

CAN YOU EVER FORGIVE ME?

Screenplay by

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1 INT. NEW YORK CITY PRE-WAR APARTMENT - NIGHT 1

Mostly darkness in the small apartment, a few table lamps illuminating a comfortable, crowded well worn space. On one shelf, souvenirs from a past life: a framed NY Times Best Seller list from 1980 with *Kilgallen* by Lee Israel highlighted in the number 15 spot. Five or six copies of this book, and a similar number of *Miss Tallulah Bankhead* (also by Lee) and many more of *Estee Lauder* by Lee Israel line a shelf. It's a bit of a trophy case.

Across the room, a well worn cat tree sits in the corner, piles of New Yorkers, and LEE ISREAL, around 50 and not trying very hard, is asleep in her clothes on the couch. A Blossom Dearie record spins on the record player, a cat snoozes in her lap. Both snore. An alarm beeps on Lee's casio digital watch. Finally, she rouses. She looks down at her watch which reads 10pm, and stops the alarm.

She moves to the kitchen, responding slightly to the music. We imagine she may be getting ready for bed. She puts her a plate in the sink, and returns. She downs her water from the table and puts the glass into her purse. She takes a bottle of scotch and also puts it into her purse. She turns off the light, but then the front door opens, hall-light pouring in, and we see Lee exit. The door slams shut.

2 INT. HIGH-RISE OFFICE BUILDING - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT 2

Nondescript cubicles and the nondescript people who are working in them. It is the graveyard shift and the YOUNG EMPLOYEES are proofreading and black-lining law documents.

The large room is eerily silent save for the scratching of pencils on paper and the sound of ICE CLINKING in a glass.

Lee is working as well, drinking a scotch on the rocks. She swirls it around absentmindedly as she works without enthusiasm.

TWO YOUNG WOMEN pass by her cubicle.

YOUNG WOMAN
(whispering)
Fucking kill me if I'm doing this at her age.

Lee hears, and waits til she can't see them.

LEE
I'll kill you now if you ask nicely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Embarrassed giggles. Swirling her glass of scotch, Lee works. Someone shouts from another cubicle, head barely visible

CUBICLE WORKER

You know we're not allowed to eat or
drink in here!

ANOTHER CUBICLE WORKER

(after a beat)

Yeah.

Lee ignores them. The first cubical worker tries to peer over to Lee.

CUBICLE WORKER

Hello?

LEE

Fascist.

A THIRD WORKER (O.S.)

Alcoholic.

Some laughter. Lee goes back to her work, tries to concentrate. She can't.

LEE

(beat)

Why do you give a crap?

CUBICLE WORKER

Because the sound of the ice is driving
me *insane*.

MANY VOICES

Me too! It's making me crazy!

LEE

Oh, fuck off.

She drinks, making as much ice noise as possible.

TALL MAN

What did you say?

LEE

I believe I said fuck off.

A tall MAN, 30, appears at her cubicle.

TALL MAN

I'm your boss. Pack up.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: (2)

2

LEE

I'm almost through with this document.

TALL MAN

Now.

He takes the document and other papers from her desk and gestures for her to get up.

LEE

(quietly)

Please, I need this job.

He ignores her, watching as she puts her things into her canvas bag (including her glass and bottle of scotch). He walks behind her, ushering her out.

The young people in the cubicles watch with amusement as she goes. Breaking into loose applause.

3 INT. CORNER MARKET - VERY EARLY MORNING

3

Straight from the job, Lee puts her groceries up on the counter - cereal, peanut butter, a can of cat food. On the small black and white TV a program with garishly wealthy characters is playing. The CASHIER, 60s Asian woman, is skeptical.

CASHIER

(she knows her)

How much have you got?

LEE

(fishing in her pocket)

Enough.

CASHIER

Show me first.

Lee counts out her disappointing amount of cash.

LEE

Okay, just this.

She separates the cereal and cat food and pays for them.

CASHIER

Put this other stuff back!

Lee walks out.

- 4 INT. LEE'S UPPER WEST SIDE APARTMENT - MORNING 4
- Lee opens the cat food and places it in front of her cat JERSEY, who's not interested.
- LEE
Since when did you become picky.
- She puts the cereal on the counter and walks through her cluttered apartment. Peeling paint, way too much stuff and years of stacked up New Yorker magazines. The small one bedroom apartment hasn't been updated in at least 20 years: paint is chipping, furniture is worn and scratched by multiple cats, even the light bulbs need dusting. But you can tell it was once a well-loved little box of a home.
- The dining table is covered with papers and coffee cups and empty wine bottles, leaving little room for the manual typewriter and old computer.
- 5 INT. LEE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS 5
- A few dead flies lie on her pillow. Disgusted, she brushes them off and curls up to sleep in her clothes.
- 6 INT. LEE'S BATHROOM - EARLY EVENING 6
- Broken shower tiles, an old moldy curtain. In the medicine cabinet mirror, Lee smooths down her hair and applies lipstick.
- She notices the litter box in the corner is in unused, pristine condition.
- 7 OMITTED 7
- 8 EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - EARLY EVENING 8
- Lee approaches the 1 train entrance at 86th street and descends the stairs.
- 9 EXT. APT BUILDING - EARLY EVENING 9
- Shivering from the cold, she treks down the New York street.
- 10 INT. LARGE APARTMENT - EVENING 10
- Lee has entered a noisy, stylish party. Forty or so festive members of the New York literary world cheerfully enjoy cocktails and conversation.

(CONTINUED)

She notices a COAT GUY taking jackets, but she walks past him in search of the bar.

Her host MARJORIE, 70 years old and sophisticated, sees her.

MARJORIE

Well, this is a surprise.

LEE

You invited me, did you not?

MARJORIE

You didn't reply.

LEE

(ignoring that)

A coat check? At *my* party we threw coats on a bed.

MARJORIE

Nice to see you too, Lee.

LEE

(beat)

You never call me back. I've got some new ideas.

MARJORIE

This is why you're here?

LEE

You don't know what I've been doing just to get by.

MARJORIE

Well, you're here now. Try to enjoy yourself, Lee.

Marjorie excuses herself.

ANGLE ON

The bar as Lee gratefully finds it.

She gets her drink and turns, walking through the crowd. She overhears a conversation between TOM CLANCY, 40 famous writer, and a crowd of eager followers.

(CONTINUED)

TOM CLANCY
I don't subscribe to the notion of
writers block.

FOLLOWER
You never experience it?

TOM CLANCY
Writers block is a term invented by the
writing community to justify their
laziness.

The crowd laughs.

TOM CLANCY (CONT'D)
My success is nothing more than that I
have the dedication and stamina to sit
and get the work done. It's simple.

FOLLOWER
Having Ronald Reagan talking about you
doesn't hurt.

TOM CLANCY
Well sure.

Lee passes the conversation, unimpressed.

LEE
(walking by)
Jackass.

FOLLOWER
Who's that?

Tom Clancy shrugs, and Lee wanders, not knowing anybody.
People hustle by her, having a good time.

SEVERAL YOUNG GUESTS are huddled together and Lee eavesdrops.

KAREN
You have to read them. As an American.

GUEST
Well, sure.

Lee looks around, landing on SEVERAL OLDER PEOPLE sitting on
couches, not talking to anybody.

They line the perimeter of the room, sipping their drinks.
They're old wallflowers.

11 INT. HALLWAY - EVENING 11

Lee walks down the hall that's decorated with framed photographs, book jackets, signed letters - it's Marjorie's professional Memory Lane.

She glances up to assess TWO FRAMED BOOK JACKETS. One is KILLGALLEN, by Lee Israel and the other is MISS TALLULAH BANKHEAD also by Lee.

Unhappy with their placement, she quickly swaps them out with a couple of frames that are closer to her eye line.

12 INT. MARJORIE'S POWDER ROOM - EVENING 12

Lee is snooping in the cabinet and finds a drawer filled with almost finished toilet paper rolls. A dozen of them at least. Weird.

She grabs the fullest one and drops it into her large bag. She takes the bar of guest soap as well.

13 INT. MARJORIE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS 13

She snakes her way through the party and makes it to the front door just as Marjorie stops her.

MARJORIE

That was quick. Did you get properly fed?

LEE

This week. Will you take my call?

MARJORIE

(condescendingly)

Sure. We'll see.

LEE

I have fascinating projects! I'm working on a lot of ideas - I just need my agent to call me back.

MARJORIE

(laughing to herself)

Well, nobody needs a new biography on Fanny Brice, Lee. We may disagree on what is considered fascinating.

She starts to walk away.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)

Good night Lee.

(CONTINUED)

LEE
(stopping her)
Why do you have mostly used toilet paper
rolls in the drawer of your bathroom?

MARJORIE
What?

LEE
I just can't figure it out.

MARJORIE
You went through my bathroom cabinets?

LEE
Just tell me. I'm curious.

MARJORIE
So that guests can have a full roll.

LEE
That's batshit, Marjorie.

MARJORIE
(to herself)
You would know...

At the coat check Lee points to a very sophisticated, long
wool coat.

LEE
Yeah, I lost the ticket, but that's the
one.

The coat check guy doesn't flinch, but hands it to her.

COAT CHECK GUY
Have a good night, ma'am.

Lee takes the beautiful coat with a smirk.

14 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

14

Lee sits on her couch, drinking scotch, with her new coat
slung over the couch. On the TV Lillian Hellman's black and
white film THE LITTLE FOXES plays. It's a scene Lee knows by
heart, but that doesn't stop her from enjoying every frame.

(CONTINUED)

Bette Davis is snuffing candles whilst quibbling with her brothers Charles Dingle and Carl Benton Reid. Lee loves this.

LEE

(along with the TV)

There are lots of things to consider.

After all, they are first cousins.

(then answering herself)

Well that isn't unusual. Our grandmother

and grandfather were first cousins.

(back again)

Yes and look at us!

She removes some appetizers from her purse, shoves one into her mouth and offers one to the cat.

LEE (CONT'D)

Jersey, here girl!

The cat wanders over but doesn't eat them. Lee is concerned.

Lee is at the counter, holding a cat carrier and talking to the assistant RACHEL.

RACHEL

You still have a balance, Ms. Israel.

LEE

But there's something wrong with her.

She's very old.

RACHEL

I'm sorry. The doctor told me to get at least half the balance before we do any tests.

LEE

Don't you take a Hippocratic oath or something? Don't you have to do something?

RACHEL

You owe us eighty two dollars.

Lee pulls some bills out of her back pocket.

LEE

Look, I've got - fourteen dollars.

RACHEL

I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

Lee walks out of the office.

LEE
Unbelievable.

16 EXT. CROSBY STREET BOOKSELLERS - DAY 16

Lee enters, wearing her stolen coat, carrying two heavy bags of books.

17 INT. CROSBY STREET BOOKSELLERS - DAY 17

GLEN, a 30 year old nerd and the used book buyer, glances briefly at Lee's pile of old books on the counter. There are CUSTOMERS waiting behind her.

GLEN

Just these.

LEE

That's it? I schlepped them all the way here.

GLEN

(dismissive)

I'll give you two dollars. I don't want the others.

He goes to the cash register to pay her.

LEE

Come on, man. I don't need much. I just don't want to carry them around.

(beat)

I've got a sick cat and I need the money. Please.

GLEN

(rude)

I told you I don't want the others. There's people waiting.

LEE

You don't have to be so disrespectful. You've actually carried *my* books here.

Glen turns to her, amused.

GLEN

And you are?

LEE

(irritated)

I'm Lee Israel.

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED:

17

GLEN

Oh, Ms. Israel. I do recognize you now.
In fact, your latest work is right over
there!

He points to a table of books with a sign "75 percent off."
Displayed is several copies of *Estee Lauder: Behind the
Magic*.

LEE

You rude little ape. What have you ever
written?

She turns to leave.

GLEN

Hey, get your garbage off my counter!

He pushes her books away from him and some fall onto the
floor. She scoops them up protectively.

18 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - ENTRYWAY - DAY

18

Lee enters her building, and upon seeing Andrei, 50s
Romanian, tries to turn around and go right back out, but he
calls out.

ANDREI

MS. ISRAEL!

LEE

Hi, Andrei.

ANDREI

I knock on your door but you never
answer. We're going on three months.

LEE

No, I know. I'm really sorry about that.
I'm working on it.

ANDREI

I don't want to have to call the
management.

LEE

Can you cut me a little slack? It's been
a rough patch. I just lost my job. I
think it was ageism.

ANDREI

Can't you write another book?

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED:

18

LEE

Last one was a bit of a calamity.

ANDREI

I like you, you've been here longer than I have, and you've always been kind to my mother. Just get it to me soon.

LEE

I will. Absolutely. Thank you.

Andrei start to walk away.

LEE (CONT'D)

But hey, in the meantime, do you think you could get an exterminator in my apartment? I've got an untenable fly situation.

19 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

19

Lee drinks coffee and reads the newspaper. She glances briefly at a framed letter on her wall. Reluctantly, she goes to it, takes it from the wall, examining it. It's a framed letter from Kathryn Hepburn. Lee sighs. She knows what she has to do, but she doesn't like it.

She takes the letter off the wall.

20 EXT. TWELVETREES BOOKSELLER - DAY

20

Lee walks down the street and enters a beautiful shop with First Edition Books and Framed Prints in the window.

21 INT. TWELVETREES BOOKSELLER - DAY

21

Inside the dark and cozy store, Lee stands before ANNA, 40, as she reads the Katherine Hepburn letter.

ANNA

(reading)

Lee, Today was to have been the Esquire shoot with Spence. Difficult days, these. Thank you for your sympathy and understanding.
Ever Yours, Kate.
P.S. Forgive the splotches. All tears lately.

(then)

Such a lovely apology.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ANNA (CONT'D)

This is very special. Why would you part with it?

LEE

(beat)

Clutter, you know. I'm not a very sentimental gal.

ANNA

(appreciatively)

Handwritten even. You're *the* Lee Israel?

LEE

Oh, Jesus. Is there another?

ANNA

I've read your biographies!

LEE

Have you?

ANNA

You're a wonderful writer.

LEE

Thank you. Can you remind my publisher?

ANNA

Working on anything new?

LEE

Besides my tan?

Anna smiles.

ANNA

So, how did this letter come about?

LEE

I wrote for some magazines a while ago - it was going to be a piece on her and Spencer Tracy - but then he died.

ANNA

Well, her letters usually have the intimacy of a phone book, but this one is really nice.

(beat)

How does one seventy five sound?

LEE

Sounds terrific.

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED: (2)

21

ANNA

If you ever are feeling sentimental, you
can come visit it!

22 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

22

She takes out a can of cat food and opens it.

LEE

I got you the good stuff, you old snob!

She puts it in a bowl on the floor, but the cat doesn't move.

LEE (CONT'D)

It's the fancy feast.

23 EXT. JULIUS' BAR - AFTERNOON

23

Jack enters.

24 INT. JULIUS' BAR - AFTERNOON

24

Lee sits drinking, headphones on.

Someone takes the seat near her but she doesn't look up. He's
about 50, queer and charming. He's JACK HOCK. He gets the
attention of CRAIG, the bartender.

