI
(mouthing thru the glass)
Just a minute, Momma.

Viola can't hear her.

VIOLA
WHAT?

ALI
I said just a minute. I'll be out in a sec.

Viola still can't hear.

VIOLA
WHAT????????!!!!!!!!!!!!

INT - NEWSROOM

Everyone stops what they're doing and looks at this screaming woman, who then smiles politely back at them.

VIOLA
(to EVERYONE in the room)
We're going shopping.

CUT TO:

INT - SMALL DEPARTMENT STORE BRIDAL SHOP

Ali and Viola are among about ten smiling moms and ten smiling daughters seated facing a very small decorated podium, to which all eyes are glued. Some models who have no business modelling are showing off the latest in wedding wear. They all take a final turn and the ladies applaud. The saleslady who's M.C.ing the affair belongs in the girdle department. At Woolworths.

(CONTINUED)

SALESLADY #1
(sickeningly sweet)
Aren't they just precious? We'll
pick up the bridal show with tea and
cookies in Fine Dinnerware in twenty
minutes, so you may want to try on
your favorite dresses before those
tummies get full!

CUT TO:

INT - NEWSPAPER - GUARD DESK

Frank Scappelli is walking in and several staffers are heading out for lunch. They all recognize him and he receives several warm hellos.

FRANK
Hi guys. Anyone know if Ali's here?

STAFFERS AND VELMA
(in loud unison)
THEY WENT SHOPPING.

FRANK
What's going on, Velma? Am I
missing something here?

VELMA
Honey, I can't say for sure, but it looks to me
like you've got all the standard equipment.
It's your friend Ali I'm not so sure about.
You known her long?

He sits down on the edge of her desk and looks at her as if he's looking at Elizabeth Taylor.

FRANK
Oh, Ali and I go back a couple years,
Velma. You wouldn't happen to know
where she went shopping, would you?

Norman is now coming down the hallway on his way in. He's carrying a bag full of photography equipment, walking very fast and thinking very hard about something.

FRANK
Norman, my man. How goes it?

(CONTINUED)

NORMAN

Oh, hello Frank. Just fine. But I'm in a little of a hurry. I've got to get into the lab before the end of my lunch break.

FRANK

Okay, Norman. You go do what you gotta do.

They watch him rush off, Velma shaking her head.

VELMA

He's developing his dead relatives.

CUT TO:

INT - DEPARTMENT STORE BRIDAL SHOP

Ali is standing in front of the mirror looking at herself in an overpowering wedding dress several sizes too large. She steps up onto the stand with great difficulty, looking like the Stay-Puft Marshmallow man. The saleslady and Viola are standing behind her, proud as can be. Ali is forlorn.

ALI

Do you have anything less billowy?

CUT TO:

INT - DEPARTMENT STORE ENTRANCE

Frank is walking in, looking around.

CUT TO:

INT - DEPARTMENT STORE BRIDAL SHOP

Now Ali is standing in front of the mirror in another dress, a fairytale gown that fits her perfectly. She stares into the face in the mirror as if looking at someone else, someone she vaguely recognizes. She takes off her glasses, as if somehow that would help her see more clearly. She is stunning. And it makes her very uncomfortable.

ALI

Momma, I'm not ready for dresses.
Let's just look at plates and
napkins today.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK
I think you might look kind of
cute walking down the aisle in
a napkin.

Frank is standing behind Ali in the mirror, with obvious admiration. She blushes with a vengeance. Viola and the Saleslady turn and smile.

VIOLA
Why, how nice to see you again,
Mr. Spaghetti....Scapilletti...Spacelli..

FRANK
Just Frank. Nice to see you too,
Mrs. Ortner. You know, your hair looks
real pretty today. You did something,
right?

VIOLA
(giddy)
Please call me Viola.

SALESLADY
And I'm Ruth. Ruth Rutherford.

Ruth Rutherford is head over heels, beaming at Frank through her half glasses. He kisses her hand, but he's looking at Ali while he's doing it.

RUTH
(scolding him)
Are you the bridegroom?

ALI
NO, HE'S NOT.
(under her breath:)
What are you doing here?

RUTH
Best man?

FRANK
So I hear.

Ruth Rutherford is beside herself, and so is Ali, although each for different reasons. Viola is oblivious.

VIOLA
Why don't you help us pick out
a dress, Frank? We could use a man's
point of view.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
NO!!

The store is quiet. Everyone is looking at Ali, who could just die.

ALI
(very softly)
I want to look at flatware.

FRANK
Good idea. (BEAT) What's flatware?

CUT TO:

INT- FLATWARE DEPT.

Viola, Ali and Frank are at a display case attended by a young, attractive saleslady who's a bit on the bimboish side.

SALESLADY *2
Is there something I can show you?

VIOLA
Oh, Ali, the Kingsbury is lovely.
What do you think?

FRANK
(trying very hard to be galant)
The bride-to-be would like to see
some flatware.

The saleslady and Viola giggle.

SALESLADY *2
What kind of service? Everyday or
sterling?

Frank doesn't understand a word of what's going on. He leans across the counter on one elbow and smiles into the saleslady's eyes.

FRANK
We want the finest flatware you got.
What would YOU suggest,
(reading her name tag)
Miss Simpson?

MISS SIMPSON
Well, it depends on what you like.
I like the Buttercup sterling.

(CONTINUED)

She takes the silverware out of the case, not taking her eyes off Frank. Ali looks very unhappy and neglected.

ALI
Well, I don't like the Buttercup sterling.
I like the Chantilly.

Miss Simpson gives Ali a barely noticeable dirty look and takes the Chantilly out of the case.

VIOLA
Oh, they're both so nice.
What do you think, Frank?

MISS SIMPSON
Are you the bridegroom, Frank?

FRANK
Oh, no. I'm just giving Ali a hand here.
Her fiance had to develop some ancestors.

She's real happy to hear the first part, so the second part doesn't matter.

MISS SIMPSON
Well, what DO you think, Frank?
Buttercup or Chantilly?

They're all looking at him for an answer. He thinks about it. He looks at the two sets, and then he looks at Ali and Miss Simpson.

FRANK
Well, ladies....I for one don't really care
what I use to chop my chow, but If I
had to decide I'd go with the Chantilly.
Now the Buttercup is real nice, but
the Chantilly, now that's a romantic
fork, as far as forks go. That's a fork
with flair and finesse.
A fine fork.

Frank grins at Ali, who tries damn hard not to smile back.

CUT TO:

EXT - FRONT OF DEPARTMENT STORE - AFTERNOON

Ali and Viola are walking along the sidewalk away from the store, Ali looking annoyed and Frank having a grand time tagging along.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK
I liked flatware. What do we do next?

ALI
Why aren't you at work?

FRANK
It's lunchtime.

VIOLA
What do you do, Frank?

FRANK
I fix engines over at Dempsey's
Garage.

ALI
(sarcastically)
Do you always look at wedding dresses
on your lunch break?

VIOLA
My late husband loved to fix
things. Especially things that
weren't broken. Improvements, he called
them, bless his heart. Left us a
legacy of them.

FRANK
Well, if there's any repair work you
need done, Viola, I'd be more than
happy to take a look.

Ali glares at him.

VIOLA
Would you really? What a wonderful idea.
I'd be more than happy to pay.

FRANK
Well, that's nice of you , Viola, but I
wouldn't ask you to--

VIOLA
I'd insist.

ALI
Momma, we don't need.....

(CONTINUED)

FRANK
 Yes, you do. You won't be able to hear
 "Here Comes the Bride" with that doorbell
 going for one thing. And to be honest, I could
 use some extra dough.

ALI
 (chiding him)
 Oh, yes? And why's that, Frank?

They're now approaching the

EXT - GAZETTE BUILDING - AFTERNOON

VIOLA
 It's all settled. (BEAT) I've got to
 dash, dear. I told the caterer I'd stop
 off before one.
 (She kisses Ali on the cheek and turns to Frank.)
 Why don't you come to the house this
 Saturday and we'll get started?

FRANK
 You got it.

Frank kisses Viola's hand, and she scurries away, giggling.

