

PRODUCTION CHOICE

Written by

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PRODUCTION CHOICE, (n):

In soap operas, a non-critical element in the script left to the discretion of the Production Team.

It's replaceable in filming depending on the needs of production. An interchangeable part of the daytime machine.

This element can be anything from a prop, fight choreography, or, say, an actress.

COLD OPENINT. PACKED AWARDS SHOW BALLROOM - NIGHT

Tuxes, ball gowns, a glittering chandelier over a sea of white tables and dazzled seat-fillers. Is this the Oscars? The Golden Globes? No -

ANNOUNCER #1

Welcome back to the 2016 Daytime Emmy Awards!

It's the biggest night of the soap-opera year. Two ANNOUNCERS smile onstage, PricewaterhouseCoopers envelope in hand.

ANNOUNCER #2

And now, the moment we've all been waiting for: our nominees for Best Original Daytime Drama...

The room darkens - we push in on the screen behind her:

ANNOUNCER #2 (O.S.) (CONT'D)

NBC's *TRASH AND TREASURE*.

ONSCREEN: Two HANDSOME GARBAGE MEN face off in front of a beautiful mansion and its city-mandated trash/recycling bins.

GARBAGE MAN #1

No, say it to my face this time -
WHAT did you call me? Me, your
sister's fiancé -

GARBAGE MAN #2

Trash, okay! You're nothin' but
trash!

Off of Garbage Man #1's stunned face, fade to black. Back in the ballroom, the camera finds the *TRASH AND TREASURE* actors at their table. They're all pretty drunk, grinning and pointing at the screen over the audience's applause.

ANNOUNCER #1

Next up, ABC Daytime's *PIECES*.

ONSCREEN: In a sparse gymnasium, a HOT MILITARY AMPUTEE takes her first solo steps on prosthetic legs, her PROUD, HOT MALE NURSE looking on -

PROUD, HOT NURSE

That's it -

HOT MILITARY AMPUTEE

I... I can't believe it...

- when - BAM! Shotgun blasts send both to the ground. The two crawl behind a weight rack as an EYEPATCH-WEARING MAN and his CREEPY HENCHMEN force their way through the gym doors.

PROUD, HOT NURSE
(whispering, horrified)
It's him - the man who stole your
leg!

REVEAL: Eyepatch-Wearing Man flexes one toned, female calf. The nurse and soldier huddle, horrified, as plaster crumbles from the ceiling and - the screen fades to black. Clip over.

Back in the ballroom, the camera lands on the *Pieces* table, including a SOLDIER in military dress, cheering.

ANNOUNCER #2
And finally, Network's long-running
SPIES.

ONSCREEN: Reveal ELIZA (glamorous, "thirty-five" with a heavy wink), clad in a black catsuit and crying hard over a bloody, catsuited JORGE (distinguished, more salt than pepper in his hair). Eliza sells her lines hard:

ELIZA (AS JEANINE)
C'mon, Agent - Horatio - please!
We have so many more heists to
pull, so many stories to tell...

She buries her face in his bloody chest. And... His eyes crack open.

JORGE (AS HORATIO)
...Do I spy... with my... little
eye... my Jeanine?

She looks up, gasps - and the scene fades to black.

Over anemic applause, we find a beaming Eliza in the audience, sitting between Jorge and FRANK, the *Spies* showrunner (a middle-aged GQ ad on legs). Eliza waves grandly to the cameras. As they pan away, Jorge leans to her, sotto:

JORGE (CONT'D)
Tough crowd, huh?

ELIZA
Oh, they're just jealous.

FRANK
So jealous they haven't nominated
you since 9/11?

ELIZA
 (wistful)
 Season 37. The meth
 smugglers.

JORGE
 (also wistful)
 Never forget.

Onstage, the announcers huddle over their envelope.

ANNOUNCER #1
 And the Emmy goes to...

A dramatic beat. Eliza, white-knuckled, clutches Jorge's arm -

ANNOUNCER #2
SPIES!

The whole *Spies* table erupts, cheering, and floods the stage.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Accepting the award tonight with
 the *Spies* cast is showrunner Frank
 Baumgarten -

Frank (now identified by a Daytime Emmys chyron) graciously
 accepts the Emmy. Starts towards the standing microphone.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 This is Frank's eleventh nomination
 and first win here tonight.

Frank takes in the room, opens his mouth to speak - but Eliza
 slides in front of him.

ELIZA
 Wow. Thank you all! *Thank you!*

Over applause, a new chyron appears: ELIZA DUFREY: DAYTIME-
 EMMY-WINNING ACTRESS, NONPROFIT ENTREPRENEUR.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
 As the longest-appearing cast
 regular, I am so, so flattered and
 honored by this award and
 recognition. *Finally*, right?