JACK

Good afternoon, darling. Can I have a
beer?

CRAIG

Hi Jack, handsome, I don't know, can you?

Jack quickly pulls out a twenty and puts it on the bar. Craig
goes to get the beer. Jack recognizes Lee.

JACK

Lee Israel!?

Lee turns and then recoils, never liking to have to talk to
anyone. She struggles to pull out a name, taking off her
headphones reluctantly.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's Jack Hock! And the last time I saw
you we were both pleasantly pissed at a
horrible book party. Am I right?

(CONTINUED)

LEE

It's flooding back to me. You were friends with Julia -

JACK

Steinberg. She's not an agent anymore. She died.

LEE

She did? So young.

JACK

Or maybe she didn't die. Maybe she just moved to the suburbs - I always confuse those two. No, that's right. She got married and had twins.

LEE

Better to have died.

JACK

Indeed.

(excited)

I just came from having my teeth bleached. How do they look?

He smiles wide. His teeth are almost too white.

LEE

Why would you do that?

JACK

Teeth are a dead give-a-way.

LEE

Okay.

JACK

(beat)

Let me buy you a drink. Even though you're the posh writer.

He signals to the bartender.

LEE

Well, thank you. I'm trying to remember that party you mentioned. Something keeps flashing in my mind. Something that happened but I can't put my finger on it.

JACK

Bad shrimp?

(CONTINUED)

LEE
Jack Hock, you said?

JACK
That's me. The renegade, the rebel. Jack
Hock. Big cock.

He flashes his smile. Lee thinks.

LEE
It will come back to me.

JACK
I'll try not to be offended. We've been
shit faced drunk together more than once,
but...

LEE
My memory is shot. Don't take it
personally.

Craig drops a drink for Lee.

JACK
How has life been treating you?

LEE
I can actually boast that I've been
banned from Crosby Street Booksellers.

JACK
What did you do?

LEE
I did nothing. People are idiots.

JACK
(beat)
I'm banned from Duane Reade.
(beat)
All of them.

She glares at him.

JACK (CONT'D)
I have a little shoplifting problem.

Lee moves her bag to other side of her stool.

JACK (CONT'D)
All in the past. But for some reason I
have a very memorable mug.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JACK (CONT'D)

Now I have to take a bus just to buy
shampoo or aspirin or something.

(beat)

I'm joking. Duane Reade's not the only
rodeo in town.

LEE

(dawning on her)

You pissed in the closet!

JACK

I did what?

LEE

I remember now. Nobody could stop talking
about the handsome English gentleman-

JACK

Why thank you-

LEE

Who was so shit-faced he mistook the coat
closet for the can. You ruined thousands
of dollars worth of furs.

Jack is caught, unsure how this will go over.

JACK

Well, I-

But Lee loves this story.

LEE

Those old ninnies didn't know what had
hit them! Their disgusting furs, all
covered with piss. Dogs were following
them home. I laughed about that for
weeks.

Jack starts laughing along with Lee.

JACK

Well I'm glad somebody found it amusing.
(then)

A few folks stopped talking to me after
that night.

LEE

Fuck 'em.

JACK

Cheers.

(CONTINUED)

24 CONTINUED: (4)

24

They cheers.

LEE

So, do you work, Jack Hock?

JACK

This and that. Mostly that.

(beat)

I happen to have some very nice coke, if you're interested.

She looks at him, appalled.

JACK (CONT'D)

Jesus, it's not like I have it all the time. A boy's gotta do what a boy's gotta do.

(beat)

Anyways, who are you to judge? It's four in the afternoon and you're drunk.

LEE

I'm hardly drunk. And it's not "anyways," it's just "anyway."

JACK

Well keep drinking then. The day is young.

25 EXT. JULIUS' BAR - NIGHT

25

They come out and walk.

26 INT. SUBWAY - NIGHT

26

Lee and Jack ride the subway.

JACK
You get out the next stop?

LEE
(nodding)
79th. You?

JACK
I'll get out there. That works.

A beat.

JACK (CONT'D)
I think I saw you in Zabar's once. You
were shouting at someone.

LEE
Terrible customer service. Been going
there for years.

JACK
They have really good bread.

They both nod comfortably.

A27 EXT. GLEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A27

A MAN (Glen) comes out of an apartment building with an
adorable puppy and attaches it to a leash.

MAN
Come on, Coco. You're such a good girl.

Lee stares at him and taps Jack.

LEE
That's the guy - the guy from Crosby
Street Booksellers!

JACK
No!

They watch as he affectionately kisses his dog.

LEE
Who knew he was human.

JACK
You got a paper and pen?

(CONTINUED)

A27 CONTINUED:

A27

LEE

Why?

Lee reaches into her bag and gives him what he needs. He goes into the vestibule of the guy's building and looks to be copying names off the buzzer list.

27 EXT. UPPER WEST SIDE STREET - NIGHT

27

They approach Lee's building.

LEE

This is me.

JACK

Nice place?

LEE

It used to be nicer.

(beat)

And you?

(CONTINUED)

27 CONTINUED:

27

JACK
(vague)
Oh - a couple blocks up.

She reaches out to shake his hand.

LEE
Good-bye Jack. This was not unpleasant.

JACK
I'll see you tomorrow?

LEE
You shall.

She goes into the building.

28 INT. LEE'S LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

28

She goes inside and after a moment, turns to see him through the glass door, standing there, looking kind of lost. After a moment, he walks off.

29 OMITTED - (NOW SCENE A34)

29

30 EXT. FANCY TOWNHOUSE - DAY

30

Lee, dressed neatly, smooths down her hair and knocks on the door.

LISA, 20s, answers. She seems put off by Lee's appearance, let's her in.

Lisa leads Lee inside.

LEE

The employment agency said this was an executive assistant position.

LISA

Your name's Lee, right?

LEE

Ms. Israel, if you don't mind.

MS. WHITMAN, a wealthy, intimidating woman in her 30s emerges from upstairs.

MS. WHITMAN

We do first names here. This is Lisa. I'm Ms. Whitman.

They shake.

31 INT. MS. WHITMAN'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

31

In the enormous living room, Lee is holding a beige colored bra.

MS. WHITMAN

Go to Bendels on Fifth. There's two kinds, but both are under wire, 34B. One has lace on the sides and the other is plain. Get them in Apricot. It's new. If you can't find them ask Celeste, she'll help you. Buy four each. Bring that one with you just to make sure.

LEE

You know Town shop is just across 86th?

MS. WHITMAN

Doesn't matter. And don't take a cab. Take the bus or better yet, take the subway. It's faster.

Lisa enters.

(CONTINUED)

MS. WHITMAN (CONT'D)
Lisa, fill Lee in on some basics please.

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED: (2)

31

LISA

Hi.

LEE

So, what is your job?

MS. WHITMAN

That doesn't concern you. She does everything you *don't* do.

LEE

Of course.

32 INT. SUBWAY - DAY

32

Lee is sitting on the subway with a Bendels bag in her lap. She's reading a book about Fanny Brice.

A LITTLE GIRL (7 years old) is standing in front of her, staring at her. Lee tries to ignore her but eventually looks up at the kid. They stare at each other.

LITTLE GIRL

Are you a man?

LEE

Are you a gargoyle?

The STARTLED MOTHER yanks at her daughter's arm and pulls her away. Lee goes back to her book.

33 INT. MS. WHITMAN'S APARTMENT - CORRIDOR - SAME DAY

33

Lisa is showing Lee how to record things in a log book.

LISA

So you have to account for how you spend your time each day. If you make a phone call for her, write it here. If you make a phone call for yourself, write it there.

LEE

Is this for real?

LISA

What do you mean?

LEE

Everything I do, I write down?

LISA

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

LEE
Going to the bathroom?

LISA
Yes.
(beat)
You get paid at the end of each day, in cash.

LEE
Lovely.

Lisa goes to a drawer in the corridor and takes out two twenty dollar bills.

LISA
(off Lee's disappointed face)
Ms. Whitman pays what she thinks is fair, considering it's under the table.

A34 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE OF CROSBY STREET BOOKSELLERS - DAY

A34

Across the street, Lee stands in a phone booth as Jack hands her the sheet of paper from the night before, with the list of names from the buzzer. She puts in a quarter and dials.

As Lee speaks, they watch the front of the store.

LEE
(in thick Long Island accent)
Hello, I'm looking for the tall guy, the book buyer, Glen. Oh, hello, thank god! This is Lillian Schuster from the fourth floor. There's an emergency! The building's on fire. We're all outside! Oh my god it's horrible!... no, they're not letting us back in! You better come over and get your dog! I see flames coming out of your window right now! I think I hear the poor thing squealing!

They watch as Glen frantically trips out of the store and runs up the street. They crack up, gratified.

JACK
That was very enjoyable.

LEE
Thoroughly.

(CONTINUED)

A34 CONTINUED:

A34

JACK

You do such a good voice!

Lee reaches into her pocket.

LEE

I've got no jingle in my jeans. You got a token?

Put out, Jack looks through his change.

34 INT. VETERINARIAN'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

34

Lee sits with other PET OWNERS in the waiting room. A YOUNG GIRL is with her DOG.

YOUNG GIRL

(to a Lady with cat
carrier)

She's so cute!

WELL-DRESSED LADY

Unless she's shredding the side of my
sofa.

YOUNG GIRL

Oh, I guess that's not good.

OLD MAN

Cats. Not for me.

Lee leans over and pets the Old Man's OLD DOG.

LEE

He's a good boy, isn't he?

OLD MAN

The best.

WELL-DRESSED LADY

He looks sick.

(CONTINUED)

OLD MAN

Just needs a shot. He could use a bath
but he doesn't like it.

WELL-DRESSED LADY

Pearl here isn't going to like getting de-
clawed but it's going to happen anyway.

LEE

It's cruel to de-claw your cat.

WELL-DRESSED LADY

Excuse me?

LEE

It's like walking on glass for the rest
of their lives.

YOUNG GIRL

I haven't heard that.

WELL-DRESSED LADY

Well, tell that to my ten thousand dollar
Ligne Roset.

LEE

I would, except it's an *object*.

The receptionist, Rachel, calls out.

RACHEL

Jersey Israel?

Lee gets up and goes to the counter.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Hi, Ms. Israel. Are you're able to pay
for the tests?

LEE

That's why I'm here.

(beat)

You shouldn't de-claw.

RACHEL

Oh, it's harmless. Really.

Lee takes a deep breath.

Lee is writing a letter by hand for Ms. Whitman while she
dictates from her bed.

(CONTINUED)

35

CONTINUED:

35

MS. WHITMAN

The event was clearly a success and I couldn't have succeeded without you. Your help and advice have been very generous and -

LEE

Are you sure you want to use success two times?

MS. WHITMAN

Excuse me?

LEE

(reading)

'Clearly a success and succeeded.'

MS. WHITMAN

I'm sorry, did I ask you for advice?

LEE

I just thought -

MS. WHITMAN

I have a Masters degree in English, Lee.

LEE

And I'm a published author, Ms. Whitman.

Whitman sighs deeply, thinking she's being mocked.

MS. WHITMAN

Can we continue, please?

LEE

Of course.

MS. WHITMAN

Now I lost my train of thought.

36

INT. MS. WHITMAN'S LIBRARY - LATER THAT DAY

36

Lee is at the large bookshelf organizing and dusting the books. Surprised, she finds her own book MISS TALLULAH BANKHEAD, and pulls it out.

Lisa enters the room.

LISA

Ms. Whitman doesn't like anyone touching the books.

(CONTINUED)

LEE

How can I possibly organize and clean them if I cannot touch them?

LISA

I mean, you know what I mean.

Ms. Whitman enters.

MS. WHITMAN

Lee, I need you to balance Natalie's checkbook.

LEE

Your teenager.

MS. WHITMAN

Yes, I've opened an account for her. She needs to learn responsibility.

LEE

By *me* balancing her checkbook?

Ms. Whitman looks at her, coldly considering her.

MS. WHITMAN

If you want to borrow a book, simply ask before handling it.

LEE

I mentioned that I was a published author. *This* is my book.

Ms. Whitman inhales.

MS. WHITMAN

I get the sense you're not very happy here.

LEE

I'm giddy.

MS. WHITMAN

You're sarcastic and impolite.

(beat, leaving)

You'll be paid for your time here.

LEE

If you can call it pay.

Lisa hands Lee two twenties and then slams the door.

38 INT. FANCY TOWNHOUSE - DAY 38

Ms. Whitman is holding the Tallulah Bankhead book, looking with shock at Lee's photo on the back.

39 INT. MS. WHITMAN'S APARTMENT - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS 39

Lisa silently reads Lee's log, mouth agape.

1:45 - 1:48. Took a dump and scratched my cunt.

3:22 - 3:26. Got fired.

3:27-3:28 Took another dump. Forgot to flush. Oops.

40 INT. JULIUS' BAR - AFTERNOON 40

Lee enters the bar, looks around, and sees Jack a few stools away. She sits away from him.

JACK

I rang you and you didn't ring me back.
Should I take it personally?

LEE

Why wouldn't you?

JACK

I'd never get out of bed.

LEE

And lucky for me, you did.

She's somewhat entertained by him, in spite of herself.

JACK

I'm coming to sit next to you because I'm not very good at social cues.

He moves next to her and Lee speaks to Craig, the bartender.

LEE

Scotch, water, Craig. And I'll buy his next one.

CRAIG

You got it.

JACK

Oh, things are looking up!

LEE

Got shit-canned again.

(CONTINUED)

40 CONTINUED:

40

JACK

That is *exactly* the reason I don't get a job.

(beat)

You're a successful writer. Aren't you writing a book?

LEE

On Fanny Brice.

JACK

Who?

LEE

Just the greatest vaudeville comedian of her time. You sure you're a fag?

A41 EXT. LINCOLN CENTER LIBRARY - DAY

A41

Lee crosses into the large library.

41 INT. LINCOLN CENTER LIBRARY - DAY

41

The table is covered with articles and books. Lee is taking notes on a pad.

She separates some papers and finds TWO TYPED LETTERS SIGNED BY FANNY BRICE. Her eyes widen.

She looks around - to let someone know the letters don't belong here - and then she changes her mind.

She reads them with a kind of secret thrill.

She glances around the room, relieved that no one is looking her way. Quickly, she drops the letters into her canvas bag.

42 INT. TWELVETREES BOOKSELLER - DAY

42

Anna greets Lee as she enters the shop.

ANNA

Oh, hi Lee. Nice to see you again.

LEE

You as well.

ANNA

How've you been?

(CONTINUED)

LEE

Well, I've discovered that my cousin
Sydney was in possession of this
delightful *bonne bouche*. I thought you
might be interested in it.

She hands her one of the Fanny Brice letters, protected in
plastic.

ANNA

Fanny Brice. One of my favorites.

LEE

(finally!)

I've been working on a new biography on
her.

ANNA

What a funny coincidence then, that your
cousin had this!

(beat)

Well, she's *much* more your style than
Estee Lauder.