FRANK
 Nothing like a mother with a mission.

ALI
 I'd like to know what YOUR mission is.
 You followed me.

FRANK
 (he sings the James Bond theme song)
 Dan dah dah don don...don don don don
 dan dah dah don...don don don.....

ALI
 Why are you doing this to me?

FRANK
 What am I doing to you?

ALI
 I don't know.

FRANK
 Then neither do I.

(CONTINUED)

They look at each other for a moment. Frank smiles and Ali starts walking again. He follows her.

FRANK
Why did you rush off the other day?
And why are you getting married?
You weren't getting married last week,
were you?

They stop walking.

ALI
I don't have to tell you why I'm
doing anything.

FRANK
Hey, come on. It's plain as day the guy's all
wrong for you. I just don't understand it,
that's all.

ALI
And what makes you think you know
what's right or wrong for me?

She begins storming down the walkway that leads to the entrance of the building, Frank following right behind and pulling a wad of letters out of his jacket pocket along the way. He waves them in her face.

FRANK
I've got it in writing, fairy tale
princess, that's how I know.

Ali stops storming and tries to take a deep breath.

ALI
Listen to me. I'm not that girl in
those letters.

FRANK
Oh, yea? Where does SHE live?

ALI
Don't you understand? It was
just a bunch of fantasy. Just my
own stupid.....

Frank takes his hand and touches her hair, very gently.

ALI
(continuing)
romantic.....

(CONTINUED)

He takes his other hand and puts it on her shoulder and leans toward her, very slowly, his face almost touching hers. She swallows. He kisses her passionately. Then their lips unlock, but not their eyes. Ali is numbstruck, her cheeks flushed and her lips almost swollen. It's quite becoming. They're just a few yards from the

EXT- THE NEWS BULLETIN - DAY

Norman is walking out of the building, ~~presumably on his way to a story with his cameras in tow.~~ He has seen some of the non-cousinly behavior. He approaches them suspiciously.

NORMAN

Ali, what was he doing?

Ali wipes her mouth unconsciously. She can barely answer him. Frank's shaking his head.

ALI

Norman. What are you doing here?

NORMAN

I work in there. What were you doing with him. Like that.

ALI

Like what?

FRANK

(holding out his hand to Norman)
Hi Norman. I was just showing Ali here how to angle your head so when the guy says "you may now kiss the bride" you get a real nice angle for the photographs.
(like he just thought of something:)

Oh, man. How stupid of me. You already know all that stuff, don't you? It's very important. Otherwise you could have it all wrong, and your nose might look like it's coming out her ear and who knows what else.

(he starts walking away backwards, still talking)
But she's got it now. You'll look just fine, don't worry. Everything's under control.

Norman looks Frank up and down.

FRANK

I'll see you guys later, alright?

(CONTINUED)

Frank blows Ali a kiss. Norman doesn't see. He's looking at her, still suspicious.

ALI
I picked out flatware today, Norman.
I think you'll like it.

She straightens his collar, and even though he likes it, he tries to maintain his hard edge.

NORMAN
Why is that guy always lurking around?
I don't trust him, and I don't think
you should either. Guy like that, you
don't know what he's up to.

Ali looks as though she couldn't agree more.

ALI
Norman, we have so many wedding
plans to go over. Why don't you come
over tonite. I'll make us dinner.

NORMAN
Meatloaf?

CUT TO:

INT - THE ORTNER KITCHEN

where Ali is standing over a hot stove, alternately stirring the contents of several segregated pots of vegetables--corn in one, peas in another and so on. The way Norman likes them.

INT - THE ORTNER LIVING ROOM

where Norman is sitting on the couch pasting grave shots into a photo album. He has several photos tentatively placed on a page, and he's moving them around in various arrangements. He handles them with great care. "Lost in Space" is on television. Viola is in a stuffed chair, sleeping with her head back and her mouth open.

ALI (O.C.)
Everyone sit down. It's almost done.

CUT TO:

EXT - THE ORTNER NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

where Frank is lurking around surreptitiously, singing something we can't make out.

(CONTINUED)

CUT TO:

INT - THE ORTNER DINING AREA

which is not too far from a slightly opened window and where Ali, Viola and Norman are getting ready to dig in.

VIOLA

Your father and I went to Niagra.
But I don't think anyone does that
anymore. It's such a shame, you know.
The power of that water. It's very
.....sexy if you know what I mean.

ALI

Mother!!!!

NORMAN

(his mouth full)
Great meat loaf.

ALI

Norman wants to go to Florida.
And he's got some family there
he's never seen.

VIOLA

Well, Florida would be very nice
this time of year.
Where do they live?

The question brings uncomfortable silence from both Ali and Norman.

VIOLA

I see. Well, that's nice.

Ali gets up with an empty vegetable platter and goes into the

INT - KITCHEN

Suddenly there's singing coming from somewhere outside the house. It's a Sinatra serenade. "Look At Me Now."

FRANK

*I'm not the guy
who cared about love and
I'm not the guy
who cared about fortunes and such,
I never cared much.
Oh, look at me now.*

(CONTINUED)

As soon as Ali realizes what and who it is, she turns on the garbage disposal and drowns it out. She goes back into the

INT - DINING ROOM

ALI
(yelling)
More peas, anyone?

But right in the middle of her sentence the garbage disposal belches its last and Frank's love song fills the void, to Ali's horror.

VIOLA
(getting up and going to the window)
It's your friend Frank out there,
Ali. What a lovely voice he has.
(she opens the window and claps)
BRAVO. BRAVO.

Through the window, we see Frank doing his act, singing with his arms out and doing Gene Kelly pirouettes.

FRANK
*I'm a new man, better than
Casanova at his very best.
With a new heart, a brand new start
I'm so proud I'm busting my best.
So I'm the guy who turned out a lover,
so I'm the guy.....*

Ali tries to get up from the table and knocks a dish of gravy onto Norman's lap in doing so. She tries to wipe it off with a napkin and finds herself mopping up Norman's crotch. She stops instantly. Norman is very agitated and, wet pants notwithstanding, gets up to look out the window himself.

NORMAN
What does he think he's doing?

VIOLA
(charmed into a daze)
He's singing. Isn't it wonderful?

Ali doesn't know what to say. She just stands there and watches Frank kneel melodramatically on the grass as he holds the closing note. Viola practically has tears in her eyes.

VIOLA
Ali, shouldn't you go ask Frank if
he'd like some meatloaf?

(CONTINUED)

NORMAN
What is this? Sing for your supper?

VIOLA
(yelling out the window)
Come join us, Frank!

A FEW MINUTES LATER.....

INT - THE ORTNER DINING ROOM

An enraptured Viola, an annoyed Norman, a delighted Frank and a distraught Ali are finishing their meal.

VIOLA
So, why did you leave the Bronx,
Frank?

NORMAN
I thought you were from Schenectady.

FRANK
Well, yea. I've moved around a lot.

VIOLA
Where's your family?

NORMAN
(looking at Ali)
I thought he ~~was~~ family!

ALI
Well, he was. I mean, he is.
It's the strangest coincidence, Momma.
Frank is Aunt Mildred's second
cousin on his father's side, once
removed. Can you believe it?

Frank is pleasantly amazed at Ali's quickness. He grins.

VIOLA
Why, that's incredible!

FRANK
Small hell of a world, isn't it? And to
think some people spend years tracking
down their relatives, right Norman?

NORMAN
And exactly how is it you and Ali
made this amazing discovery?

(CONTINUED)

ALI
Why don't you finish up the meatloaf,
Norman?

NORMAN
(facetiously)
Because there's no more gravy.

Ali gets up with some empty dishes and heads into the kitchen.

VIOLA
I've never understood all that once-
removed, twice-removed business.

Norman lights up.

NORMAN
It's simple, Mrs. V. If Ali's Aunt Mildred
had, say, a daughter. And that daughter had....

Then the garbage disposal kicks up again, making horrendous sounds.
Norman just raises his voice and continues the geneology lesson. Frank
gets up and goes into the kitchen to help Ali.