Frank tries for the microphone. Eliza deftly twists away.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
 I tell the volunteers at my
 charities: you can have the best
 script in the world, but what makes
 a production is the *people*. And on
Spies, I work with the best people
 every day. So I don't forget any -

She reaches down her dress, pulls out a laundry list of names. It's ridiculously long - think rolls of receipt tape.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Obviously thank you to Ira, my agent; Angelica, my hairdresser; my assistant, Laurie; my ex-husband -

She squints, unable to read the name -

ELIZA (CONT'D)

It's smudged, so I'll just thank both. And -

Frank firmly pulls the microphone away.

FRANK

Thank you, Eliza, for all your *dedication* -

ELIZA (CONT'D)

But I'm not - my gardener is watching -

Frank grins to the crowd and cameras as if she's not there:

FRANK

Wow - how surreal! To think that a kid from the harsh streets of Winnetka could be a part of *this...*

The audience chuckles. Eliza fumes. Frank's voice fades as she spots the monitors showing the two of them - the cameras slowly pushing in on *Frank's* shining face. Eliza scooches closer to him, trying to stay in the shot - but the cameras keep framing her out.

Wheels turn. She steps out of frame as Frank soldiers on:

FRANK (CONT'D)

And the writers and I, we hoped the season would be well-received, but we had absolutely no idea that -

A sudden collective gasp. Frank stops, confused, as -

ELIZA (O.S.)

Say, look who I found!

Eliza enters from offstage, holding a squirming KITTEN in her arms. It's wearing a tiny sweater: EMOTIONAL SUPPORT KITTEN. Cameras pivot from Frank and the Emmy to Eliza and the cat.

FRANK

Where the hell -

AUDIENCE MEMBER (O.S.)

Hey, my cat!

ELIZA

This kitty doesn't want to talk
about awards! He wants to talk
about my *newest* charity, Kittens...

She catches sight of the soldier at the *Pieces* table.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

...for Vets! Yes! Kittens for Vets.
Have we got a sec for some kittens?
And some veterans?

The audience "awws". Eliza holds the kitten to Frank's face.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Give him a kiss, Frank?

FRANK

Uh, Eliza, I'm allergic -

ELIZA

Of COURSE you can hold him -

In one fluid motion, Eliza shoves the kitten at Frank and wrenches the Emmy away. Frank finds himself with a face full of yowling kitten as music begins to play them off -

ELIZA (CONT'D)

(quickly)

To finish, I would also like to
thank the lighting team for making
me look fantastic, and our editing
team for picking my best takes each
show - because it's truly through
dedication and teamwork that we can
achieve our dreams!

Frank pries the cat from his scratched, swelling face, lunges one final time for the microphone as the music crescendos -

FRANK

Again, to all you kids out there -

ELIZA

(yelling)

Thank you, Emmy Academy! God bless
America, and God bless *Spies*!

Eliza hoists the Emmy into the air, triumphant, just as Frank hoists the kitten away and lets out a messy, catastrophic sneeze. FREEZE on the pair, juxtaposed, and SLAM TO:

MAIN TITLES.

ACT I**EXT. LA STREETS - MORNING**

Los Angeles. City of Angels? City of Cars.

A shiny black SUV sits in bumper-to-bumper Hollywood/Highland traffic. Think Hollywood-Bowl-level shit.

ELIZA (O.S.)

"Oh, Horatio. Yesterday we had all the time in the world. But today, we have only five minutes until the oxygen is depleted - until we lose consciousness... and our lives."

INT. TOWNCAR - CONTINUOUS

Reveal the speakers: Eliza, now in dark sunglasses and a very expensive track suit, reciting as her bespectacled twenty-something assistant, LAURIE, reads from her phone.

LAURIE

(stilted)

"But Jeanine. Five minutes?"

Laurie is not an actress, but Eliza is the Norma Desmond of soap operas. Her acting is utterly sincere.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

"We trained together at the spy academy in hyperbaric chambers just like this one. There must be - "

She's interrupted by a series of dings.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

Sorry, hang on -

Laurie taps at her phone. Eliza watches, annoyed.

ELIZA

Is it the Twitter or the Face Book?

LAURIE

Twitter. I thought I deactivated your notifications, but -

ELIZA

Oh, I put them back. It's nice to know when I'm adored. (re: lines) Shall we? From that last part?

Laurie returns to the script.

LAURIE

Right, um -
(finds her place)
"There must be a way out!"

ELIZA (AS JEANINE)

"Oh, if only we had something of use besides these diamonds - so valuable outside, yet so useless locked with us here."

LAURIE

"Wait - did you say diamonds? I - "

Eliza abruptly breaks character.

ELIZA

Laurie, there it is again. The new writers are giving Jorge the good lines.

LAURIE

I don't think -

ELIZA

- Jeanine worked three seasons undercover for a jewelry smuggler, and the *explosives expert* thinks of the diamonds?