LEE

Right? Thank you.

ANNA

Didn't she say "Wrong is for other
people."? I love that.

LEE

(impressed)

She did.

Anna smiles and looks to the letter.

LEE (CONT'D)

Well, what do you think?

ANNA

I believe I could sell this.

(beat)

I could offer you seventy five.

LEE

(disappointed)

Oh.

ANNA

I could pay more for better content. It's
a bit bland, is all.

(CONTINUED)

LEE
(glancing at the letter)
True.

Anna goes to write a check.

LEE (CONT'D)
Would you be able to pay cash?

ANNA
Let me see if I have enough.
(she checks a drawer)
I'm glad to hear you're writing another
book! I'll be the first to buy it. Did
you hear Tom Clancy is going to get paid
3 million dollars to write more right-
wing macho bullshit? What is the state of
the literary world?

LEE
Are you kidding me? That blowhard is
getting paid three million dollars?

Anna is taken aback by Lee's reaction.

LEE (CONT'D)
Everyone thinks they can be a writer, I
guess. Oh to be a white male, who doesn't
know he's full of crap, huh?

ANNA
Oh - I totally agree. Why do we celebrate
the famous over the actual great writers
of our day? The culture is dying.

Lee is struck by how Anna is saying exactly what she feels.

LEE
My sentiments exactly.

ANNA
(beat)
I've tried to write a little. Short
stories. And I know better than to
presume they're any good.
(beat)
I can't believe I just admitted that! I'm
sure they're terrible.

(CONTINUED)

42 CONTINUED: (3)

42

LEE
Maybe they are, maybe they're not.
(beat)
Let me take a look.

ANNA
Really?

LEE
I'll be honest.

ANNA
Unfortunately, I believe you!

43 INT. MARJORIE'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

43

Lee barges into Marjorie's office, leaving the door open.

LEE
I hear they got Tom Clancy three million
dollars to write some more red-baiting
propaganda?

MARJORIE
Lee - I've had too long a morning already
for this.

LEE
He's a fraud.

MARJORIE
What is your point?

LEE
He was drinking sherry at your party. No
self-respecting writer would drink
sherry.

MARJORIE
Oh lord, Lee.

LEE
I need an advance for my Fanny Brice
book. I need you to get me ten thousand
dollars. I am months behind in my rent
and my cat is sick and isn't that why I
have an agent?

MARJORIE
(losing her cool)
I can't get you an advance like that,
Lee. I just can't.

(CONTINUED)

LEE

Give me one reason why that cocky shit would get three million dollars and you can't get me ten thousand? Are you that bad of an agent?

MARJORIE

(calling to her assistant
in the adjoining room)

Toni, can you please close the door? Ms. Israel and I have some sensitive business to discuss.

The door closes behind Lee.

LEE

I'd hate for her to hear a grown up conversation.

MARJORIE

I'll give you three reasons. Number one Tom Clancy's famous.

LEE

Well here we go.

MARJORIE

I can't get an advance for you because nobody has ever heard of you- you've written some successful biographies, sure, and you disappeared behind your subjects, but that means nobody knows who you are!

LEE

Because I did my job!

MARJORIE

Number two - Tom Clancy goes on every radio show, on Larry King, to every book signing and he plays the game, he hobnobs. Meanwhile, you've burned every bridge I've made for you. You're impossible to work with and everybody knows it.

LEE

See, this feels beside the point. If I'm a good writer-

MARJORIE

Number three- nobody wants a book about Fanny Brice.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MARJORIE (CONT'D)

There's nothing new and sexy about Fanny Brice. Nobody will give you a ten DOLLAR advance for a book about Fanny Brice!

Lee is shocked, but also kind of impressed. She sits.

LEE

I had a book on the New York Times best seller list. That has to count for something.

MARJORIE

I've known you a long time, Lee. It hurts me to have to say this all to you.

LEE

Tell me what to do, then, Marjorie. I have to do something. I will take anything! Magazine pieces, crackerbox copy. I'm not trying to get rich here, I'm just trying to survive.

MARJORIE

The way I see it you have two options- either you become a nicer person, who gets along with others. You put on a clean shirt, you stop drinking, you say "please" and "thank you"-

LEE

Oh you've got to be fucking kidding me-

MARJORIE

Which doesn't seem like it's going to happen. OR - you take the time to become a name that people know, and then maybe, maybe I will be able to get you paid again.

LEE

How the hell am I supposed to do that? I'm a 51 year old woman who likes cats more than people. That's not "hot and sexy", as you'd say.

MARJORIE

Write your book. Something for you, in your voice.

LEE

(scoffing)

Well-

(CONTINUED)

MARJORIE

You've been saying you were going to do it for ten years.

LEE

Well, I would love to, that sounds delightful Marjorie, but I need money yesterday. I have to pay my bills. We don't all have ex-husbands who left us a classic six on the park.

Marjorie shakes her head, offended and exhausted.

MARJORIE

You can be an asshole if you're famous. You can't be unknown and be such a bitch, Lee.

(then)

Nobody is going to pay for the writer Lee Israel right now. So I suggest you find another way to make your living.

Lee thinks about this.

44 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

44

Lee sits in front of her typewriter. She stares at the blank page, contemplating. She types: "This is me sitting down to fucking write". And stops. She glances at the other Fanny Brice letter sitting nearby, taunting her.

She picks up the Fanny Brice letter and compares the typeface. It matches.

She zips the sheet from the typewriter and rolls the Fanny Brice letter into it. She scrolls down and adds a P.S.

P.S. I have a new Grandkid, and he got my old nose. Do I have to leave him an extra something for repairs?

She smiles, and then heartily laughs to herself. It's a good joke.

45 INT. TWELVETREES BOOKSELLER - DAY

45

Anna and Lee are sitting in the back of the store. Anna is laughing, reading the letter. She's not aware of Lee's anxiety.

ANNA

Who writes like that? Only Fanny Brice, right?

(CONTINUED)

LEE
(pleased with herself)
It's a good one, isn't it?

ANNA
Oh, my father would enjoy this. He
relished a good self-depreciating joke.
(beat)
This was his store.

LEE
Oh?

ANNA
For forty years. He passed away.

LEE
And now it's yours.

ANNA
Yup. I kind of grew up in here.

LEE
It's very beautiful.

ANNA
A few of the shops are hanging on. But
Barnes and Noble is killing us. It's
probably good he's not around to see it.
He hated chain stores. His customers were
very loyal, though. They would sit right
here and drink scotch together.

She reaches into a drawer and removes a bottle of scotch.
Then runs off and returns with two glasses.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Yes?

LEE
Indeed.

Anna pours and they toast.

ANNA
I can definitely sell this one for a lot
more. I mean, the P.S. makes it
priceless!
(beat)
How's three fifty?

46 INT. VETERINARIAN'S OFFICE - DAY 46

Rachel has laid out three bottles of prescription pills in front of Lee.

RACHEL

One of each, two times a day, in her food. The infection will probably go away in a day or two, but keep giving her the pills, they'll help stabilize her.

47 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT 47

Lee is handing Andrei cash in his doorway.

ANDREI

Keep it coming, Ms. Israel. I don't want to be the bad guy.

LEE

And here. Your mother needed milk.

She gives Andrei a grocery bag. Adina appears.

ADINA

Thank you, Ms. Israel.

LEE

You're very welcome. Your hair looks good today.

ADINA

Oh, no.

ANDREI

You still having insect problems?

LEE

It's awful. Dead flies everywhere!

ANDREI

I'm going to take care of it.

48 INT. JULIUS' BAR - NIGHT 48

Lee and Jack are drunk, spending the last of her earnings.

JACK

So what did you do this time?

(off her confusion)

I'm assuming you got sacked from yet another tedious job? Is that not why we are drinking?

(CONTINUED)

LEE
This is a celebratory session of
drinking, not a wallowing one.

JACK
It's hard to tell the difference with
you. No offense.

Lee smirks.

LEE
I've figured out a way to pay my bills
without shovelling shit. It's a good
feeling.

JACK
Well, chin-chin!
(he lifts his glass)
You going to tell me how?

Lee smiles to herself.

LEE
You'd be too scandalized.

JACK
Oh MY! You clearly don't know me well.

LEE
No. Some things are better kept to
oneself.
(then)
Even if it is sort of brilliant.

JACK
Oh come on, spill!

Lee looks around. She can't keep it inside any longer.

LEE
Alright fine, can you keep a secret?

JACK
I have no one to tell. All my friends are
dead.

This registers on Lee for a moment, then passes.

LEE
Quite by accident, I've found myself in a
rather criminal position.

Jack perks up.

(CONTINUED)

JACK

I can't fathom what crime you are possibly committing. Except a crime of fashion, of course.

LEE

I've been embellishing documents, if you will.

JACK

(intrigued,
conspiratorially)

Are you forging checks?

LEE

(excited, topping him)

No. Literary letters! From famous writers.

Jack is disappointed.

JACK

So... Not checks? Not money? Just letters?

LEE

(frustrated)

You don't understand the elite world of collectable literary artifacts.

JACK

I suppose I don't.

(sarcastically)

How thrilling. You're forging pieces of paper that go where? Libraries?

LEE

I sell them to collectors.

JACK

How much are you getting for them?

LEE

I shouldn't have told you. What a waste of a secret. I could have told a rock and gotten a better response.

JACK

What if you get caught?

LEE

I can't get caught. Fools get caught.

(CONTINUED)

JACK
I've heard that before!
(then)
Am I the first person you've told?

LEE
You aren't the only one without friends.

JACK
Don't you have a girlfriend or something?
Some bit of fluff? Some lovely hanger-on?

LEE
That would be you.

JACK
I remember you had someone.

LEE
We broke up. She was a pain in my ass.

JACK
Why?

LEE
She wanted things.

JACK
Like what? Money?

LEE
She wanted me to listen to all her
problems, and be closer with her friends.
Things like that.

JACK
The nerve.
(then)
I haven't been in a relationship for so
long. It's really hard to meet someone at
my age. I'm losing my hair.

He pulls back his hair to show her where it's receding.

LEE
I don't think that's the reason.

JACK
(beat)
I'm thinking about getting my eyes done.

He turns to her, square on.

(CONTINUED)

JACK (CONT'D)
Should I?

LEE
(deadpan)
Should I?

They both stare at each other's faces.

JACK
(beat)
No point.

LEE
Asshole.

49 INT. ANTIQUARIAN BOOK FAIR - DAY

49

A LARGE BANNER READS "P.S.3 GREENWICH VILLAGE ANTIQUARIAN BOOK FAIR" Lee and Jack pass under it.

JACK
Oh god, I hope they serve booze.

LEE
(annoyed)
They most certainly do not serve booze.
But maybe you can find some coke.

Lee and Jack wander around the packed, noisy event, taking it all in. Dealers at tables and DOZENS OF PEOPLE shopping. Crazy people, normal people, all kinds.

JACK
You're going to figure who to forge?

LEE
I don't forge. I wrote a couple of hot sentences.
(beat)
We're people watching.

JACK
(disbelieving)
Yeah, right.

Jack is drawn to a table covered in SIGNED HEAD SHOTS OF MOVIE STARS. He picks up a photo of young LAURENCE OLIVIER.

JACK (CONT'D)
Oh my god - I loved him.

(CONTINUED)

LEE
Maybe he's available.

JACK
Isn't he dead? He'd be very old by now.

Lee glares at him.

JACK (CONT'D)
Don't look at me like that. So I don't
keep up. So what.

They approach a table named HARRY'S COLLECTIBLES.

Jack lifts a signed autograph and looks at the VENDOR, HARRY.

JACK (CONT'D)
How much is this?

HARRY
Two hundred.

JACK
How do you know he really signed it?

HARRY
(defensive)
It's authenticated.

LEE
By whom.

HARRY
(annoyed)
By an authenticator.

LEE
Who authenticates the authenticator?

Harry turns away to another customer. Lee and Jack wander away, laughing.

Lee wanders and Jack follows, collecting the business cards off the tables that sell signed letters. She smiles at the Vendors, perusing their wares.

ANGLE ON

THE ARGOSY BOOK SHOP TABLE

Lee and Jack are looking over the signed letters and autographed first editions. A woman, NELL, is the vendor.

(CONTINUED)

NELL
Are you looking for anyone in particular?

LEE
Not really. You have a wonderful
collection.

Lee is looking at a letter by NOEL COWARD.

NELL
Such a hoot, isn't he?

LEE
Brilliant.

NELL
Oh, take a look at this beauty. I just
got a hold of this one - Dorothy Parker.

She hands Lee a framed letter by Dorothy Parker. Lee reads.

LEE
I was born thirty years too late.

NELL
I feel the same way.

JACK
How much is that?

LEE
We're not buying today. Just looking.

NELL
No problem. I'm asking six hundred.

JACK
WOW.

Lee blanches, embarrassed by him.

She glances down at the letter again.

NELL
Just in case you are tempted, make sure
you do your homework. Not all of the
other dealers are as discerning as we
are.

LEE
Oh?

(CONTINUED)

NELL
Some care more than others about getting
the real thing.

LEE
Just so we know, who should we be looking
out for?

NELL looks around and points to a MAN, 40, some distance
away. He stands behind a table that has many customers.

NELL
That one. Not sure, but I'd stay away
from him.

LEE
Well, thank you so much for the advice.

NELL
Take care.

NELL moves off to help someone else and they walk on.

LEE
You need to keep your mouth shut.

JACK
What did I do?

50 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - AFTERNOON

50

She and Jack enter her building and find Andrei and the
EXTERMINATOR.

ANDREI
Oh, good. He just did the third floor.
Let's go to your place.

LEE
Finally. These flies are making me crazy.

51 EXT. LEE'S APARTMENT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

51

Lee unlocks her front door and walks inside. Jack, Andrei and
the exterminator follow behind.

EXTERMINATOR
Whoa!

Andrei and the exterminator immediately turn around and walk
out. Jack stands next to Lee, frozen.

(CONTINUED)

51 CONTINUED:

51

EXTERMINATOR (CONT'D)
I'm not going in there. It smells
horrible.

He looks around at the messy place. Dirty dishes, garbage,
newspapers, and apparently, a terrible smell.

LEE
What? Let me show you the dead flies.
They're everywhere!

EXTERMINATOR
Sorry, lady. I'll come back when it's
cleaned up.

ANDREI
What's going on in there?

LEE
Nothing! I'll clean up.

They walk away. Jack looks at Lee with pity. She's
humiliated, but doesn't understand the problem.

JACK
(gently)
It smells very bad.

LEE
You think I'm deaf? I heard them. Jesus.
I'll do a little straightening!

She shuts the door on him, turns around and surveys the
place.

JACK (O.S.)
(through the door)
You want me to help you? Come on, I'll
help you.

52 INT. LEE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

52

Lee crouches down and looks under her bed.

JACK
It's in here.

There, along with a million dust bunnies, is a month's worth
of cat shit.

53 INT. LEE'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON 53

Lee is dragging a broom across the cat shit. Jack holds a garbage bag open and she dumps it all in.