INT - THE ORTNER KITCHEN

It's much worse than it sounds. Meat and vegetable debri are gushing up
like Old Faithful from the hole in the sink. Ali tries to switch the thing
off, but it's unstoppable. Frank reaches under the sink and does something
to get it to stop.

FRANK
Got a wrench?

Ali gets one from a kitchen drawer and hands it to him, and after about
two minutes he fixes it.

FRANK
Start her up.

Ali flips the switch back on and the disposal hums just perfectly.

ALI
Thank you.

FRANK
(grinning again)
You're welcome.

(CONTINUED)

Ali goes back to the

INT - DINING ROOM

and Frank follows, drying his hands on a towel.

NORMAN

But if your **second** cousin, once-removed,
married and had children.....

VIOLA

Frank, that kitchen sink is
possessed. I don't know what you
did in there, but I thank you from
the bottom of my heart.

FRANK

Piece of cake. I'm sure there's
nothing in this house I can't conquer.

Norman is getting pissed.

NORMAN

What do you do for a living, Frank?

FRANK

I make engines purr, Norman.

VIOLA

You didn't tell us where you're staying.

FRANK

I've got a room right over
the garage. Just until I get settled.

NORMAN

Right. You strike me as the type to
set down some serious roots.

VIOLA

Well, that's ridiculous to live in a
garage.....we've got a room here that we--

ALI

No, Mother. Not again.

VIOLA

Ali, it's silly for us to let that
room go to waste when there are
people--

(CONTINUED)

ALI
(sarcastically)
---who belong in insane asylums that
can live in it. Momma, you said the Captain
was the last time.

Frank sees an opportunity. He's listening very carefully.

VIOLA
(cross)
Ali, really. This is different.
Frank seems like a very nice man,
and he's family. How can you be so rude?

FRANK
I wouldn't want to impose.

VIOLA
It would be no imposition, dear.
I think we could put you to good use.

ALI
MOTHER! He wouldn't want to stay here!

VIOLA
Why not? I think it's a wonderful idea.

FRANK
Well, I'm sure I could help you
ladies out with a few things around here.

VIOLA
See, Ali? It's the least we can do.

FRANK
I don't know what to say.

Ali looks helpless. Norman's been waiting for an opportunity to get into this.

NORMAN
Viola, I think what Ali is trying to say
is that you may unintentionally
be putting Frank on the spot here.
Chances are he wouldn't be happy
living here with two ladies.
I'm sure he needs his privacy, don't you
Frank?

FRANK
I hate privacy.

(CONTINUED)

VIOLA

Then, we insist. It's all settled.

Frank smiles mischievously at Ali. She shakes her head angrily at him, and then, as if ready to cry, runs upstairs to her room, leaving Viola perplexed, Norman concerned and Frank unfazed.

FRANK

(winking at Norman)

Wait till you see the flatware we
picked out, Norman.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP - A THICK PAIR OF GLASSES

which are on top of a clock (6:30 am) on top of a nightstand.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

INT - ALI'S BEDROOM - DAWN

It's not quite light yet, and Ali's apparently been tossing and turning and rolling around all night. She looks like a blintz in a blanket. The alarm goes off, but she can't unroll herself enough to get her hand free to stop it. There's a knock on her door, and she jolts up, still mummified in the blankets.

FRANK (O.C.)

(singing)

Good morning to you! Good morning to you!
We're all in our places....
with shiny faces.
Good morning to you! Good morning to you!

And then she hears his footsteps, walking away. She maneuvers to the side of the bed and manages to get her feet planted on the floor. Then she stands up and twirls herself out of the blanket, turns off the alarm, grabs a robe and goes to the bedroom door. She very carefully and quietly tries to open the door, but can't, because she locked it from the inside. She unlocks it, opens it just a crack and peers down the

INT - HALLWAY

There's no one there, so Ali makes a quick run for the

(CONTINUED)

INT - BATHROOM

and quickly closes and locks the door. Safe inside, she opens the medicine chest for some toothpaste and is confronted with all sorts of strange toiletry items. She turns on the faucet to drown out any incriminating noises and then examines the shaving cream with fascination. Then she puts it back and takes out the bottle of aftershave. She opens it and puts it to her nose. And then there's a knock at the door and she spills it all over her face.

FRANK (O.C.)
Breakfast is served.

ALI
I'm not hungry.
And I'd appreciate it if you'd keep
your clutter out of my medicine
chest.

But he's gone. Ali puts the aftershave back and climbs into the shower with her bathrobe on. Only when she's in with the shower door closed does she take off her robe and throw it out over the top, along with her glasses. We hear the shower start.

CUT TO:

INT - THE ORTNER KITCHEN

where Frank is putting the finishing touches on a spectacular three-man omelet. Viola is setting the breakfast table.

FRANK
I like to cook, you know?
You cook some food and you fix it up all nice
and someone eats it. Human beings are
the only creatures that do that.

VIOLA
I never thought of it that way.
Have you ever worked as a cook?

FRANK
Yea. Cook. Mechanic. Cab driver.
Security guard. You name it,
I got tired of it. I don't know.

ALI

is now standing outside the kitchen out of view, listening to Frank and Viola. They don't know she's there.

(CONTINUED)

BACK TO VIOLA AND FRANK

FRANK

My mother, she used to get up and cook
me a good breakfast every morning.
She'd be up bright and early just to see that
I got a hot meal. I remember this one time
I was sitting there at the table
while she was cooking, and I couldn't wait.

I started banging my spoon on the plate.
It drove her crazy. She said If I didn't stop,
I wouldn't have any French toast.
And that was my favorite, French toast.
But I kept on banging the spoon.

So then she said, "that's it, Frankie.
One more time and you don't eat."
And I looked her right in the eye and she
looked me in the eye and she said,
"I mean it." And we stared at each other.

But I did it again. I don't know why.
I banged my spoon on the plate. So then
she took away my plate, and she dumped
the French toast into the sink, and that was it.
I couldn't believe it. And after she did it,
she looked so sad. Like it killed her to
do it. I could've asked her to make eggs
benedict then, and she would've, you
know? (BEAT) But I didn't. I went to school
without breakfast that day.

Frank looks up from the omelet at Viola and they smile sort of sadly at one another. And then Ali walks in, apparently all ready to leave for work.

VIOLA

Look what's for breakfast, sweetheart.

Ali tries to be curt, but we can tell she's amazed at what's going on in the kitchen.

ALI

I can't. I've got to go.

She looks ashamed. Frank looks almost hurt.

FRANK

You gotta eat. I made a three-man
omelet. If there's only two men,
I've got to start all over.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
So you'll each have a man and a
half.

She goes into the kitchen, grabs a glass of juice and gulps it down.

FRANK
(sniffing)
I like your aftershave.

Ali turns red and dashes out of the kitchen. They hear the front door open and shut.

VIOLA
I think she's a little jittery about
marrying Norman.

FRANK
Wouldn't you be?

CUT TO:

A GLARING TELEVISION SET

Public Access is on. "Fun With Balloon Animals". The topic is being discussed with the seriousness of the SALT treaties.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

INT - ORTNER LIVING ROOM

It looks like two or three in the morning, pitch BLACK. Frank is visible in the glow of the television light. He's sitting on the couch in a plaid flannel bathrobe with a glass of milk in his hand. There's a plate full of Oreos on the coffee table. On the

INT - STAIRWAY

is Ali in her flannel nightgown with a blanket draped over her shoulders, heading downstairs.

INT - LIVING ROOM

Ali stands behind Frank on the couch for just a second and then walks around, plops down on the other end of the couch and, keeping her eyes on the television set, reaches across the table and takes an Oreo. He watches her with the vaguest trace of a smile on his face. She takes a bite out of it. Frank puts the glass of milk down and looks back at the program on the

(CONTINUED)

TELEVISION

The man hosting the program says he's been making balloon animals for fifteen years, but anyone can learn. The balloon maker then introduces a guest and they explore the topic further, beginning with the best balloons.

ALI AND FRANK

both watch for a few moments. Then Ali takes another cookie and is about to put it in her mouth when she reaches over and dunks it in Frank's glass of milk instead.

FRANK
Hey? You awake?