54 INT. LEE'S KITCHEN - LATER 54

Drinking wine, she washes dishes and wipes dead flies onto her sponge. Jack sweeps the living room.

55 OMITTED 55

56 INT. LEE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS 56

A drunk Lee sits on her bed on the phone.

MARIE'S VOICE

Hello?

LEE

Hello? Elaine?

MARIE'S VOICE

Who is this?

LEE

Who is *this*?

MARIE'S VOICE

You called me.

LEE

What's your name?

MARIE'S VOICE

What's *your* name?

LEE

Harrison Ford!

(alt: Elaine Stritch)

Who the hell are you?

Lee slams down the phone. Jack appears in the doorway eating take-out fried chicken. She gives him a mischievous look and she picks up the phone again. She dials.

LEE (CONT'D)

Hello, is Marjorie there? It's Lee Israel.

(CONTINUED)

MARJORIE'S ASSISTANT'S VOICE
I'm sorry, she's unavailable right now.

LEE
I see. Will you leave word that I called?
Thank you.

She hangs up and then dials again.

MARJORIE'S ASSISTANT'S VOICE
Hello?

LEE
(in different voice)
Good evening, I have Nora Ephron.

MARJORIE'S ASSISTANT'S VOICE
Certainly. One moment.

MARJORIE'S VOICE
Nora, hello!

LEE
(in Nora's voice)
Is this a good time?

MARJORIE'S VOICE
Of course. So wonderful to hear from you!

LEE
(in her own voice)
Star-fucker! Is that one word or two?

Lee slams down the phone.

JACK
You sure you should be doing that?

LEE
Life's short.

JACK
You're *so* good! You should be on
vaudeville!

She smirks at him.

JACK (CONT'D)
Who's Elaine?

LEE
Not your business.

(CONTINUED)

JACK
Who're you going to call now?

57 EXT. VACUUM CLEANER STORE - DAY 57

Walking down the street and referring to a slip of paper with an address scribbled, Lee finds what she's searching for: a shop full of junk and old typewriters in the window.

58 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY 58

Books on Noel Coward cover the table. Lee is reading one of his biographies and taking notes.

59 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - LATER 59

She shuffles through some of her very old notebooks and boxes of blank stationary. For once she's glad she doesn't throw anything away. Pleased, she's unearths some very old, yellowed typing paper.

60 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - LATER 60

At her desk, Lee inserts the sheet of paper into one of the newly purchased typewriter and rolls it in.

She opens a nearby book for reference. It contains a reprint of a Noel Coward letter. She measures the letter carefully and how he spaces his words.

LEE
(counting out loud)
One two three four five spaces, fifteen
space indent.

She turns to the typewriter and pauses. Then she thoughtfully begins to type on the blank sheet.

LEE'S VOICE OVER
My dear Billy,
I fear I must decline your invitation as
this weekend heralds the arrival of
Marlene.

Lee smiles for the first time in a long time.

LEE'S VOICE
The canny old Kraut remains one of my
most cherished friends, despite her
predisposition to whining ad nauseam
about her ageing process, as though she
were the first gorgeous lady undone by
Father Time...

61 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - ANOTHER DAY 61

We hear Lee's voice as she attempts to trace Noel Coward's signature.

LEE'S VOICE

Dear Sidney,
I had no idea you knew Dottie Parker. A tragic loss but she has been dying for decades. Whether it was drink or chemistry or character, she was unable after a time to write anything and that made her sere and infinitely pathetic. My own friends are dropping like flies and I am thankful of late when they live through lunch.

Having a difficult time tracing, she tries to simply copy it but it looks shaky.

She looks around her place and takes an interest in her ancient TV set.

62 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER 62

She is disemboweling it.

63 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - JUST AFTER 63

Lee has placed the shell of the TV over a small lamp with no shade. The bare bulb illuminates the screen and makes for a perfect light box.

Lee places the original signature in the book on the screen and then her own letter. Easily and with flourish, she forges Noel Coward.

It appears completely genuine. She signs another letter and stares at her work.

64 INT. SUBWAY - DAY 64

Lee sits on the subway, anxiously holding an old brief case. She's dressed up a bit.

65 INT. ARMADA BOOK SHOP - DAY 65

Lee enters the charming store. The owner PAUL, 60's and nerdy, turns to see her.

PAUL

Welcome.

(CONTINUED)

LEE

Good afternoon. I'm aware that you sell memorabilia and first editions, as well as typed letters signed?

PAUL

Yes, all of it. What can I do for you?

She removes the Coward letters from her briefcase, encased in a plastic sheath.

LEE

Would you be interested in these?

Paul takes the letters and reads them, chuckling.

PAUL

These are wonderful! Yes, I'd be very interested.

LEE

I have a cousin who was a collector. He asked me to sell some of his treasures so he can afford his early bird specials in Palm Beach.

PAUL

Hard to find letters that have a real taste of the author's personality, but these do just that!

Lee can't help but smile.

LEE

Yes, I thought so myself. Very clever man.

PAUL

I can give you two hundred for them. How does that sound?

LEE

Oh, I'm sorry. I'm afraid I could get at least double that elsewhere.

PAUL

(impressed)

Okay. You're probably right. Name your price.

LEE

I think four hundred would be fair.

(CONTINUED)

65 CONTINUED: (2)

65

PAUL

(beat)

Okay.

Paul starts to write out a check.

LEE

Would you happen to have cash? My cousin
closed out his accounts - it's
complicated.

PAUL

I think I've got it.

He hands her the cash.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Please, anything else you come across -
bring it in. I have high-end clients that
come in frequently. Or I call them if I
have something I know they'll like.

LEE

Sure thing.

PAUL

In fact, I have a buyer who actually knew
Mr. Coward. He's going to love this!

LEE

Really?

(tense)

Wonderful.

A66 EXT. UPPER EAST SIDE STREET - DAY

A66

Lee walks with purpose, feeling the fresh victory of her
recent sale.

66 EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

66

Lee enters.

67 INT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

67

Lee meets Jack - who looks tired and disheveled. She joins
him in a booth and hands him a copy of one the letters she
just sold.

LEE

You're looking at one month's rent.

Jack reads a bit of the letter and looks at her, confused.

(CONTINUED)

JACK
Who's Marlene?

(CONTINUED)

LEE
(pronounced correctly)
Marlene! Why am I even showing this to
you.

She snatches it back, disgusted.

JACK
How much did you get?!

LEE
Four hundred for two.

JACK
A little more than I just made.

LEE
What?

JACK
I sold a little coke.

LEE
(appalled)
Right here? To whom!?

JACK
Some fool. It was mostly laxative. He
just left.

LEE
Do me a favor. Keep me out of, and away
from your seedy dealings.

JACK
That's funny, coming from a woman who
just sold someone a piece of paper for
four hundred dollars.

LEE
A piece of paper? It was literary genius,
you dope. He couldn't believe how witty
they were.

The WAITER with a name tag (KURT) comes up.

KURT
(flirting)
Hello ladies.

LEE
I resent that.

(CONTINUED)

JACK
(flirting back)
Is the cinnamon roll sweet, or too sweet?

KURT
It's perfect. If you don't like it, I'll
eat it.

LEE
I'll have coffee.

Kurt is about to leave.

JACK
And can you warm it up?

KURT
Of course I can.

LEE
(beat)
How are you going to eat it with his dick
in your mouth?

JACK
First things first.

LEE
You're shameless.

JACK
He started it.
(excited)
So, now we both have some money. What
should we do?

LEE
What do you mean?

JACK
Gamble? Drink? Shop? I don't suppose you
dance?

LEE
Unlike you, I actually try to put my
money to good use. Like buying food and
securing shelter.

JACK
I just thought we could do something.
Life is dreary.

(CONTINUED)

67 CONTINUED: (4)

67

LEE

I know what we can do that'll be fun.

JACK

Did you just say 'fun?'

A68 OMITTED

A68

68 INT. AUNT ELEANOR'S CAT CAFE - MOMENTS LATER

68

Lee sits in the middle of the floor, thirty cats surround her on scratching posts and cat trees and elaborate cat houses. It's either someone's idea of heaven or someone's idea of Hell. Jack stands back, as an employee, PRISCILLA 20s, waits by the door.

JACK

You've got to be kidding me. *This* is your answer to dreary

PRISCILLA

Have a good cuddle.

PRISCILLA leaves, closing the door. Lee, who has been here before, starts to say hello to different cats as they jump down and greet her. She sits on the carpet and they climb on her.

JACK

A dyke who likes cats. How original.

LEE

Sit down. You allergic?

JACK

Not physically.

LEE

Then sit down.

Jack does as he's told. Reluctant at first, the cats go to him and he blanches. Slowly, he becomes comfortable and pets them.

JACK

Do they know you?

LEE

No. But I've been coming here for years.

(beat)

Don't spread it around.

(CONTINUED)

JACK
I won't. I'd be too embarrassed for you.
(whispers)
I hate cats!

LEE
I've only brought one other person here.
It was kind of our "thing."

JACK
Oh... Elaine?

LEE
She picked out Jersey for me and brought
her home.

JACK
You two stay in touch?

LEE
(beat)
I think she might be living with someone
else.

JACK
I thought you dumped her. It's how you
made it sound, anyway.

LEE
Well, it was messy. I don't know.
(beat)
I'm not exactly the picture of mental
health, if you haven't noticed.

JACK
(teasing)
What on earth could you be referring to?

Lee puts her face close to a cat on the floor.

JACK (CONT'D)
Okay I've seen your idea of celebration.
Tonight can I show you mine? Please?

Lee is wary.

Lee and Jack enter the upscale gay piano bar, which is
dripping with history. They head to a small round table. At
the piano, is a true performer, one of the last of her breed,
who sings the classics, with witty reparte between songs.
She's singing "Goodnight Ladies".

(CONTINUED)

JACK

There aren't go-go dancers, but I love this place.

Lee takes it all in, as they settle in to a small table. Jack can't read if Lee hates this place or not.

JACK (CONT'D)

We don't have to stay long. Can we just have one drink though?

LEE

No. I like it. It's good.

Jack is pleased. Lee lets herself get swept away by the music, which continues over the next scenes.

JACK

Scotch and soda?

Lee nods. He gets up to get them drinks. From the bar he looks back and sees Lee swaying just barely to the music. She closes her eyes, enjoying this moment. He smiles to himself.

Lee is chatting with Anna as she looks over a freshly typed Noel Coward letter. They're sitting at the table drinking scotch. A few CUSTOMERS browse the shop.

ANNA

My father was a huge Noel Coward fan. I can practically hear his voice. It's so *him*.

LEE

(pointing to the letter)

This line here is especially clever, don't you think?

ANNA

It's wonderful. I'm especially fond of his writing. Dorothy Parker as well. Caustic wit, you know?

LEE

Caustic wit is my religion.

ANNA

I can't pull it off, but I admire those who can. You certainly can.

(CONTINUED)

LEE

Doesn't help too well in the relationship department.

ANNA

Ah. I'm sure that's not true.

(beat)

You have family?

LEE

What do you mean?

ANNA

(laughing)

As in relatives.

LEE

No, actually.

ANNA

That's too bad.

LEE

Relationships are complicated. I generally try to avoid them.

ANNA

Is it possible?

LEE

If you work at it.

ANNA

Okay. Shall we settle up?

They walk to the counter. A curious customer, CHARLES, comes over.

CHARLES

What are you buying?

Anna proudly shows the letter.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Is this real?

Anna looks to Lee.

LEE

I should say so!

CHARLES

To think his pen touched this paper.

(CONTINUED)

He reads the letter.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

A gem.

(to Lee)

Give her a good price.

Lee tries to hide her pleasure. The man wanders off to browse.

ANNA

(considering)

Three hundred?

LEE

Terrific.

Anna goes to the drawer.

ANNA

I know. Cash.

She hands Lee the money and writes out a receipt.

ANNA (CONT'D)

This has my number - I mean the store's number -

(shy)

If you're ever in the neighborhood and you know, want to get a drink or a coffee sometime.

LEE

Sounds good. I would like that.

71 INT. A PRINTER - DAY

71

The YOUNG CLERK holds up a piece of stationary monogrammed DOROTHY PARKER, along with a Hollywood address. He hands it to Lee.

CLERK

Came out well, don't you think?

LEE

Lovely.

CLERK

You didn't want a watermark, right?

LEE

Correct. I find them tacky.

(CONTINUED)

71 CONTINUED:

71

CLERK

Okay, Miss Parker, that will be thirty five fifty.

She looks up, startled, then smiles. She reaches for her purse.

72 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

72

Lee is writing on a typewriter labeled "DOROTHY PARKER," when the phone rings. Placed around the room are typewriters labeled "NOEL COWARD," "EDNA FERBER," "TENNESSEE WILLIAMS."

LEE

Hello?

MALE VOICE

Is Lee Israel there?

LEE

This is she.

MALE VOICE

This is Alan Schmidt from East Village Books. I heard you have a collection of some impressive letters and I was hoping I could get a look.

LEE

(guarded)

Where do you work?

MALE VOICE

I own East Village Books. You think you might have any Louise Brooks? I got a lot of old timers around here who collect a strange variety of memorabilia. But I got no merchandise.

LEE

Louise Brooks... I'll have to go through what I have.

MALE VOICE

Great. Come by as soon as you do.

They hang up. Strange phone call. After a beat, she writes LOUISE BROOKS on a label and then returns to her writing.

LEE'S VOICE

Dear Joshua -- Alan told me to write and apologize. I have a hangover that is a real museum piece;

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

72 CONTINUED:

72

LEE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

I'm sure that I must have said something terrible. To save me this kind of exertion in the future, I am thinking of having little letters runoff, saying: 'Can you ever forgive me? Dorothy.' -- But until I do that: Can you ever forgive me? Dorothy.

We see more labeled typewriters: "FANNY BRICE" and "MARLENE DIETRICH."

Lee beams as she types, pleased with herself.

73 INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

73

Anna and Lee are sitting at a small table, chatting and drinking. Anna lifts her drink to toast Lee.

ANNA

To Fanny Brice, Noel Coward, and Dorothy Parker! May their brilliance live on!

They clink and drink.

ANNA (CONT'D)

And to Lee. A brilliant writer who happens to still be alive!

LEE

That's negotiable.

ANNA

(beat)

Wouldn't it be incredible if once you've passed on, people were selling your letters?

LEE

Why on earth would I want that?

ANNA

Because. Most of us mortals just disappear. This way - you still kind of exist.

LEE

When I die - who cares. As long as someone feeds my cat.

ANNA

I'll feed your cat.

(CONTINUED)

LEE

Thank you.

Anna hands her a napkin and finds a pen.

ANNA

I want to be the first. Come on.
Immortalize yourself.

LEE

Are you serious?

ANNA

Just sign it.

Lee picks up the pen.

ANNA (CONT'D)

(beat)

Gosh, calling a hangover a museum piece.
Brilliant!

Lee freezes, does she mean *her*?

ANNA (CONT'D)

Oh, I wish I could've met Dorothy Parker.

Relief.

LEE

It's hard finding someone who knows who
she *was*.

Lee signs the napkin and Anna takes it.

ANNA

(reading)

Humphrey Bogart? You're no fun.

LEE

So I've been told.

ANNA

Have you ever written about yourself?

LEE

Don't think I'd find myself that
interesting.

ANNA

I would. You should.

(CONTINUED)

LEE

You're very flattering, Anna.

Anna reaches into her bag and pulls out an envelope.

ANNA

I can't believe I'm doing this, but
here's one of my stories.

LEE

You brought it with you.

ANNA

I'm an idiot, I know.

LEE

I'll give it a read.

ANNA

I've only taken a couple of classes so -

LEE

Don't worry about it. I'm honored.

They look down at the menus and Anna puts on a pair of
glasses.

LEE (CONT'D)

You wear glasses.

ANNA

Only recently.

LEE

I like them. They look good on you.

ANNA

I wasn't sure about the frames.

LEE

They're nice.

ANNA

I used to have perfect vision.

(smiles)

Don't you love getting older and watching
your parts - fall apart!

LEE

You're too young.

(CONTINUED)

ANNA

Hardly. I really thought I'd have more accomplished by this time in my life.

LEE

That's why you need to drink more alcohol.

(beat)

I thought the shop was yours.

ANNA

Yes, I inherited it. Truth be told, it's more pressure than I thought.

LEE

Oh?

ANNA

My father took a lot of pride in it. Almost too much! He was very choosy and almost snobbish about his inventory. I try to live up to that - run it how he would run it.

Silence. Lee has become more uncomfortable. She drinks quickly.

ANNA (CONT'D)

So, you've been here before?

LEE

Couple of times.

ANNA

Where did you grow up?

LEE

Woodside, Queens. My parents live in Florida, may they rest in peace.

ANNA

I thought you didn't have family.

LEE

I also have a ridiculous brother in New Jersey. You?

ANNA

I'm an only child. I'm close with a few of my cousins, though.

LEE

Oh, I have some cousins, I think.

(CONTINUED)

73 CONTINUED: (4)

73

ANNA
Not into the family thing?

LEE
I like my alone time.

ANNA
Not every second though. You're here with me right now!

LEE
Hey. I always need a drinking buddy.

But Anna's not sure if she likes that.

74 EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

74

They come out of the restaurant.

ANNA
This was fun. I think I'm a little tipsy.
Are you?

LEE
Takes a lot more than that.

ANNA
(laughing)
Oh no. Have I embarrassed myself?
(beat)
How did Dorothy say it? "Can You Ever
Forgive Me?"

Anna looks at Lee, and there's a long silence.

ANNA (CONT'D)
What? Did I say something wrong?

Lee, guilty, has a hard time looking at her.

LEE
No, no. You didn't do anything wrong.

ANNA
Oh. Good!

LEE
Well, this was very nice.

ANNA
(shy)
It was. So nice to make a new friend.

(CONTINUED)

74 CONTINUED:

74

LEE

Indeed.

Awkwardly, they hug.

LEE (CONT'D)

(business like)

Speak soon?

(beat)

And when I've read your story, I'll let you know. I'm just pretty busy these days so I might not get to it right away.

ANNA

(disappointed)

Oh, that's okay.

(beat)

Good-night.

LEE

Good-night.

Lee turns and walks away. Anna stays there a second, tipsy and confused.

75 INT. LEE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

75

She lies in bed (next to Jersey) reading.

After a moment she pulls Anna's story from her bag and starts to read it. She can't do it. She tosses it and flips off the light.

76 INT. LEE'S LIVING ROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

76

Having been awakened by banging on the door, Lee runs to it. She looks through the peephole and sees Jack with a bleeding lip and a bruised face.

77 INT. LEE'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

77

Jack sits on the toilet with a washcloth on his face while Lee searches the medicine cabinet.

JACK

You need a new shower curtain, you know.

LEE

You want to discuss decorating with me?
Who beat you up?

(CONTINUED)

77

CONTINUED:

77

JACK

It's my own fault.

(beat)

I didn't have enough money and I didn't know until after - until it was too late.

LEE

I'm not even going to try and understand that.

JACK

I used to get away with so much. Do you think it will scar?

She finds the hydrogen peroxide and attends to his wounds.
She stares at him.

JACK (CONT'D)

I couldn't find my keys, I couldn't get into my apartment.

(beat)

What?

LEE

And where is said apartment?

JACK

It was on 92nd. And then it was on 96th.
And then...

Lee leaves the room.

LEE

You can sleep on my couch.

He smiles, grateful.

78

OMITTED

78

79

INT. A PRINTER - LATER

79

The place is dusty and badly organized. Lee, holding the typewriter in its case, wanders down an aisle and notices piles of typewriter paper and stationery, stacked carelessly. Some of it is yellowed and old.

80

INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

80

Lee writes a letter on that very paper. The table is littered with books about Louise Brooks and papers covered with Lee's notes.

(CONTINUED)

80 CONTINUED:

80

LEE'S VOICE

Dear Paul,
Your friend Barry was absolutely accurate
in his predicting that cheap Charlie
Chaplin would write a vulgar book for
vulgar people.

Lee is smiling, enjoying herself.

81 EXT. EAST VILLAGE BOOKS - DAY

81

Lee enters the shop.

82 INT. EAST VILLAGE BOOKS - DAY

82

A dusty and crowded store. The owner, ALAN SCHMIDT (45) is
behind the counter finishing up with a customer. (He also
happens to be the man NELL pointed to at the book fair when
warning Lee).

LEE'S VOICE

The lies he tells about Paulette are
understandable; she was a bitch in a
ditch and he grew to hate her. Given the
opportunity, I wouldn't even fart in her
direction!

ALAN

How can I help?

LEE

You called about Louise Brooks.

ALAN

I certainly did. You're Lee?

LEE

Ms. Israel.

ALAN

Alan.

They shake.

ALAN (CONT'D)

Whaddya got?

Lee hands him a couple of letters, carefully encased.

ALAN (CONT'D)

These are beauts.

(beat)

Funny, how you happened to have them!

(CONTINUED)

LEE

I had to go through a lot of my cousin's things, and there they were. They're quite witty, aren't they?

ALAN

(reading)

She had quite the mouth.

LEE

(tense, defensive)

She had a very big personality.

ALAN

Liked the ladies, I hear.

(beat)

This the real thing?

LEE

I assume so.

He studies it.

ALAN

Anyway, most people will believe what you tell them. And they love this stuff. Personally, I don't get it.

(beat)

How much you want for them?

LEE

Five hundred dollars seems fair.

ALAN

Two fifty.

LEE

I'm giving you a good deal.

ALAN

(relenting)

Four.

LEE

All right. I'd prefer cash, if you got it.

ALAN

Of course I got it.

As he gets the money -

(CONTINUED)

82 CONTINUED: (2)

82

ALAN (CONT'D)

If you come across any more - especially if she mentions any other people - like Harry Cohn or Howard Hughes. I can always pay more for those.

83 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

83

CLOSE - UP

Of Lee signing several letters in different colored pencils - LOUISE BROOKS.

LEE'S VOICE

Dear Bill,
Finally, I got to see HELL'S ANGELS. A lot of bad acting of course, but Jean Harlow literally glistens. I thought all through it of how compelling the young Howard Hughes was --

84 INT. ARGOSY BOOKS - DAY

84

Lee hands letters to NELL, the woman she met at the convention, who looks them over suspiciously.

85 INT. MEMORY LANE ANTIQUES - DAY

85

An OLD MAN counts out cash for Lee.

LEE'S VOICE

Dear Flora,
I was never comfortable being viewed as a victim, despite Harry Cohn's attempts. I would have burned in hell before sleeping with that fat-assed little Caesar. My cat has spit up hair-balls more attractive than him.

86 INT. EAST VILLAGE BOOKS - DAY

86

Alan Schmidt hands Lee a pile of cash.

87 INT. EAST VILLAGE BOOKS - DAY

87

And now another DEALER is handing Alan cash for some of Lee's letters.

OTHER DEALER

Where'd these come from?

ALAN

Some cranky dyke. Pretty good, huh?

(CONTINUED)

87 CONTINUED:

87

The other dealer shrugs, not caring.

88 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT BUILDING/ANDREI'S DOOR - DAY

88

Andrei is counting a handful of cash.

ANDREI

All cash, huh? What are you now, a waitress?

He looks at the bills and sees they're large.

LEE

I robbed a bank.

Andrei's mother Adina, 80, appears in her nightgown.

ADINA

Ms. Israel.

LEE

How are you doing, Mrs. Ungur?

ADINA

Thank you for those cookies.

LEE

Those were good, weren't they?

ADINA

Not as good as the chocolate Babka. But good.

LEE

I'll have to remember that.

(beat, lightly)

Tell your son to go easy on me, will you?
Can't kick an old dog out on the street,
right?

89 INT. UPSCALE BAR/RESTAURANT - NIGHT

89

Lee and Jack sit at a small table. They've already got their drinks.

LEE

How have you gotten along for as long as you have?

JACK

What do you mean?

LEE

Living here and there. Selling illegal substances, behaving imprudently.

JACK

What?

LEE

Unwisely.

JACK

Don't underestimate sparkly blue eyes and a little bit of street smarts - they go far in this city. Although I may be stretching their limits.

LEE

But who did you want to be? What was your plan?

JACK

I don't know what to say. I always imagined I would figure it out as I went along. And for the most part, I have. I have no regrets.

LEE

That can't be true.

JACK

You mean, why don't I have some brilliant talent like you do for copying?

LEE

Is that what you think I do? Copying? Let me tell you something. I'm a better Dorothy Parker than Dorothy Parker.

JACK

Well, cheers to that!

(CONTINUED)

They cheers.

LEE
It's good writing.

JACK
Then everyone wins. What's the problem?

LEE
How on earth are you so imbecilic?
Nobody knows it's me.

JACK
I do.

The FEMALE SERVER approaches.

FEMALE SERVER
Are you ready to order?

LEE
I'll have a burger, rare, with onions.

JACK
I'll have the same.

LEE
Get the steak. You said you wanted a
steak.

JACK
You sure?

LEE
He'll have the steak.

JACK
Why don't you get a steak?

LEE
We came here to get you a steak.

JACK
Thank you.

FEMALE SERVER
Skirt or T-bone?

Jack falters.

(CONTINUED)

89 CONTINUED: (2)

89

LEE
He'll have the T-bone.
(beat)
And another round.

90 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - LATER

90

Jack and Lee are in the living room. She opens a new bottle of scotch.

JACK
Do you mind if I put on some music?
She points to a stack of records and Jack goes to them.

(CONTINUED)

LEE

Be careful. In fact, don't touch them.

She pours two glasses and hands one to him.

LEE (CONT'D)

What do you want to hear?

She flips through her albums so Jack can see.

JACK

Something joyful. Dare I say, gay?

She removes an album and puts it on (most likely it won't be joyful).

JACK (CONT'D)

Did you ever want to be famous?

(beat)

You know, like the people you write like.
You're as good as them.

LEE

I wouldn't mind getting my own table at
The Palm. Believe me, I thought that by
now I would have.

(beat)

You know I was only thirty two when my
first book was published. I thought it
would all be -She gestures like an airplane going up... then the airplane
goes sharply down.

JACK

I started out here -

His airplane up.

JACK (CONT'D)

And it's just been -

His airplane goes down and down until he's lying on the sofa.

JACK (CONT'D)

Fuck 'em.

LEE

Fuck 'em.

91 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - LATER

91

Lee and Jack are both passed out, each on their own side of the sofa.

92 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY 92

Lee extracts sheets of paper from the oven. They are perfectly curled and rumpled and are already typed on. She lays them out on the table.

LEE'S VOICE

My Dear Boy, I enjoyed our talk
tremendously and was not the least bit
upset about the article.

93 EXT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT 93

Jack paces and smokes as he waits. Kurt (the waiter he flirted with) comes outside, his shift over.

LEE'S VOICE

My professional demise has been gleefully
predicted for years.

Kurt greets Jack.

LEE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

But nonetheless I await the return of
your ruby-red lips to blue Harbour, in
the event my spirits should falter.

Jack and Kurt disappear behind the restaurant for a "date."

LEE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Yours and very much anticipating, Noel.

94 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY 94

As Lee expertly forges Noel Coward's signature. She leans back in her chair, satisfied.

PAUL (O.S.)

This is quite something.

95 INT. ARMADA BOOK SHOP - DAY 95

Paul and Lee look over the Noel Coward letter.

LEE

I thought so, too.

PAUL

Well, as you know, I think I already have
a buyer for it. I'm going to call him as
soon as you leave.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

95

CONTINUED:

95

PAUL (CONT'D)

I sent the Marlene Dietrich to Los Angeles - I got a request from a collector out there.

LEE

Wonderful. You guys do that - sell to other collectors?

PAUL

Oh yeah. There's a whole world of wheeling and dealing, most of which I don't care to partake. A lot of characters in this line of work.

(beat)

Hey, for a while there we had the Hitler Diaries. Remember that?

LEE

Criminal.

PAUL

Not everyone gets into this because they respect history and talent, if you know what I mean.

She nods as he looks at her for what feels like a little too long.

96

INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

96

They enter. Jack flops on the couch and Lee's goes into the kitchen.

We see many more labeled typewriters throughout the apartment:

ALDOUS HUXLEY, HUMPHREY BOGART, EUGENE O'NEILL, KURT WEILL, EZRA POUND, MARGARET MITCHELL.

LEE

Get your feet off the couch.

JACK

(unsure)

Really? Look at it.

LEE

This isn't a flop house.

She feeds her cat who walks over slowly.

JACK

How old is that hairball, anyway?

(CONTINUED)

LEE

Twelve.

JACK

That's fuckin' old. How many cat years is that -

He tries to count. Lee goes to the blinking phone machine and presses PLAY.

PAUL'S VOICE ON PHONE MACHINE

This is Paul, from Armada. Ms. Israel, I was wondering if you could come in tomorrow. I have a couple of questions regarding the last Coward letter I purchased.

She and Jack look at each other.

JACK

Uh oh.

PAUL'S VOICE

Please come in or call as soon as you can. It's important.

97 INT. LEE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

97

She lies awake in bed, unable to sleep. She rolls over and anxiously pushes the covers off of her.

98 INT. ARMADA BOOK SHOP - DAY

98

She's trying to keep her cool as she stands at the counter waiting for Paul to finish with ANOTHER CUSTOMER. Finally, he's free.

PAUL

Hi Lee.

LEE

What seems to be the problem?

PAUL

You know I've got the client that knew Noel Coward, and he said Mr. Coward would never have been as explicit as he was regarding his orientation. It was illegal in those days and - anyway. Apparently the letter was a fake.

(CONTINUED)

LEE
(concerned)
I'm shocked. My uncle would be appalled.

PAUL
You mean your cousin.

LEE
(flustered)
Of course. My cousin was always rather avuncular toward me.

PAUL
(beat)
I also got a call from Los Angeles, Lee. Seems one of your letters was quite the controversy at a convention out there. I hate to say it but your name has been put on a list.

LEE
A list.