Ali tries to keep from smiling.

ALI
(thoroughly enjoying the Oreo)
It's thanks to you that I couldn't sleep.

FRANK
You should've eaten your breakfast.

ALI
It's not because I didn't eat breakfast.

She dunks another Oreo in Frank's milk. Frank is amused.

FRANK
Help yourself.

ALI
Thank you.

She dunks again, shaking the Oreo over the glass to let the excess milk drain off. Then Frank dunks one of his own, only he leaves it in the milk too long, and half of it flops into the glass and floats.

ALI
You let it soak too long.

FRANK
(his mouth full)
So how come it's because of me that you couldn't sleep?

Ali is now on her fourth or fifth Oreo and going strong.

ALI
Because I used to write letters before I went to bed. To you.

(CONTINUED)

Her words are punctuated by chewing and slurping.

ALI
(continuing)
It made me nice and sleepy.
Now I don't have any letters to write,
and I can't stop thinking.
I just lie there and think and think and
think.

FRANK
I know the feeling.

Ali looks at him. She stops eating for a second.

ALI
I guess you do. I'm sorry.

FRANK
No, don't be sorry.
You gave me **your** thoughts to
think about. (BEAT) You saved me.
That's why I had to meet you.

He stares at her. His affection is serious now. She can't handle it and turns her eyes back to the program. The balloon maker is saying that blowing balloons can be very hard on the cheeks, and you can over do it if you're not careful. Ali cuddles up against her arm of the couch and rests her head.

ALI
(quietly)
Everything is different in the
middle of the night.

Frank looks at the television for a few BEATs, and then back at Ali. But her eyes are already closed. He watches her sleep. Then he pulls her blanket up over her shoulders and gently takes her glasses off and puts them on the table.

FRANK
Sweet dreams, Ali.

CUT TO:

INT - A PAROLE OFFICE - THE NEXT AFTERNOON

Clyde Morgan's phone is ringing. He picks it up.

(CONTINUED)

CLYDE
Parole, Morgan. (BEAT)
Where the hell have you been,
Scappelli?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT - FRANK'S GARAGE

FRANK
I miss you too, Clyde.

CLYDE
Tell me something, Frankie boy.
Why would a man want to risk
parole to go to Jersey?

FRANK
Give me a break, will ya?
I got a regular job, a place to
stay. And I'm clean.

CLYDE
Do you want to go back in, Scappelli?
Is that what this is?
Because I don't intend to put my
ass on the line so you can gamble
with yours.

FRANK
Clyde, have I ever asked you to do
anything with your ass?
I'm just asking you to look
the other way for a while.
You know as well as
me that if I was in the City five
minutes I'd have my hands dirty.

CLYDE
I'll lend you some soap.

Clyde hangs up and shakes his head, genuinely worried.

CUT TO:

EXT - ORTNER HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Frank pulls up on his motorcycle. Norman is walking up to the house to take Ali out. He's carrying a bouquet of daisies.

NORMAN
(perfunctory)
Hello, Frank. How are you?

FRANK
Well, it's Mr. Family Tree with
some daisies for his dear. BEAT
(getting more sinister)
You got a big night planned, old buddy?

NORMAN
I don't know what it is, but
I don't like you.

FRANK
I'm sorry, Norman. I just like to kid
around a lot. I didn't mean nothing.
As a matter of fact, I think you're
a pretty lucky guy.

NORMAN
Well, thanks. I am.

Frank goes over to him and puts his arm on Norman's shoulder.

FRANK
You know, Norman, lemme tell ya.
A lady likes flowers. You got that
right. But not a whole bunch of them.
(He takes the flowers from Norman's hand)
Here.
(He gives Norman one daisy and keeps the rest)
A single flower is how you want to do it.
Nice and simple. Like you're saying to her
she's the one flower out of a million.

NORMAN
You think so?

FRANK
(grinning)
You'll have her wrapped
around your little finger.

Norman starts to ring the doorbell, but Frank stops him.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Wait. Lemme have that back a second.

Frank winks at Norman. Norman hesitates, but then gives the daisy back to Frank, who starts plucking the petals off.

NORMAN

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

FRANK

This way.....(she loves you...she loves you
not).....she'll know that you were trying....
.....(she loves you).....to find out....(she loves
you not).....if.....(she loves you).....or.....
(she loves you----)....NOT.

Frank hands the petal-less daisy back to Norman, who's not sure what to think at this point.

FRANK

Sorry buddy. That flower doesn't know
love from a hole in the ground.

Norman thinks for a second and then breaks out into laughter. Frank doesn't know what he's laughing about.

NORMAN

Flower. Hole in the ground. Pretty good.

And then Norman goes up to the door very confidently with the plucked daisy in his hand and rings the bell, which works perfectly. Frank watches.

INT - THE ORTNER HOUSE

Ali answers the door, all dressed up for her date and looking considerably better all the time.

ALI

Hello, Norman. Come on in.

Frank comes in, too. He starts up the stairs.

NORMAN

(handing her the de-petalled daisy)
I brought you a flower.

Frank stops and watches with amused anticipation.
Ali's never received such a pathetic looking flower before and stares at it.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
What happened to the petals?

NORMAN
It's a one-in-a-million flower for
a one-in-a-million girl.

ALI
(melting)
Oh, Norman, that's the sweetest thing
you've ever done.

Norman gestures a grateful and guilty "thankyou" to Frank on the stairway.
Frank shakes his head with incredulity, and starts up to his room again.

NORMAN
Hey, Frank. Wanna go bowling?

FRANK
Thanks Norman, but I know three's a
crowd.

NORMAN
So bring a date. Come on, let's
all be friends.

Frank thinks about it.

FRANK
Alright, what the hell.

Ali tries to hide her jealousy. Norman is delighted.

CUT TO:

INT - BOWLING ALLEY

where Ali, Norman and Miss Simpson from the flatware department are
putting on bowling shoes. Ali is noticeably miserable, Norman is excited,
and Miss Simpson from the flatware department is oblivious to everything
and everyone except Frank, who is just now returning to the group with a
tray full of cold beers.

FRANK
(in his best opera baritone)
Here's to good friends...tonite is
kind of special.....

(CONTINUED)

Miss Simpson giggles uncontrollably. They each take a mug and a bottle off the tray. Frank sits down to keep score, with his date on his lap.

MISS SIMPSON
Isn't he the cutest?

Ali gives her a dirty look and guzzles her entire beer.

NORMAN
Ali, there is an unlimited supply of
beer in New Jersey.

ALI
Good.

Frank laughs. Norman doesn't know what to say, so he grabs a ball and walks to the lane, making every possible exaggerated contortion as he sends the bowling ball straight up middle.....A split. Ali starts on another beer. Norman bowls again, this roll looking every bit as doomed as the first. But it's a spare.

FRANK
Alriiiiiight. A good warm-up for Normie.

A slightly drunken Ali smiles proudly at Norman. Frank sees, and kisses Miss Simpson until Ali's smile fades. Frank gets up and bowls a four. Total for the frame. Miss Simpson bounces up and gives him a kiss. Ali watches, drinks and fumes.

INTERCUT:

Norman's unusual but highly effective bowling technique. Strike after strike after strike, with Ali cheering him on loudly

WITH

Frank's graceful but ineffective technique. Twos, fours, fives and threes. And still Miss Simpson gives him kisses after each frame. The more annoyed Ali gets, the more beer she guzzles. Finally, she can't control herself and

ALI

rushes at Miss Simpson, ready to explode. She slurs her words:

ALI
Thissisn't golf, you know,
Misssss.....Misss.....
(burps)
The **highest** numberrrrwins, not the
lowest.

(CONTINUED)

MISS SIMPSON
(geniunely surprised)
Oh.

ALI
(very drunk; turns to Frank)
Toobad you din mmmake a bet, innit?

FRANK
It so happens I can enjoy myself
without a wager.

ALI
Wanna bet?
(she bursts into laughter)

NORMAN
What are you talking about?

ALI
NonovyurbiznessNorman.

FRANK
I think we should get some food in
her stomatch, Norman. What do you say?