PAUL
It's like a red flag. People are on alert, that's all. They won't buy from you anymore.

LEE
Cousin Rodney had fakes? I'm sure he doesn't know! I'll refund whatever you've paid me -

PAUL
I don't want a refund. I'm all right. I just thought I'd let you know.

Panicked, Lee downs a drink. Jack is beside her.

JACK
You can sell to other dealers. There's gotta be a lot of them.

LEE
You are missing the point. I have so many letters! What am I going to do with them? Hours and hours of work. There's a lot more money to be made. I just mastered Judy Holliday. They're gorgeous.

(CONTINUED)

99 CONTINUED:

99

JACK

I think you mean Billie Holiday?

LEE

I think you're an idiot.

I'm sure you can sell them. Nobody knows
what you look like.

100 INT. MEMORY LANE ANTIQUES - DAY 100

A FAX MACHINE WHIRS and the OLD MAN looks to it.

101 INT. EAST VILLAGE BOOKS - DAY 101

Another fax machine and a photo of Lee is slowly spit out.
Alan sees Lee.

102 INT. ARGOSY BOOKS - DAY 102

NELL pulls the paper from her fax, seeing Lee's face.

103 INT. TWELVETREES BOOKSELLER - DAY 103

Anna walks toward her fax machine as Lee's face slowly
appears. She pulls it out and reads the text.NOTICE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
Caution: possible forgeries being sold in New York City by
one Lee Israel. If you have any information regarding this
please contact MARK SOLANAS, FBI.
Anna, shocked and confused, stares at the picture.

104 EXT. WESTSIDER BOOKS - DAY 104

Lee approaches a shop we've never seen before, holding a file
of letters.

105 INT. WESTSIDER BOOKS - DAY 105

Lee enters and ARLENE turns to greet her.

ARLENE

How can I -

She stops and steps back, turning cold.

ARLENE (CONT'D)

We don't want your business here.

Lee stands there, stunned.

106 INT. EAST VILLAGE BOOKS - DAY

106

Lee enters the store. Looks empty.

(CONTINUED)

LEE
Hello? Alan?

Alan appears from the back of the store, surprised and pleased to see Lee.

ALAN
You got my message. Thanks for coming.

LEE
(holding a file)
I brought some wonderful Faulkner's that I've unearthed.

ALAN
Not why I called. Listen. The FBI has been in to see me.

LEE
The FBI?

ALAN
(beat)
They asked me if I'd wear a wire. I'm not going to do that to you. I'm a good guy. And if they ask me to be a witness, I'll lie. But you're going to pay me five thousand dollars.

LEE
I don't know what you're talking about.

ALAN
Don't worry. I won't rat you out.

LEE
That's very generous of you. I don't have five thousand dollars!

ALAN
(shrugging)
You're a clever woman. More or less. Figure it out. You're welcome.

107 EXT. STREET - DAY

107

Lee and Jack walk.

LEE
How the hell am I going to pay that scum bag? I bet he knew all along. He probably turned me in so he could blackmail me!
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

107 CONTINUED:

107

LEE (CONT'D)

Where am I going to get five thousand dollars?

JACK

Nobody knows what I look like. Let me sell for you.

She turns to him.

JACK (CONT'D)

And I get a cut.

LEE

Ten percent.

JACK

Fifty.

LEE

Oh please. How is that fair? You can't even spell CUP.

JACK

I'll be taking a huge risk. Besides, I owe you money. I could pay you back a lot faster.

LEE

So I pay you so you can pay me back, and Alan Schmidt pays you so I can pay him off. The irony is killing me.

(beat)

Twenty percent.

JACK

Forty.

108 INT. WESTSIDER BOOKS - DAY

108

Jack nervously enters the shop.

ARLENE

Hello! Welcome.

JACK

Thank you.

He goes to the counter.

JACK (CONT'D)

My granny just died and I found these in her closet. Would you be interested in something like this?

(CONTINUED)

ARLENE
Edna Ferber!

JACK
You've heard of her?

(CONTINUED)

108 CONTINUED: (2)

108

ARLENE

Oh, I've heard of her! She wrote that movie with James Dean.

JACK

I guess. I'm not up on these things.

ARLENE

Your granny was a collector?

JACK

Guess so!

109 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

109

Lee is in the kitchen when there's a loud knock on the door.

JACK (O.S.)

It's me.

She opens up.

JACK (CONT'D)

Oh my god!

LEE

Pull yourself together.

JACK

She bought all three!

He shows her the cash.

LEE

How much?

JACK

Six hundred dollars. I did it! I didn't fuck up!

110 INT. EAST VILLAGE BOOKS - DAY

110

Alan is looking over some letters on the counter as Jack browses in the store.

JACK

Oh look at this!

He holds up some strange statue.

(CONTINUED)

110 CONTINUED:

110

JACK (CONT'D)
Such wonderful knick knacks.

ALAN
So your granny collected letters?

JACK
I don't know who these people are but I
had a feeling they might be worth
something.

ALAN
How'd you know I buy these sort of
things?

JACK
Do you?

ALAN
Sure.
(beat)
I can give you fifty dollars each.

JACK
I have a feeling I could do better. A
store in Brooklyn offered me two hundred
dollars for one!

ALAN
Why didn't you sell it to them, then?

JACK
(shrugging)
I don't like the boroughs.

111 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

111

The place is messier than usual. Lee looks like hell. Jack is
sitting down at the table opposite her, taking out some cash.

JACK
I am good at this. You should see me.
(beat)
When was the last time you got outside?

LEE
How much did you get?

JACK
(boasting)
The first place gave me six hundred
dollars. The other guy gave me a
thousand!
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JACK (CONT'D)

You just got closer to paying that asshole back with his own money! He gave me a thousand dollars!

LEE

Was he suspicious?

JACK

Not at all. Hell, I always did want to be an actor! Here.

Lee watches him count out six hundred dollars. Something looks off to her.

LEE

How much did you say he gave you?

JACK

A thousand.

LEE

Then why is there eight hundred extra in your hand?

JACK

What?

LEE

You're stealing from me.

JACK

Oh, what did I say? He gave me fourteen hundred. Isn't that what I said?

LEE

You moron. You're stealing from me and you don't even know what you're selling!

JACK

No. Lee, it was a mistake. Here. I'm sorry.

He hands her more money.

LEE

You're selling literary TREASURES! One-of-a-kind, carefully written witticisms. It's not just a piece of paper, it's a portal to a better time and place when people honored the written word.

JACK

Okay I get it.

(CONTINUED)

111 CONTINUED: (2)

111

LEE

You need to respect what you're selling.
This is my work.

JACK

Well...

LEE

What?

JACK

I mean... You're impersonating other
people. Very well, I'm sure, but come on.
Nobody is buying Lee Isreal letters.

Lee is furious, but of course he has a point.

LEE

Steal from me again, I'll fuckin' kill
you.

112 INT. TWELVETREES BOOKSELLER - DAY

112

Jack is inside the store talking to Anna. She is looking over
a Flannery O'Connor letter.

ANNA

You never read A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO
FIND?

JACK

No, but boy was she right!

ANNA

This was your grandmother's?

JACK

Found it in her suitcase. I assume it's
real. Do you think it's real?

ANNA

(studying it)
Looks that way.

(beat)
But there have been some forgeries going
around, I'll need to get this
authenticated before I can purchase it,
if that's all right.

JACK

Oh. I sincerely doubt -

(CONTINUED)

112 CONTINUED:

112

ANNA

No, I'm not saying you or your grandmother knew - it's just a precaution.

Jack looks down at the display case and sees Lee's letter from Katherine Hepburn.

JACK

Oh look at that.

ANNA

Wonderful, isn't it?

JACK

Who's Lee?

ANNA

Oh, an author she knew.

JACK

How much is it, if you don't mind.

ANNA

I'm asking eleven hundred.

JACK

Oh, well worth it.

113 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

113

Jack and Lee eat take-out. Lee looks terrible (hung over, not having slept).

LEE

What a thief! I think she gave me less than two hundred for it!

(beat)

Flannery O'Connor?

JACK

She wants to have it authenticated.

LEE

Did you take it back?

JACK

I couldn't. I didn't know what to do.

LEE

You left it with her? You idiot!

(CONTINUED)

JACK
Stop calling me an idiot.

LEE
They're going send me to jail. Worse. The
pillory.
(beat)
I'd kill myself first.
(beat)
You can't do it anymore.

JACK
We can't stop now.

LEE
Everyone is on high alert.
(beat)
I'll never pay that schmuck off!

JACK
(beat)
Maybe you should steal more real ones,
like you did at first. And I'll sell
them.

LEE
Finding those was a fluke.

JACK
Where do the real letters go? Who has
those?

LEE
Archives. Museums. And you need proof
that you're researching something. They
don't just let anyone in.

JACK
You can get into archives. You're a
famous writer. You could steal those
letters, copy them, replace your copies
and sell the originals.

Lee looks at him, like "where did all this come from?"

JACK (CONT'D)
In my sticky finger days I would find the
thing I wanted, and it could only be
things that came in boxes - like
toothpaste, and I'd shop for a while with
it in my basket.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

113 CONTINUED: (2)

113

JACK (CONT'D)

Then, when no one was paying attention
I'd take the toothpaste out of the box,
slip it in my pocket and put my used one
in the box.

(beat)

If they're suspicious they come back to
the shelf and see nothing is missing.

114 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - ANOTHER DAY

114

Lee is crouching down, looking at her cat under the couch.

LEE

You be a good girl.

Jack comes into the room.

JACK

He'll be fine.

LEE

She. It's a SHE. She's old. And she
better be fine.

JACK

Just let me come with you. You gave her
enough food for a month!

LEE

I need you here. She needs the pills.

JACK

But it was my idea!

LEE

Oh come on, you know you like the idea of
actually living somewhere for a few days.
Give her fresh water. And two pills
twice a day.

JACK

I will.

LEE

The way I showed you? Mixing it in the
food?

Jack nods. Lee slowly stands up, grabs a packed duffel bag
and a typewriter.

LEE (CONT'D)

Don't snoop. And stay out of my bed.

(CONTINUED)

114 CONTINUED: 114

She opens the door and slams it behind her.

115 INT. LEE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS 115

He walks into her room and promptly flops on her bed. After a second, he opens her night table drawer to snoop and shuffles through some things before landing on a photograph.

He lifts it to see - it's of Lee and another woman, sitting at a picnic blanket in the park.

116 INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DAY 116

Lee stares out the window. She is a ball of nerves. Seated next to her, a WOMAN is crying softly. Lee notices, not sure what to do. After a moment she reaches into her bag and puts on her headphones and turns on her radio.

117 INT. TWELVETREES BOOKSELLER - DAY 117

FBI AGENT, SOLANAS 40s, stands with Anna. She's showing him the Flannery O'Connor.

ANNA

I told him I had to have it authenticated. He seemed pretty nervous.

AGENT SOLANAS

Do you mind if I keep it?

ANNA

Of course not.

(beat)

Do you think he knew it was fake?

AGENT SOLANAS

I'm not sure. But he might be working for someone who does.

Anna's face falls.

ANNA

Lee?

AGENT SOLANAS

If you think you can get her back in here, would you be willing to wear a wire?

Anna thinks, torn.

(CONTINUED)

117 CONTINUED:

117

ANNA

I'm sorry.

118 EXT. YALE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY

118

Lee walks through the grand campus.

119 INT. YALE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY

119

A SECURITY GUARD surveys the room, Lee approaches the LIBRARIAN behind the counter.

YALE LIBRARIAN

Can I help you?

LEE

I'm doing an in-depth look at writers and alcoholism. Hence - Lillian Hellman. Here's the contract with the publisher.

Lee places a piece of paper in front of the woman. It's a contract that Lee has clearly forged, but it looks real.

LEE (CONT'D)

Since there's already a great deal written about her, I'm interested in the more personal, archival material. Any kind of correspondence, journals, diaries - would be ideal.

YALE LIBRARIAN

I'll give you what we've got.

120 INT. ARMADA BOOK SHOP - DAY

120

In the back of the shop, Paul stands by as the FBI agent Solanas, who is joined by his partner AGENT DOYLE, showing him one of the Clara Blandick letters.

AGENT SOLANAS

Look familiar?

PAUL

Yes, I bought this one from her.

AGENT SOLANAS

(re: photo of Jack)

What about this guy? Have you ever bought from him?

Of course, Paul recognizes him.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL
(realizing)
They're in it together.
(beat)
Right. As soon as I told her she was on
the 'no buy' list, he started coming in.
Such a shame. A *smart* woman.

AGENT DOYLE
Sounds like a nut case.

(CONTINUED)

120 CONTINUED: (2)

120

PAUL
A talented nut case.

AGENT SOLANAS
(rolling his eyes at Doyle)
She fooled every dealer and authenticator
in New York. She's smarter than you, you
idiot.

Doyle looks contrite.

AGENT SOLANAS (CONT'D)
(to Paul)
Do you think you could get her back in
here?

PAUL
Oh, I doubt it.

AGENT SOLANAS
What about Jack Hock? Would you be
willing to wear a wire?

Paul considers.

PAUL
(tickled)
Just like in the movies. I always thought
I would make an excellent detective.

A121 OMITTED (NOW SCENES 118 & A129)

A121

121 INT. YALE LIBRARY - LATER

121

Lee sifts through Lillian Hellman's personal letters, all
signed by the author.

She removes a notebook, and while pretending to take notes,
begins to copy the letters word for word.

Lee turns, feeling like she's being watched. Sure enough, a
security guard is eyeing her. She smiles and he looks away.

Lowering her head, she slowly and very carefully tries her
hand at the signature.

122-123 OMITTED

122-123

124 INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

124

Working on a large glass of scotch, Lee is spread out all
over the room with a light box, an old manual typewriter and
many papers on Lillian Hellman.

(CONTINUED)

124 CONTINUED:

124

Seated at the desk, she is meticulously typing one of two Lillian letters on stationary that looks identical to what she saw in the library. When she's finished she practices her signature.

125 INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

125

Lee is in bed with another glass of scotch.

She gets under the covers and picks up the motel phone and dials.

MARIE'S VOICE

Hello?

LEE

Oh, hello. Elaine?

MARIE'S VOICE

No.

LEE

Is she there?

MARIE'S VOICE

No, would you like to leave a message.

LEE

Yes, this is Lee Israel.

MARIE'S VOICE

(rude)

Oh.

LEE

Who's this?

MARIE'S VOICE

This is Marie.

LEE

Well, okay *Marie*, can you please tell her I called? Same number. Thank you.

She hangs up, distraught.

126 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

126

Jack is entertaining KURT at Lee's apartment. Kurt is recklessly searching through her record collection.

(CONTINUED)

KURT

You've got good taste. But they're in pretty bad shape. How long have you lived here?

JACK

(starting the record)
Oh, forever.

KURT

Ever think about cleaning some of the junk out?

JACK

I might for the right man. What's your place like?

Kurt glides around the apartment inspecting it.

KURT

A lot cleaner! What is all this? Why do you collect typewriters?

JACK

It's too complicated to explain. It's for my work. I don't bring many people to my home. It's my safe space. I'm very private.

Kurt glances at the upended TV set/light box.

KURT

Guess you don't watch a lot of TV.

JACK

Rots the brain. I don't believe in it. I'm a reader.

This makes Kurt smile. Jersey the cat wanders over.

KURT

Well hello little kitty! You look like death!

(CONTINUED)

126 CONTINUED: (2)

126

JACK
Don't say that!

KURT
So, what have you got?

Jack goes to his bag and retrieves a joint and a little vial of coke.

JACK
Little coke, little dope and little old me.

KURT
Let's get this party started.

127 INT. LEE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

127

Jack and Kurt, under the covers, are asleep in Lee's bed. Jack wakes and drags himself out of bed wearing only his boxers, he flings on Lee's ratty robe.

128 INT. LEE'S KITCHEN - MORNING

128

He opens two capsules and mixes the contents into a bowl of food for Jersey, which she eats.

JACK
Oh thank god.

He goes back to bed.

A129 EXT. YALE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY

A129

Lee walks through the grand campus.

129 INT. YALE LIBRARY - MORNING - NEXT DAY

129

The librarian is at the desk.

LEE
Good morning. The Lillian Hellman box I was working on yesterday?

YALE LIBRARIAN
Ah yes, a book on drunk authors. Who else are you going to be writing about?

LEE
(checking her watch)
You know what, I've got to catch a bus.

(CONTINUED)

129 CONTINUED:

129

YALE LIBRARIAN
(put off)
Of course. I'll get what you need.

A130 OMITTED

A130

130 INT. YALE LIBRARY - A LITTLE LATER/DAY

130

Lee at the table, again going through the Lillian Hellman's papers. As soon as the security guard looks away, Lee replaces the original letters with the forgeries.

(CONTINUED)

130 CONTINUED:

130

Slowly, she slips the originals into her tall boot and then looks up to find the librarian glaring at her.

Has she been caught? They both stare. Nobody breathes. Lee smiles. Having been previously snubbed, the woman smirks and looks away.

Heart pounding, Lee rises, picks up the boxes and heads to the counter.

LEE

Here you go! Sorry for the rush. I just get overly anxious when I'm traveling.

YALE LIBRARIAN

(softening)

Oh, of course. I do, too.

(beat)

Find what you needed?

LEE

And then some. Thank you for your help.

Lee walks to the exit and is stopped by the guard, who asks to look in her large bag.

The librarian opens the box, suspicious. She stares at the papers, not sure if she's been had.

The security guard is examining Lee's bag. He sees her lined notebook, pens. Some junk. He gestures that she can go.

131 OMITTED

131

A132 INT. YALE LIBRARY - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A132

Lee exits, sighing with relief. Suddenly the security guard emerges and calls after Lee.

SECURITY GUARD

Excuse me, ma'am?

Lee freezes, and turns back to him slowly. He approaches her, reaching his hand out.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

You forgot these.

He hands her a pair of gloves. Lee nods appreciatively.

132 OMITTED

132

A133 INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DAY A133

Lee looks straight ahead, anxious to get home.

133 EXT. LEE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - AFTERNOON 133

Lee walks up to her building with her duffel and typewriter.
Andrei comes out of the building.

LEE

Hi, Andrei.

ANDREI

Miss Israel. There were two men looking
for you. They said they were FBI.

LEE

What?!

ANDREI

I told them you weren't home. They were
asking all kinds of questions. About what
you do, what kind of things you write.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

133 CONTINUED:

133

ANDREI (CONT'D)

(beat)

I've seen all those typewriters in your apartment -

LEE

Did you say anything?

ANDREI

No, no. I said nothing. Are you in trouble?

LEE

That remains to be seen.

134 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

134

She enters and finds the place is an unrecognizable mess. Glasses, bottles, records out of their sleeves.

LEE

Hello?

No response. She looks around, increasingly disturbed.

LEE (CONT'D)

Jack? Hello?!

(beat)

Jersey! Mama's home. What did he do to our home, Jersey? Come on girl.

She glances around and then looks under the couch.

Lee remains there, frozen. After a beat, she lifts her head up and her face crumples. She covers her face in her hands.

Jack stumbles out of the bedroom, half asleep.

JACK

Oh shit.

He glances behind him nervously.

JACK (CONT'D)

(loudly whispering)

Alright this looks bad, I know.

LEE

Get out.

(CONTINUED)

JACK

(re: Kurt, whispering)
I couldn't resist him, he's so adorable -
you have to understand.

LEE

Get out of my house.

JACK

Why? I'll clean up!

She throws his jacket and back pack at him. Lee is furious.

LEE

My cat is dead.

JACK

Oh no. I'm so sorry.

LEE

Out.

Just then Kurt appears from the bedroom.

KURT

Jack? What's going on?

LEE

Oh for fuck's sake. GET OUT OF MY HOUSE.

KURT

Your house?

JACK

Darling, I can explain-

But Kurt is done. Jack is caught between trying to deal with Kurt and Lee in the same moment. Lee goes to the front door and holds it open, unable to make eye contact with Jack. Kurt, grabbing his clothes and shoes, makes his way out, Jack reluctantly follows him.

KURT

This is too fucked up for me.

JACK

(to Lee)
Lee I'm so sorry. It probably just
happened. It's not my fault.

(CONTINUED)

134 CONTINUED: (2)

134

JACK (CONT'D)
I gave her the pills. I did what you told
me, Lee.
(beat)
Let me in!

She pulls the dead cat from under the couch. Kneeling by the
couch, she cradles it in her lap as she cries.

LEE
(under her breath)
I'm sorry, Jersey. I shouldn't have left
you.

135 EXT. VETERINARIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

135

Lee holds a shoe box and walks into the vet's building.

136 INT. VETERINARIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

136

She walks up to Rachel at the counter.

RACHEL
Hi, Ms. Israel. Is Jersey okay?

Lee can only manage to shake her head.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Oh. I'm so sorry.

LEE
I don't have a backyard or anything.
(beat)
I didn't know what to do with her.

Rachel now sees the box.

RACHEL
Oh, we can take care of that.

Lee hands it to her.

LEE
Okay.

RACHEL
I'm sorry for your loss.

Lee heads for the door.

137 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

137

Lee is in the kitchen, drunk and pacing and dialing the phone.

MARIE'S VOICE

Hello?

LEE

Yes, I'd like to speak to Elaine.

MARIE'S VOICE

Is this Lee?

LEE

Is she there please?

MARIE'S VOICE

Actually she's -

LEE

(cutting her off)

I just had something of importance to tell her. At what time do you expect her return?

MARIE'S VOICE

I'm not actually sure.

(beat)

You've got to stop calling here.

LEE

I don't have to do anything, *Marie*. I just need people to take my calls, instead of having some piece of shit tell me what I have to do. That's what I think I deserve.

She slams the phone down.

138 INT. JULIUS' BAR - DAY

138

At a table, Lee hands Jack a bunch of letters in a folder. She is short, averting her eyes. She is all business, cold.

LEE

Let them authenticate all they want. They're real. Don't settle.

JACK

Lee - are we going to talk about it? I am really sorry.

(CONTINUED)

She stays the course.

LEE

Did you make an appointment at Armada?

JACK

Yes. I rang him. He said to come at one.

LEE

All right. Afterward, come right here.

JACK

I'll do good, you'll see. I'll make it up to you.

Lee doesn't reply to this. There is no making it up.

LEE

Get a written receipt. I want to know how much you're paid.

JACK

Okay, if that's what you want. He'll give it to me. That little fucker eats up my shtick.

(laughing a little)

Ooh that sounded dirty.

He laughs, trying to engage Lee like they used to. She won't.

JACK (CONT'D)

Come on. How long are you going to freeze me out?

LEE

(beat)

I trusted you. I don't know if you've noticed, but I don't do that. You have reminded me why that is.

JACK

(sincerely pleading)

Lee, I took care of the cat. I swear. It was an accident, and I feel awful.

LEE

And your little friend? Who was not supposed to be in my house. Does he feel awful too?

JACK

I don't know. I haven't seen him.

(CONTINUED)

LEE

We will continue doing business together because I have no options, but we aren't friends, I don't think we actually ever were.

JACK

Lee-

LEE

We will meet in public. You will not fuck this up like you fuck everything else up in your life. Sell the letters. Get the money. And get a fucking receipt.

JACK

Fine.

(after a moment, one more
try)

I only-

LEE

I'm done.

She looks him in the eye for the first time. He understands that it's over.

JACK

I'll be back after the sale.

He gets up slowly and walks away. Lee sits stoically.

139 EXT. ARMADA BOOKSELLERS - DAY

139

Jack walks up the street, smoking, nervous, headed for Armada Booksellers.

140 INT. ARMADA BOOKSELLERS - SOON AFTER

140

Paul, more uneasy than usual, is handling the letters that Jack has offered him.

JACK

Aren't these fabulous? I just know someone is going to treasure them.

PAUL

They're terrific. Where on earth did you find these?

(CONTINUED)

140 CONTINUED:

140

JACK

My granny just passed and I discovered them when I was cleaning out her junk. They're worth something, right?

PAUL

How much are you asking for them?

JACK

I guess around three hundred each?

Paul goes to write a check. Jack is taken aback by how easy this is.

JACK (CONT'D)

Actually, do you have cash?

Paul instantly counts out six hundred dollars cash and puts it in Jack's hand.

141 INT. JULIUS' BAR - DAY

141

Already hammered, Lee sits at the bar, scribbling in a notebook, doing calculations of the money she owes. She is agitated and more than a little drunk.

LEE

(to the bartender)

I need another.

Craig comes over, starts to pour.

CRAIG

That's debateable.

LEE

(too defensive)

What did you say?

Craig looks up, surprised by her anger.

CRAIG

Nothing, Lee.

He walks away, shaking his head a little.

LEE

(to herself)

Fuckin' judgemental jack-ass.

142 INT. ARMADA BOOKSELLERS - DAY

142

Jack is cornered by Solanas and Doyle.

(CONTINUED)

142 CONTINUED:

142

JACK
(in a panic)
I'm pretty sure they're stolen, I didn't want to ask. But she asked me to sell them as a favor so I said okay!

AGENT SOLANAS
As a favor? You don't accept a cut?

JACK
Well, a small one. Very small. But I don't know where they came from, honest! I'll tell you anything you want to know. Am I in big trouble?

He gives his puppy dog eyes.

143 INT. JULIUS' BAR - CONTINUOUS

143

Lee is drunk, looks up at a picture of Tallulah Bankhead on the wall, amongst all the other famous people who used to frequent the bar. Then back to her drink. Empties it. She is mumbling to herself. This is a Lee we haven't seen before - more incoherent, nervous. The anxiety is getting to her.

LEE
(mumbling, barely audible)
...probably ran off with the money. I'll kill him....

CRAIG
(from end of the bar)
Did you say something?

Lee shakes her head, shooing him off.

She crumples the piece of paper she was scribbling on. Looks back to the picture, weirdly distracted by it. Glances at the clock. It's 2:30.

LEE
(mumbling, only making out every couple of words)
No, at least until 3...
(then, calling to Craig)
Actually one more.

Craig sets one down next to her.

LEE (CONT'D)
(pointing to the picture)
I wrote a biography of her once, in another life.

(CONTINUED)

CRAIG

Yes, you've told me.

More and more festive people are crowding into the bar. Craig attends to the other patrons. Someone tries to sit at the stool next to Lee.

LEE

No! I'm waiting for someone.

The guy rolls his eyes, walking off. Lee puts on her headphones, to drown out the crowd.

LEE (CONT'D)

(muttering to herself)

Nobody has any patience anymore.

People are crowding into Lee's space though. Finally, Lee gets up to move down the bar, comes face to face with the FBI agents, approaching her.

AGENT SOLANAS

Lee Israel?

She takes off her headphones, confused. The patrons of the bar, as well as Craig all notice what's going on. It takes Lee a moment.

AGENT SOLANAS (CONT'D)

I'm agent Solanas and this is Agent Doyle. We're here to deliver a subpoena to appear before a federal grand jury.

He hands Lee an envelope.

AGENT SOLANAS (CONT'D)

Your appearance is scheduled for two weeks from today. You will find the address on the enclosed documents. You are forbidden to destroy any evidence pertinent to this case.

LEE

I don't know what you're talking about.

AGENT SOLANAS

We've intercepted your employee, Jack Hock. He is cooperating as are the dealers you did business with.

(beat)

Anything you'd like to say? Anything on your mind that you'd like to get off your chest?

(CONTINUED)

143 CONTINUED: (2)

143

LEE

I think it behooves me to be a wallflower at this particular dance. Until I can get a hold of an attorney.

AGENT SOLANAS

As you wish.

(beat)

Mr. Hock requests that you not try to reach him or telephone or harass him in any way. And by law you are forbidden to contact him regardless.

Lee is stung.

144 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

144

Frantic, Lee attacks her research with a scissors, throwing the pieces into different garbage bags. She rips papers and crumples up anything she can find.

145 EXT. UPPER WEST SIDE STREET - DAY

145

Carrying several black plastic bags, Lee hustles down the street.

She glances around her, paranoid, chucking bags into various piles of street garbage waiting for pick up.

One by one, Lee throws a typewriter into a different garbage can.

146 INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

146

Lee sits opposite an UPTIGHT FEMALE LAWYER. She's picking cat hair off her old jacket, visibly agitated.

UPTIGHT LAWYER

(reading from a document)

Investigating agents spoke with the Assistant Librarian for Manuscripts at Yale Library... He confirmed that the letters sold to CW-1 did belong to Yale and that forged copies of these letters were now in the files.

LEE

I could've told you that. But you have a very good reputation, surely you can -

(CONTINUED)

UPTIGHT LAWYER

(cuts her off)

Ms. Israel, I'm afraid that you will spend a fair amount of time behind bars, despite my reputation.

(beat)

You were deliberate, your crimes were premeditated and I have to say, numerous. It says here -

(reads)

You created and sold approximately four hundred letters.

LEE

That many?

UPTIGHT LAWYER

You're proud.

LEE

Did you read them?

UPTIGHT LAWYER

No. Why would I read them?

(considering)

I believe the only way to handle this is to plead insanity and frankly, I don't think we'd have any problem proving it.

Lee stares at her, doesn't like this one bit.

147 INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

147

Lee sits across from LLOYD, a handsome lawyer. She rubs her temples.

LLOYD

Headache?

LEE

Awful.

LLOYD

Can't blame you.

(reading papers)

Looking at all this... it's pretty bad. Now that said, can I say - those letters were pretty damned impressive. I especially enjoyed the Louise Brooks.

(CONTINUED)

LEE

Thank you.

(beat)

I'm afraid they were my finest moment.

LLOYD

I'm sure that's not true.

(beat)

You fell on hard times. You had a sick cat. You couldn't get a writing job and you didn't mean for it to get out of hand, but then some jerk blackmails you and you panic. You never meant for it to continue, or to steal, but you had to pay him back or you'd go to jail.