ALI
No. It's my turnnubowl.

Ali wobbles over to the bowling balls. When she picks one up, she flops onto the floor and ends up sitting there with the ball on her lap, wondering how she got there. She looks at the ball and then back up at the rest of them. Still sitting on the floor, she pushes the ball down the lane. It goes straight into the gutter, but she cheers it on the whole way, just as she cheered for Norman. And she's truly stunned when it doesn't knock down any pins. Norman goes over to help her up.

ALI
Normannnl I'm so glad you're here.
I lost my bowling ball down there.

She tries to find it by pointing, but it doesn't seem to be anywhere, and she's getting very dizzy. Her finger finally lands on someone else's ball in another lane.

ALI
There it is!

NORMAN
You're drunk.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
(clapping her hands)
Good answer! Good answer!
Miss Simpson, tell us what prize
we have for our contestant.

FRANK
(standing up and pulling his
date up with him)
Come on, Norman. Let's all get a burger.

MISS SIMPSON
How do you know her, anyway?

ALI
Why don't you tell her, Frank?

NORMAN
Come on, Ali. Let's go eat.

ALI
Tell her Frank. Let's hear another
one of **your** fairytales. Or are you
running out?

Everyone in the bowling alley is watching now.

NORMAN
(gently)
Come on, Ali. Let's go.

MISS SIMPSON
(to Frank, suggestively)
I think it's time for you to take me
home, Frankie.

ALI
He's nothing special, you know?
You can get another one just like him
for just pennies. There's a great
selection at the county jail.
Twenty-two cents a week. A
real bargain.

Frank grinds his jaw and looks away from her abruptly. Norman notices.

MISS SIMPSON
Were you in jail, Frankie?

NORMAN
Ali, what in the hell is going on here?

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Yea. Why don't you tell Norman what's going on here? Because you're right, sleeping beauty, I'm plum out of ideas. And while you're at it, why don't you tell Norman who you've been telling all of your ideas to for the last two years, because if you don't I think I just might.

MISS SIMPSON

Was Ali in jail, too?

ALI

(to Miss Simpson)

Flatware brain.

NORMAN

Ali, besides being the worst bowler here, just who is this guy?

FRANK

I'm the best friend she's ever had, that's who. You want to read all about it?

ALI

You wouldn't dare.

FRANK

What are you so scared of, Ali? You're going to marry the guy. Doesn't HE have a right to know what goes on in that pretty little head of yours?

Ali is stunned by the word "pretty". She takes yet another gulp of beer.

FRANK

(continuing)

Why didn't you write love letters to Norman?

NORMAN

What love letters?

MISS SIMPSON

I GET IT! Pen pals! How romantic.

ALI

They weren't love letters, and you know it.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK
Oh, yea. You wanna bet?

And with that, Frank grabs her by the shoulders and kisses her in front of everyone like she's never been kissed before. Ali doesn't resist. The hand that's holding her beer falls open, and the beer spills all over the floor. Everyone in the bowling alley is applauding, except Miss Simpson and Norman.

FRANK
Come back to New York with me.

Miss Simpson grabs her purse and shoes and storms off in frustration.

Norman pulls Frank away from Ali and takes a swing at him.
Frank puts up a block in defense.
Norman slips on the puddle of beer and falls flat on his back, unconscious.

Ali is stunned into momentary sobriety. She rushes to Norman on the floor and shakes him.

ALI
Norman. Are you alright?

Norman is fine, although stunned and confused.

ALI
Norman, say something.

He gets up off the floor and shakes himself off.

NORMAN
Get away from me.

ALI
Norman, please. Let me explain.

NORMAN
You've obviously had plenty of time to explain, Ali. I'll never forgive you for this.

Frank is putting on his jacket.

ALI
Norman, I was just writing to him.
He's on parole. He just came here,
unin---

(CONTINUED)

NORMAN
(to Frank)
And as for you, Hot Lips Hooligan.
You'll hear from my lawyer.

ALI
Norman. Wait. Please.

But Norman has already changed shoes and is now marching out of the bowling alley. Frank shakes his head and looks as if he wants to comfort Ali.

ALI
I can't believe this. My whole life
has been ruined by a total stranger.
Are you happy now?

Frank is uncharacteristically sad and quiet. He studies her for a long time, and then a strange, defeated smile forms on his face.

FRANK
You've got it all wrong.
You don't get it, do you?

He goes to touch her.

ALI
Don't touch me. Don't talk to me.
And definitely don't write to me.
Just leave me alone.

That's all he'll stand for.

FRANK
Fine. You're hopeless. Go dig your grave
with Norman. You'll be very happy. He's
a great bowler.

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out his key ring, takes off a key and hands it to her. She watches him take off his bowling shoes and put on his boots. And then he walks away.

EXT - BOWLING ALLEY - NIGHT

Viola Ortner pulls up to the front of the building an old Rambler, and a miserable and disheveled Ali gets into the car. It's starting to rain. Viola turns on the windshield wipers and they don't work.

ALI
stares into the night.

Sinatra is singing "Noone Ever Tells You" as we

CUT TO:

EXT - GARDEN STATE PKWY - NIGHT

where Frank is riding his motorcycle, his jacket inflated and his angry expression exaggerated by the rush of the air. He reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out Ali's letters. He rips off the rubber band with his teeth. From behind, we watch him turn them loose in the wind, like confetti. He picks up speed. Then

A POLICE CAR

pulls out of a dark spot on the side of the parkway, turns on its chase lights and heads after him.

CUT TO:

EXT - THE ORTNER FRONT PORCH - MORNING

A short, plump stranger wearing a hat walks up to the door and rings the bell. Viola opens it. It's Clyde Morgan, Frank's parole officer.

CLYDE MORGAN
Mrs. Earnest Ortner?

Viola's pleased as pudding to have a man at the door. To see her.

VIOLA
Yes?

CLYDE
My name is Clyde Morgan.
I'm a friend of Frank Scappelli's.

VIOLA
Oh, of course. Would you like to
come in?

CLYDE
Thank you, ma'am.

INT - ORTNER HOUSE

Clyde takes off his hat and walks into the living room, with Viola behind him, straightening her hair and adjusting her skirt on the way.

VIOLA
Please, sit down.

Clyde sits down in the stuffed chair and Viola sits down on the couch. Clyde has a troubled look on his face.

VIOLA
He's not in any trouble, I hope?

CLYDE
Well, I hope not myself, Mrs. Ortner.
But trouble follows that boy around
like a shadow, I'm afraid to say.

VIOLA
How do you know him?

He looks like he regrets having to answer her.

(CONTINUED)

CLYDE

I'm his parole officer. (BEAT)
Do you think I could have a word
with him, ma'am?

VIOLA

Oh, my. I didn't realize he had
a parole officer. We've only recently
met, you see. Well, actually,
He's my sister-in-law's cousin
on his father's side, once removed.
Or his mother's side, I think.
You know I never really understood
all of that removed business.

CLYDE

(very patiently)
I can't say I do either, ma'am, but...

VIOLA

Please, call me Viola. Would you
like a cup of coffee?

CLYDE

No, ma'am. Viola, ma'am.
I would really talk to him, though.

VIOLA

No. I think it was a second cousin,
twice-removed.
(She tries to remember,
and then gives up)
I'll go get us some coffee.

She gets up and goes into the kitchen, leaving Clyde feeling very awkward
and uncomfortable sitting on the edge of the chair with his hat in his
hands.

He looks around the room, perplexed. Family photos. Middleclass suburban
trinkets. It's apparently not where he expected to find Frank Scappelli.
Viola comes back, as chipper as a beaver, with a a tray and coffee.
She pours him a cup. He's extremely patient and polite, realizing it's very
possible he's being courted. He smiles nervously.

VIOLA

I wish I knew where he was.
He left just yesterday. I can't
get a word out of my daughter about
it. One lump or two? Clyde.

CLYDE

Your daughter. Ali Ortner?

(CONTINUED)

VIOLA
Why, how on earth.....

CLYDE
Frank. He always had this notion
to look up your daughter.
Wouldn't listen to me.

VIOLA
I don't understand. You mean they
can put someone in jail just for
coming to New Jersey?

CLYDE
Parole violation, ma'am. Out of state
jurisdiction. (BEAT) You wouldn't happen
to know where he went, would you?

VIOLA
Oh, dear. No. You're not going to
turn him in, are you?

CLYDE
No, ma'am. I like the kid, to tell
you the truth. I've covered his
....scuse me ma'am.....more times
than I care to remember.
He's already missed a couple of
appointments. But that's not the
worst of it. Looks like somebody's
filed an assault charge against him.

VIOLA
An assault charge?
Who'd do a thing like that?

CUT TO:

INT - THE DAILY NEWS BULLETIN

Writers are writing, editors are editing and other various morning
newsroom activities are in full swing.

INT - MORGUE

Ali is cutting a newspaper into unreadable shreds, very preoccupied with
her thoughts. Velma walks in with the some mail.

VELMA
You wanna talk about it?

(CONTINUED)

ALI
(monotone)
Talk about what?

VELMA
I don't know, honey. First that handsome man with the Levis falls out of the sky comes waltzing in here like you his best friend. Then you and Norman tie the knot. Now Norman's moping around here like an old basset hound and you're sitting in here like this was a real morgue and makin' confetti outa the paper.

ALI
Norman is calling it off.

Velma shakes her head, disappointed that's all she got.

VELMA
Well, look on the bright side.

Ali looks at Velma, but Velma doesn't have anything else to say.

VELMA
I just said look on it, honey. I didn't say I knew what it was.

Then Norman walks into the morgue, trying to be ultra-cool. Velma dumps the mail on Ali's desk and leaves very slowly, hoping to catch one more morsel.

ALI
(tentatively)
Hello, Norman.

NORMAN
I'm only here because I need to get a background file.

ALI
Norman. I've got to talk to you.

NORMAN
There's nothing to talk about.

Ali gets up from her desk and goes over to him. He moves away and pretends to search through the files.

(CONTINUED)

ALI

Norman. Please.
I'm sorry I didn't tell you about Frank.
I didn't think you'd understand.

NORMAN

Well, that was brilliant reasoning.

ALI

It's not what you think.

NORMAN

I don't want to hear about it.
All these years, and I don't even
know you. Corresponding with
criminals.

He slams the first file drawer shut and starts looking through another.

ALI

All I did was write to him. I never expected
this to happen. I never asked him to come
here. I never even knew he was getting out.

NORMAN

I SAID I don't want to hear about it.
I don't keep secrets from you.
I don't have any secrets. I've never had
a secret in my whole life. What were
you **telling** him all that time?

ALI

Norman. Can't we just forget about
Frank? He's gone.
I just want everything to be back like
it was before.

Norman looks up from the file.

NORMAN

(correcting her)

Back "as" it was before, Ali.

Ali smiles at him. Almost relieved. Hopeful.

NORMAN

(pouting)

You never wrote **me** any letters.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
I'll write you a letter. I'll write you
a hundred letters. I need you, Norman.

Now Norman looks relieved. He thinks it over.

NORMAN
How many did you write him?

ALI
(very dramatic)
I write you a thousand letters.
I'll write you a letter every day until
death do us part, maybe even after.

NORMAN
That's ridiculous, Ali. *Maybe even
after.*

ALI
(happy again)
Oh, Norman.

She puts her arms around him. He looks around nervously to see if anyone
can see, and then gives her a self-conscious hug.
Through the glass we see Viola watching from the guard desk, shaking her
head.

CUT TO:

EXT - A NEW JERSEY POLICE STATION

Clyde Morgan walks in and goes up to the front desk.

CLYDE
I'm here to see Frank Scappelli.
Clyde Morgan.

OFFICER
You his attorney?

CLYDE
No, I'm his uncle.

OFFICER
That's too bad. Follow me.

The officer takes Clyde to a

INT - HOLDING CELL

where Frank is damn glad to see him.

(CONTINUED)

OFFICER

Ten minutes.

The officer leaves. Clyde doesn't say anything at first. He just closes and opens his eyes, very slowly.

FRANK

What do you think, Clyde?
I figured I'd try the Garden State
facilities this time.
I could write a guidebook.
Bed and Breakfast Behind Bars.

CLYDE

What happened, Frank?

FRANK

I gotta speeding ticket.

CLYDE

What happened, Frank?

FRANK

Oh, you mean that other thing?
Clyde, you wouldn't believe it.

CLYDE

Try me.

FRANK

This crazy Norman character thinks
I punched him in the bowling alley.
He filed an assault charge. It came up
on the liscence check when I got pulled
over for going eighty on the parkway, so
they brought me in. Sorry I stood you up.

CLYDE

Scappelli, read my lips. I can't very
well cover your behind when it's
locked up across the state line, can I?
If Jersey gets you on "assault," you're
going to go straight back to your cell
in New York as soon as you check out here.
Goodbye parole.

FRANK

I didn't punch him, Clyde. He slipped.
He was knocked out. He doesn't even
know what happened.

(CONTINUED)

CLYDE
Didn't anyone see it?

FRANK
Everyone except Norman.
Clyde, I'm telling you, there was
nothin' to see.

CLYDE
Norman thinks there was.
What about Ali?

FRANK
What **about** her?

Clyde has "I see" written all over his face.

FRANK
No way.
She'd go along with Norman.
She couldn't see straight.

Frank ponders that last observation for a long time.

CLYDE
Maybe there's someone at the
bowling alley.

Frank nods, but he doesn't look too hopeful as he watches Clyde leave.

CUT TO:

INT - ALI'S BEDROOM

Ali's wedding dress is layed out on her bed. She's in her bathrobe, sitting at her vanity, trying to insert contact lenses. It's obviously new to her. She can't get to her eyes with her glases on, and she can't see them with her glasses off. She tries several different manuevers, each one more clumsy than the last. Finally she gets them in. Her eyes are watering uncontrollably. There's a knock at the door, and Viola pokes her head in. She's all ready for the wedding.

VIOLA
How's my little girl doing?

ALI
Momma. Can you do my face?
I can't even find it.

Viola pulls up a chair, takes a Kleenex and wipes Ali's face.

(CONTINUED)

VIOLA
I was hoping we could have
a little talk.

ALI
(totally embarrassed)
Oh, motherrrrr. We really don't
need to talk about anything.
I'm marrying Norman, after all.
(She giggles)

Viola's putting eye shadow on Ali. She stops.

VIOLA
Honey, that's what I wanted to
talk with you about.

They look at each other for a moment.

VIOLA
Why didn't you tell me about
Frank?

ALI
Tell you what, Mother. I don't
know what you mean?

VIOLA
His parole officer was here.

Ali's eyes widen with shock, while Viola daydreams about Clyde for a moment.

VIOLA
A very nice man. (BEAT)
He told me that you'd been
writing to Frank while he was
incarcerated.

ALI
In jail, Mother. He was in jail.
Don't glorify him like I did.

VIOLA
Why did you feel you had to keep it
secret?

ALI
WHY IS EVERYONE SO WORRIED ABOUT
MY SECRETS?

There's another pregnant pause.

(CONTINUED)

ALI
 Momma. It was just the stupidest
 thing I've ever done, and I want to
 forget all about it.

Viola can tell it's a touchy subject. She takes a deep breath and starts
 putting mascara on one of Ali's eyes.

VIOLA
 Why do you think it was a stupid
 thing to do? So, he's a gambler.
 A little rough around the edges.
 So what? You obviously helped him
 through a very difficult time, and he's
 grateful to you for it.

ALI
 Well, he almost broke up Norman and
 me. That's a strange form of gratitude.

VIOLA
 Maybe it wasn't gratitude.

Ali is getting lovelier by the minute. She looks at her mother and thinks
 about it for a minute.

ALI
 Mother. I can't bear to be near him.
 He makes me feel sick in my stomach.
 Like on the Whip at the amusement park
 when I was a litte girl.

Viola smiles with that knowing expression only a mother can possess.

VIOLA
 You loved the Whip.
 BEAT You screamed yourself blue in
 the face, and then you demanded to
 go again. Five or six times.