(beat)

Depending on the judge, I think at worst you could conceivably get a year and change.

Lee looks panicked.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

You'll bring a book.

(beat)

Look, if you want me to represent you, you're going to have to do a few things before appearing in court.

LEE

Like what?

LLOYD

Clean up your act. First, you're getting a job. Any kind of job. And second, you're enrolling in community service to show how penitent you are.

LEE

What - what kind of service?

LLOYD

Something with children?

LEE

Jesus no.

LLOYD

Animals, sick people. Whatever. You're going to show that you have turned over a new leaf.

(BEAT)

You've got to go to AA.

(CONTINUED)

147 CONTINUED: (2)

147

LEE
That's absurd.

He stares at her. It doesn't seem possible that her spirit could sink even lower.

LEE (CONT'D)
I want to ask you something.
(beat)
So, everyone I sold to - do you think they all know?

LLOYD
Yeah. They probably all know. But right now, that's the least of your worries.

148 INT. JULIUS' BAR - DAY

148

In the mostly empty bar, dressed for court, Lee sits and drinks, somewhat a pariah. A few regulars whisper about her.

A149 EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

A149

Lee walks up the steps of the intimidating courthouse.

149 INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

149

Lee and Lloyd sit on a bench outside the courtroom. Lee is sweating in her heavy jacket as she anxiously rubs her hands against her thighs.

LLOYD
We're very lucky this is our judge. Very lucky. She doesn't waste time with things like this. I have a good feeling. Try to breathe.

LEE
I'm scared.

LLOYD
(handing her a mint,
annoyed)
You smell like alcohol.

She shrugs and takes the mint.

150 INT. COURTROOM - DAY

150

In a simple, nearly empty courtroom, Lee and Lloyd stand before the JUDGE.

(CONTINUED)

LLOYD

(continuing)

She is seeking employment with Scholastic books as a copy editor, and has already put in over forty hours of community service at a cat shelter.

JUDGE

(to Lee)

Before I render my verdict, have you in the last twenty-four hours used drugs, pills, alcohol, anything that could affect your ability to understand what is going on?

LEE

No ma'am.

JUDGE

Have you anything additional you would like to say to the court before I offer your sentence?

LEE

Yes.

Lloyd watches her carefully as she stands, and takes a deep breath. What comes next begins as something rehearsed, but devolves into a stream-of-consciousness confession.

LEE (CONT'D)

I have been living in a state of enormous guilt and anxiety for the past year. Not because I felt like I was doing something wrong, but because I was always afraid of being found out. I can't specifically say that I regret my actions-

Lloyd clears his throat, urging Lee to watch herself.

LLOYD

Lee-

LEE

I don't. I thoroughly enjoyed writing these letters, living in the world of Dorothy Parker and Noel Coward, pretending I was something I am not. In many ways, this has been the best time of my life. It's the only time recently I can remember being proud of the work I was doing.

(then)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LEE (CONT'D)

But it wasn't my work, was it? I was hiding behind these people, their names. Because if I'd actually put myself out there, done my own work, then I would be opening myself up to criticism. And I'm too much of a coward for all of that. I've lost my cat- the only soul that truly loved me, maybe ever- and I lost my friend - who might have been an idiot, but tolerated me, and was nice to have around. And I've realized that I'm not a real writer. In the end, it was not worth it.

This hits Lee in a surprising way. Lloyd looks at her nervously. She returns to her script.

LEE (CONT'D)

I will accept the judgement of the court as valid and fulfill whatever sentence I may receive with the full understanding that I have earned said punishment.

A moment. The judge nods.

JUDGE

Lee Israel, the court sentences you to five years probation plus six months house arrest. You may only leave home to go to and from your place of employment, your work in the community, and to alcoholic's anonymous meetings.

LEE

(blurring)

I don't have anywhere to go.

JUDGE

You are not to leave the state or consort with felons and you are to pay restitution to your victims within your means.

Lloyd grins at Lee, nodding. Lee stares, in disbelief.

LLOYD

(quietly to Lee)

This is a good thing. Very fair.

But Lee is reeling. The weight of everything is finally settled on her, and it is heavy.

(CONTINUED)

150 CONTINUED: (3)

150

LEE
(at her lowest)
Mm hmm. Good.

Lloyd doesn't know what to say.

A151 EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

A151

Lee walks out of the courthouse emptied and exhausted.

151 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

151

Lee enters her apartment. It is eerily empty. No typewriters. No Jersey. No Jack. Jersey's empty food bowl sits on the floor, taunting Lee. She checks her answering machine but has no messages. She collapses onto the couch. She does not know where she will go from here.

152 EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

152

Lee sits on a bench waiting. After a moment she sees ELAINE, 45, coming toward her.

LEE
Thanks for coming.

ELAINE
It sounded important.

LEE
It was. It is. My phone got shut off. In case you tried to call.

ELAINE
I didn't.

They sit down and Elaine notices the cat hair on Lee's jacket, picks at it.

ELAINE (CONT'D)
I see you brought Jersey with you. How is that old bitch?

LEE
That's what I wanted to tell you, Elaine. She just died.

ELAINE
Oh.

LEE
I figured, since she was a gift from you-

(CONTINUED)

Lee starts to tear up.

ELAINE

Was she?

(beat)

I'm so sorry, Lee.

LEE

(shrugging)

I got too attached to her.

ELAINE

You going to get another?

LEE

No. I can't replace her. It wouldn't be right.

ELAINE

Maybe in time.

LEE

I do go to Aunt Eleanor's pretty regularly.

ELAINE

Oh god, I haven't thought about that place in years! It's still there? On 96th?

LEE

Exactly the same. Different cats.

ELAINE

(beat)

You still on 82nd?

LEE

Where else would I be?

ELAINE

You look all right. You all right?

LEE

You can't imagine what I've had to do to survive.

ELAINE

We all have to do things we don't want to do.

(CONTINUED)

LEE

Maybe. I can't remember the last time I was doing something because I wanted to do it.

Elaine examines Lee, concerned.

ELAINE

Are you sleeping, Lee?

This bit of kindness hits Lee.

LEE

Fits and starts. But when you can't recognize your own life it's hard to find rest.

ELAINE

You're having one of those times. You just gotta ride it out.

LEE

I was supposed to be something so different than this. Wasn't I? When we were together, people liked my work right?

ELAINE

That's why you wanted to see me?

LEE

No. I mean... I've wanted to see you for a long time. I've needed to see you, Elaine. I just... I'm in a crisis. And you know me.

ELAINE

It always seemed more important to you that people liked your work than that they liked you.

LEE

Well, of course.

ELAINE

No, Lee. That's not healthy.

LEE

I guess not. But-

ELAINE

You were so miserable.

(CONTINUED)

LEE

No I wasn't.

ELAINE

Yes you were.

A beat.

LEE

I was happy with you.

ELAINE

Well, I appreciate that. We were happy there. For parts of it.

LEE

It was more than parts of it.

ELAINE

No, Lee. There was always a wall between us. Something I couldn't penetrate.

LEE

I tried. God damnit. I tried more with you than with anyone ever.

ELAINE

No you didn't. You did everything you could to keep your distance. You lied, you drank constantly, you were self-involved-

LEE

Well, I didn't say I was perfect.

ELAINE

And the moment anyone wronged you, you cut them out. It was like you were looking for everyone to fail you, so you wouldn't have stay connected.

LEE

Well fuck. I always thought of myself as pleasantly prickly.

ELAINE

More like a fortress of disdain. I could never get you to let down the wall- to trust me- and at some point I just stopped trying.

LEE

I wish you hadn't.

(CONTINUED)

ELAINE

I don't know why you were so afraid for anyone to get to know you - maybe you thought nobody would like what they saw. Such a shame.

This takes Lee by surprise. Elaine starts to stand up, Lee grabs her arm.

LEE

Wait - don't go.

ELAINE

This isn't my job anymore, Lee. To talk you off the ledge. It's exhausting.

LEE

Who is she?

Elaine sighs, she was trying to avoid this.

ELAINE

Lee.

LEE

I'm just curious.

ELAINE

She's a public advocate. She's warm and it's simple.

LEE

Is she always a cunt to your old friends? I wouldn't let her answer the phone if I were you.

ELAINE

And there it is. I don't know why I try.
(she makes a motion of a wall going up)

You're never going to change. Everyone is always wronging you - nobody appreciates you, nobody gives you what you deserve....

(short beat)

And nothing is ever your fault.

Lee is stunned.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

I've got a class.
(then)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

152 CONTINUED: (5) 152

ELAINE (CONT'D)

It was good to see you, for a minute there.

She turns and walks away.

LEE

(beat)

Say hi to Marie!

Elaine doesn't turn around and Lee sits there, hating herself.

LEE (CONT'D)

Shit.

153 OMITTED 153

A154 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT A154

Lee lies in bed, staring up at the fan. She isn't filled with anxiety anymore. She is numb. She is lifeless, replaying Elaine's words in her head. She pulls out Anna's short story and begins to read.

154 EXT. TWELVETREES BOOK SHOP - DAY 154

Lee walks past Anna's bookshop. She sees Anna inside, talking to a customer. She knows she can't go in. She stops and watches though. Suddenly Anna looks up and the two women make eye contact.

Anna breaks it and when she looks back up, Lee is gone.

Sadly, Lee walks away.

155 OMITTED - (NOW SCENE A154) 155

156 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY 156

Lee stares for a while. Finds nothing.

She goes and sits at her one remaining, original type-writer. She puts in a piece of paper. She thinks.

157 INT. JULIUS' BAR - AFTERNOON - SOME MONTHS LATER

157

Lee sits at a table - she doesn't look good but she doesn't look bad either. Craig brings her a scotch.

CRAIG

Haven't seen your face in here in a while.

LEE

Yeah well, I'm only allowed to leave the house for my AA meetings.

Craig walks away shaking his head. Suddenly the door opens and Jack comes in. He sees Lee, approaches her table. Is this a coincidence? Jack looks a little thin, and walks with a crutch, babying one foot.

LEE (CONT'D)

Thanks for coming.

JACK

(shrugging)

It was quite inconvenient. I had to move around some meetings, but I had my assistant cancel my afternoon.

Lee smirks. It's kind of Jack to make this easier.

LEE

Can I get you a drink? I'm buying. I've started counterfeiting money now.

She smirks, this tickles Jack.

JACK

Not today.

(off Lee's surprise)

It's my new meds. Throwing my whole system off. Gin tastes like mouthwash. Takes the fun out of it.

Lee is concerned, but doesn't press.

LEE

I guess you were able to cut a deal? Ratting on me worked out?

JACK

Three years probation.

LEE

At least you're out and about.

(CONTINUED)

JACK

So are you.

LEE

No, I'm at an AA meeting on 10th street.

Jack laughs.

JACK

Criminals at large!

(then)

I couldn't imagine what was so important that Lee Israel swallowed her pride and asked me to meet her. So spit it out.

LEE

I'm reconsidering.

JACK

Oh just tell me.

LEE

Well... I've been thinking about writing a new book. About what happened. About what I did. And about you, if you'll let me.

JACK

Like hell I will! What would my boyfriend think if he knew about my shadier dealings?

LEE

Do our crimes even count in your top ten of shady dealings? I doubt it.

JACK

Fair enough. But I don't want a book out there about me. I'm a very private person.

Lee is quiet.

LEE

I have to do something. I have to write again.

JACK

What about Fanny Price?

(CONTINUED)

LEE

Brice? No. I think for once I would like to write about one Lee Isreal. As terrifying as that sounds.

JACK

I'm still mad at you, you know. You treated me like shit. I don't think you're a very nice person.

LEE

I would agree with you.

JACK

But I suppose you may be mad at me as well.

LEE

If you didn't look quite so decrepit, I would be.

JACK

(quietly)

Yes, well. I guess it's not some huge plot twist. It was going to catch up to me eventually.

LEE

You *have* fucked your way through Manhattan.

JACK

I would like that on my tombstone.

They share a morbid laugh.

JACK (CONT'D)

With the addition of: but he steered clear of the boroughs.

LEE

Sure.

After a beat.

JACK

Will you make me 29? And with perfect skin? And don't make me sound stupid?

Lee is quiet, realizing he is agreeing.

(CONTINUED)

JACK (CONT'D)
Oh fuck it. Write whatever you want. It's
not like anyone reads your books anyways.

LEE
I've already written five chapters.

Jack laughs.

LEE (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Thank you.

Lee reaches out and touches Jack's hand. This lingers for
just a moment and then Jack stands, breaking it.

JACK
I'm late for a board meeting. My driver
is waiting. The life of a millionaire.

They both smile, going with the bit. Jack starts toward the
door. Crossing in front of Lee. Lee stifles a little laugh.

Jack looks back...

JACK (CONT'D)
What?

LEE
No... I was so tempted to trip you, just
now.

Jack laughs, against his better judgement.

JACK
Wow, you're ... a horrid cunt, Lee.

LEE
So are you, Jack.

JACK
Good luck.

LEE
You too.

He leaves.

Sitting at her dining table, Lee writes on an old, large
computer. She sips scotch.

(CONTINUED)

158 CONTINUED:

158

A kitten scampers around her ankle and settles on the keyboard. The place is cleaned up again, but still Lee's.

159 EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

159

Springtime. Lee sits on a bench, content. She eats a hot dog, and watches people pass.

160 EXT. STREET/LAST BOOKSTORE - DAY

160

Lee walks down the street and backtracks, having seen something in a bookstore window that has caught her eye. It's a mounted letter from Dorothy Parker. One that Lee has written.

161 INT. RENWICK & CO. RARE BOOKS - DAY

161

Lee addresses the bookseller.

LEE

My friend's birthday is coming up and he'd love to own that Dorothy Parker in the window.

BOOKSELLER

She's a beauty, isn't she?

LEE

Can I ask how much a letter like that runs?

BOOKSELLER

We're asking nineteen hundred, framed and matted, and she comes complete with a letter of authenticity.

Lee's eyes widen.

LEE

Does the letter of authenticity come with a letter of authenticity?

BOOKSELLER

Oh, I can assure you. It's the real thing. No one can write like Ms. Parker could. Not before and not since.

(CONTINUED)

161 CONTINUED:

161

The bittersweet compliment is music to her ears.

LEE

Well, that might be out of my price range, but thank you very much.

162 INT. LEE'S APARTMENT - DAY

162

Lee sits at her old typewriter (the one she already owned), and writes.

LEE'S VOICE

My dear sir, I offer my droopy salutations from the Great Beyond. I understand that you're selling my personal letters to the tune of nearly two grand. To think poor Lee Israel received a tiny fraction of that sum when she sold them to someone, who then sold them to you.

163 EXT. RENWICK & CO. RARE BOOKS - DAY

163

We see the man through the front window, reading this letter. He looks into the distance, considering. Disturbed, he moves to the shop window.

LEE'S VOICE

I dearly hope this letter will not affect the selling price of your valuable artifact. As I most famously muttered mere moments after my cremation: "Darling, excuse my dust."
Yours,
Dorothy Parker.

The bookseller removes the letter from the window display. And then decides to put it back.