ALI
 (after several BEATS)
 I grew up, Momma.

Viola finishes putting mascara on the other eye.

VIOLA
 Frank may be in trouble.
 He violated his parole just to see
 you. Did you know that?

(CONTINUED)

ALI
I'm not responsible for his
recklessness.

The doorbell rings. Viola goes downstairs to answer it.

INT - THE FRONT DOOR

Viola opens it and finds Clyde Morgan.

CLYDE
I'm so sorry to bother you again, ma'am.

Viola does not look one bit bothered. She motions him in.

VIOLA
Did you find him?

CLYDE
No, ma'am, but I'm sorry to say
the New Jersey highway patrol did.
It seems your daughter's the
only one who may be able to
straighten this thing out.

Then he seems to notice her attire.

CLYDE
You look real nice, ma'am. I hope
I didn't come at a bad time.

Viola's tickled to death about the compliment.

VIOLA
Oh, thank you! (BEAT) It's really
not my usual style, but I thought,
"why not." You never know until--

CLYDE
'Scuse me, Ma'am, but there isn't
much time, I'm afraid. Do you think
I could speak with her?

CUT TO:

EXT - THE ORTNER BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

It's all set for the nuptials, with two very small sections of white garden chairs decked with streamers and flowers. The Muntzleman menagerie has arrived, and they're taking their seats amongst the other guests.

(CONTINUED)

MR. MUNTZLEMAN

looks like Colonel Sanders in his white suit, and

MRS. MUNTZLEMAN

looks like she dressed to go to a formal square-dance.

ROSEMARY

has been dressed in an outfit befitting a five-year-old, and apparently needs desperately to go the bathroom. She's walking around, holding herself.

MAMAW

is grumbling about something.

MORTON MUNTZLEMAN

seems very annoyed with

LOIS MUNTZLEMAN

who has already taken a tray of food and is eating from her lap, licking her fingers.

NORMAN

is pacing nervously, looking at his watch.

VIOLA

is busy greeting the guests, but seems preoccupied by her daughter's absence. Finally

ALI

comes storming into the yard in her gown and marches up to Norman. Everyone is watching.

ALI
How could you do such a horrible
thing?

(CONTINUED)

NORMAN
(whispering)
Ali, shhh. Calm down. What are
you talking about?

ALI
You know perfectly well what I'm
talking about. You told the police
that Frank knocked you out, and he
could very well lose his parole
because of it.

NORMAN
Well he **did**, didn't he? I was
just doing my civic duty, Ali.

ALI
He did not!

Ali is furious. She heads around the house toward the driveway, tripping
over her dress and trying to hold on to her veil.

NORMAN
(confused, to himself)
He didn't?

Norman runs after Ali. The guests are agog.

EXT - THE ORTNER FRONT YARD - AFTERNOON

NORMAN
Where are you going?

ALI
I'm going to talk to the police.

NORMAN
YOU CAN'T DO THAT. We're getting
married.

Ali's already starting up the Rambler. She yells out the window.

ALI
Bite a rock, Norman.

Norman gets into his own car and follows her.

(CONTINUED)

Frank Sinatra is singing "Summer Wind" as we

INTERCUT:

ALI IN THE RAMBLER ON THE PARKWAY

NORMAN IN HIS CAR, trying to follow her

ALI GETTING IN LINE TO PAY A TOLL

NORMAN GETTING IN AN "EXACT CHANGE" LANE TO PAY A TOLL

ALI LEAVING THE TOLL BOOTH

NORMAN STILL STUCK AT THE TOLL BOOTH, without the exact change

ALI MAKING A TURN OFF

NORMAN APPARENTLY LOST, looking at the signs with confusion

CUT TO:

INT - NEW JERSEY POLICE STATION

Ali storms in in her wedding gown, getting all kinds of strange looks from all the cops, bums, prostitutes, etc. She walks up to an officer behind a desk.

ALI
I need to see the judge.

OFFICER #1
This isn't a courthouse, lady.
That's the building behind.

ALI
I need to see a prisoner.

OFFICER #1
A judge or a prisoner, lady?
Make up your mind.

Another officer looks up at the girl in the wedding gown and shakes his head.

(CONTINUED)

OFFICER #2

Maybe she wants to use a judge
to marry a prisoner.

ALI

PLEASE. It's very important.
There's a grave injustice in
progress.

OFFICER #2

One-Adam-twelve. See the
lady. We've got a grave injustice
in progress. One-Adam-twelve.

OFFICER #1

Give her a break, Harry.
Listen, Lady. If you don't calm
down, we can't help you. Now, let me
guess. You're here to file a missing
persons report on some guy who was
supposed to meet you at the altar.
I hate to tell you this, but it happens
all the time. Nothing we can do about it.

OFFICER #2

Grave injustice. Cold feet. Same
story, no matter what you call it.

ALI

PLEASE. Just tell me if Frank Scappelli
is here. I've got to see him.

Officer #1 scans the books.

OFFICER #1

Scappelli....Scappelli.....Scappelli...
Yup. We've got him. Reckless driving.
And possible assault.
Looks like he's got a
hearing tomorrow morning.
You want I should give him a message?

ALI

Can't I see him?

OFFICER #1

Sorry, Lady. No visiting hours today.
You can wave to him in the courtroom
tomorrow if you like.

ALI

But, he needs me as a witness.

(CONTINUED)

OFFICER #1
Don't make any difference.
You still can't see him until
tomorrow.

A DRUNK

has been watching all this.

DRUNK
What a shame! After she got all dressed
up.

OFFICER #1
You can wait if you like.

CUT TO:

EXT - SOMEWHERE IN NEW JERSEY - MORNING

Norman is driving aimlessly, obviously lost. Steam starts coming up from under his hood. He pulls over. Then there's a small explosion and his engine dies. He gets out, opens his hood and slams his fist on the engine. The radiator blows. He jumps back, cursing his luck. Cars are honking at him. He's about to give up when he notices a

SHINY NEW HEARSE

pulling up beside him. The driver is an strangely attractive young woman. She looks at Norman and smiles. Her window rolls down automatically. Norman stares.

WOMAN
Would you like a ride somewhere?

CUT TO:

INT - NEW JERSEY POLICE STATION

where Ali has obviously spent the night. She's tossing and turning in one of the wooden chairs up against the wall. Her makeup is completely smeared and her dressed incredibly rumpled.

BEHIND THE COUNTER

Officer #1 is talking with Clyde Morgan. They're pointing at

(CONTINUED)

ALI

who yawns and opens her eyes, startled at first. Then she remembers where she is. Clyde Morgan walks over to her.

CLYDE
Miss Ortner?

ALI
Huh?

CLYDE
I'm sure Frank's going to be
right happy to see your face today.
Come on, ma'am. Let's see if we
can straighten this out with the
judge.

They head down a hallway.

ALI
You're his parole officer, aren't you?
Can't you get him out of this?

CLYDE
No, I don't think it would be a good
idea to bring that up today.

CUT TO:

THE HEARSE -- DRIVING THROUGH TOWN

Norman is sitting up in the front seat with the woman. She's very unusual. Her hair is a wild bird's nest, but her face is quite soft and pretty. Her eyes seem to stare into nowhere, even though she's looking at Norman. She has a heavy Jersey accent.

BETH
I'm Elizabeth. But everyone calls
me Beth.

NORMAN
Norman.

Norman looks behind him to see if the back compartment is occupied.

NORMAN
Are we alone?

(CONTINUED)

BETH
It's my father's car. He's an undertaker.
He lets me borrow it on weekends.
What happened to you? You look like
death.

Norman checks out the rest of the hearse.

NORMAN
And you ought to know, huh?

Beth shakes her head like "here we go again."

BETH
I've heard all the death jokes,
you know. In school they called me
Beth Death. That can really kill your
self image.

They both realize her unintentional pun and crack up.
Norman thinks for a second, then he shakes his head, exhausted.

NORMAN
I get a lot of those jokes, too.

BETH
(softly)
Yea? Why would anyone make jokes
about you?

CUT TO:

INT - COURTROOM

where Frank is seated beside a bailiff and a court stenographer, facing a
female judge.

ALI AND CLYDE

appear in the doorway.

FRANK

sees Ali's face and smiles. Then he sees her dress and his smile
disappears.

JUDGE
Would everyone please have a seat?

Ali and Clyde sit down with Frank.

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE
Mr. Scappelli.

FRANK
Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE
Mr. Scappelli, were you at
the Lickity Split Bowling Alley,
lane number seven on the night of the fifth?

FRANK
Yes, Your Honor, I was at the
the Lickity Split Bowling Alley.

JUDGE
Lane number seven?

ALI
Your Honor. I was at the Lickity
Split Bowling Alley, too.

Everyone looks at the girl in the gown.

JUDGE
(rolling her eyes)
Lane number seven?

ALI
I can explain everything.

JUDGE
Your name is....

ALI
My name is Ali.....Ali Ortnen.

Frank's happy to hear her last name is unchanged.

STENOGRAPHER
Is that "Alley", A-L-L-E-Y?

Ali can't hold it in anymore.

ALI
Frank was living at my house because
the Captain had moved out, and because
everything was broken, and, you see,
Norman and I were getting married,
and so we went **bowling** with
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ALI (CONT'D)

Frank and the lady who sold me my flatware. I got the Chantilly. Frank helped me pick it out, because Norman was working on his gravestones at work. And I was very upset because, because well, I really don't know why I was so upset, but I was very upset and I had too much to drink and I started talking about **the letters** right in front of Norman. And then Frank...well, Frank. He, he, he, he **kissed** me right in front of Norman, who was already very upset about all the singing and everthing. And so Norman, I'm sure he didn't mean to hurt anyone, but it was **Norman** who tried to punch Frank. And Frank just sort of **held up his hands** and Norman slipped on the beer, which I spilled. So I told Frank to leave, and Norman said he didn't want to marry me because I didn't tell him about the letters. **I COULDN'T TELL HIM**, you know? I just couldn't. But anyway Norman and I made up, but I didn't know he was going to try to get Frank in trouble. I just can't believe he would do such a thing. Can you?

THE JUDGE

just sits there speechless, along with everyone else.

FRANK

smiles at her, marvelling.

JUDGE

Please. Calm down, Miss Ortner.

ALI

Your Honor. Frank didn't assault Norman Norman assaulted Frank. And it's all because of the letters.

JUDGE

What letters?

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Your Honor. Ali was kind enough to write to me while I was in jail. I put an ad in the paper, and she answered it. If it weren't for her I don't think I ever would've gotten out.

CLYDE

winces at the mention of jail.

THE JUDGE

looks at Ali looking at Frank, and then looks down at a file in front of her and reads through it.

CUT TO:

EXT - THE FRONT OF THE JAILHOUSE - MORNING

The hearse pulls up. Norman gets out, waves a fond goodbye to Beth. She peels out like she was driving a Maserati. Norman sighs.

INT - THE JAILHOUSE

Norman waddles into the very room where Ali spent the night, still in his now very crumpled formal attire. He goes up to the desk.

OFFICER #2

Let me guess. You want to see a judge and/or a prisoner and there's a grave injustice in progress, right?

NORMAN

I'm looking for a girl in a wedding gown.

OFFICER #1

I never would've guessed.

The two officers laugh at Norman, who's getting very upset.

OFFICER #1

Down the hall, to your left. Room 112. It says "grave injustice" on the door. Can't miss it.

CUT TO:

INT - COURTROOM

JUDGE

Mr. Scappelli.
To be frank with you, Mr. Scappelli,
I'm still a just a little bit confused.
I can't say that I understood one word
Miss Ortner said on your behalf, and I really--

ALI

I'll can explain it again--

JUDGE

Please don't.

Norman enters the room to everyone's surprise. He's an emotional and physical wreck.

NORMAN

Your Highness, may I approach the
bench?

JUDGE

There is no bench. (BEAT)
You're Mr. Muntzleman, I presume.
And you were at the bowling alley
in lane number seven on the fifth.

NORMAN

Lane number seven. Yes, Your Highness.

JUDGE

Your Honor.

NORMAN

My what?

JUDGE

Mr. Muntzleman, are you capable
of explaining the charge you've
filed against Mr. Scappelli?

NORMAN

He didn't hit me.

Ali and Frank are relieved.

JUDGE

Did someone else in lane number seven
hit you?

(CONTINUED)

Norman hangs his head.

NORMAN

No. It just felt like it, I guess.

The judge closes the file.

JUDGE

Mr. Muntzleman, I'm going to fine you twenty-five dollars for falsifying a charge. Mr. Scappelli, I trust that you will attend to your speeding ticket promptly, and that you will in the future abide by the legal limit. Miss Ortner, I have no jurisdiction over you, and you have obviously committed no crime, but may I, as a concerned citizen and a sympathetic human being, recommend that you get your SHIT together.

(she gets up)

And may I suggest to all of you that you select a luckier lane than number seven the next time you decide to go bowling together. Case dismissed.

Clyde goes over to Frank and gives him a slap shake.

FRANK

(under his breath)

Don't say it. I'm leaving today.

Everyone leaves except the bride, the groom and the ex-con. Ali looks at Norman with a combination of gratitude and guilt and then goes over to give Frank a hug. Once he has her, he lifts her up and twirls her around in her wedding dress. Then he sets her down and just looks at her. She looks very embarrassed all of a sudden.

Norman watches them, already somewhat resigned.

FRANK

Thank you, Ali.

ALI

You don't have to thank me.

FRANK

You didn't have to come down here.

ALI

I'm just glad you didn't get sent back to jail.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK
I thought you liked me in jail.

ALI
Well, I---I'm just glad everything
turned out alright.

FRANK
Yea. Me too. (BEAT) You look nice.
You're not wearing your glasses?

ALI
I got contact lenses.

FRANK
You look beautiful.

She looks embarrassed. And beautiful.

ALI
Well. Momma must be worried
sick about me.

FRANK
How is she?

ALI
Oh. Fine. Thanks.

FRANK
Everything working okay still?

ALI
Yes. Everything's great.

FRANK
Good. Glad I could help.

ALI
Where will you go now?

FRANK
Back to New York. Start spreadin'
the news. I'm not taking any more
chances.

She nods her head. He kisses her cheek.

ALI
Well. Goodbye.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Goodbye.

They start to walk out, but they both have to walk out the same way, so they do, each feeling a little foolish for having already said goodbye. Frank laughs. Ali looks at her feet and smiles.

EXT - JAILHOUSE - AFTERNOON

They walk very slowly down the steps and to the

EXT - PARKING LOT

They both just stand there for a moment.

FRANK

goes over to his motorcycle and swings one leg over.

ALI

goes over to the Rambler. They look at each other.

FRANK

(yelling to her)

If I send you my address, will
you write?

ALI

nods her head. She opens the car door and is about to get in. She looks at Frank one more time.

CUT TO:

EXT - JAILHOUSE

A forlorn Norman is walking out. Then something ahead catches his eye.

NORMAN'S P.O.V.

Beth Death has pulled her hearse up to the curb. She's waiting, leaning against the car seductively.

BACK TO NORMAN

making a beeline for the hearse, straightening his tie and tails on the way.

(CONTINUED)

BACK TO FRANK AND ALI

He's sitting on the motorcycle, patting the seat behind him, motioning for her to get on.

ALI

shakes her head, still smiling.

FRANK

pats the seat again.

ALI
You'll go too fast.

FRANK
I'll go slower.

ALI

thinks about it.

ALI
Promise?

FRANK
I promise! Come on!

She gets on the back of the bike. He takes her arms and wraps them around his waist. He starts the bike. Then he peels out of the parking lot with a lurch. Ali's gown flies out in the wind.

FRANK AND ALI

from a distance. A man in a leather jacket and a girl in a wedding dress barrelling down the roadway, passing one car after another. We can't see their faces, but we can hear their voices, screaming over the wind.

ALI
YOU PROMISED.

FRANK
YOU LOVE IT.

Frank Sinatra is singing "How Little We Know" as we

FADE OUT