LAURIE

The writers just have to learn the show a bit, get their bearings.

ELIZA

Well, they better bear down, because if they keep this up, I'm -

Eliza's phone jangles - "Top of the World." She answers.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Eliza DuFrey, you're on speaker.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Are you holding out on me?

ELIZA
 Meghan! How's the toughest
 muckraker in the biz?

EXT. VARIETY NEWSROOM - DAY

MEGHAN (chain-smoking entertainment reporter, late fifties)
 lights a cigarette as she swivels in a chair at her desk.

MEGHAN
 The least you could do was give a
 girl a heads up!

INTERCUT MEGHAN AND ELIZA.

ELIZA
 A what?

MEGHAN
 Twelve years of friendship, gushing
 reviews of your every storyline -
 do they mean nothing?

ELIZA
 You've lost me, Meghan.

MEGHAN
 The *Soap Weekly* blog says you're
 leaving *Spies!*

ELIZA
 It does not!

Eliza makes a grabbing gesture to Laurie. Laurie swipes at
 her phone and hands it over, *SOAP WEEKLY's* blog on the
 screen. Eliza scrolls and skims.

MEGHAN
 It says you're dodging contract
 negotiations -

ELIZA
 It was a hiatus in Wine Country -

MEGHAN
 That Frank's having kittens -

ELIZA
 Rumors - Frank's my biggest fan!

MEGHAN
 And after your speech last night -

ELIZA
What was wrong with my speech?

MEGHAN
(diplomatic)
Shall we say, I wanted to check in.

Eliza reaches the end of the article - and visibly relaxes at the phrase "Anonymous Sources."

ELIZA
Meg, you of all people should know
Soap Weekly is a menstrual rag of a
magazine. I'm on my way to set
right now. Long day ahead - diamond
heist, hyperbaric chamber. But you
didn't hear it from me.

BUZZ BUZZ. Laurie's phone vibrates - Frank's office calling.
Eliza declines the call before Laurie can intercept it.

MEGHAN
Well, call me after, or I'll worry.

ELIZA
Don't. I'm fine. I've never been so
fine in my life.

Eliza hangs up - Invincible, secure. Turns back to Laurie.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
Let's go again from Horatio?

CUT TO:

EXT. NETWORK STUDIO - DAY

Eliza climbs out of the towncar and smiles up at the huge sign on the side of the stage: "SPIES: WEEKDAYS AT 3PM." A much younger Eliza features prominently, dressed in a sexy black jumpsuit and dangling a diamond necklace from her hand.

ELIZA
Morning, gorgeous.

She winks at the sign. Behind her, Laurie loads up her arms with garment bags labeled "CATSUIT #1-5".

Eliza, carrying only her purse, reaches the soundstage door -

ELIZA (CONT'D)
Oh, Laurie, could you -

Laurie adjusts the bags in her arms and manages to elbow the glossy doors open for Eliza to -

INT. NETWORK STUDIO ENTRYWAY - DAY

- sweep past the security desk and a SECURITY GUARD.

ELIZA
Marcy! Happy Emmy!

The guard double-takes after them, picks up the phone.

SECURITY GUARD
Production, we have a situation -

INT. NETWORK STUDIO HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

ELIZA
(consulting her watch)
10:15! Look, we made the call ti -

Eliza rounds the corner of the hallway and freezes:

MOVERS are emptying out a dressing room. Box after brimming box pour out of a door labeled ELIZA DUFREY (JEANINE). Or, well, a door once labeled ELIZA DUFREY (JEANINE) - one of the movers is prying the nameplate off with a hammer.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
What on - No! No, no, no -

Laurie drops the garment bags in a heap -

LAURIE
Probably a mistake, I'll fix it -

But Eliza has no time for assistant-level platitudes. She barges into the fray -

ELIZA
Stop! You can't take that!

Chaos ensues:

- Eliza fights with a mover over a frilly 70s lamp, but can only get hold of the cord - which snaps.

- Eliza tries to stop a mover carrying a box full of lipstick-kissed picture frames and vintage *Spies* posters. They bob at each other like basketball players, until he fakes left and goes right, leaving her spinning.

- Eliza turns back to the Hammer Mover as he pops the nameplate fully off the door. As he examines it, proud -

ELIZA (CONT'D)
Give it back!

Eliza tries to take it from him. A tug-of-war ensues until -

AD (V.O.)
Jeanine to the stage, Jeanine to
the stage -

ELIZA
That's me - I -

Distracted, she loosens her grip - and the Hammer Mover yanks the nameplate out of her hands. Eliza tries to pursue him, but gets tangled in the garment bags and is blocked by another rush of movers with boxes - boxes full of HER THINGS.

Eliza turns back to the dressing room - it's now totally bare. Horrified, she turns back to the now-deserted hall:

ELIZA (CONT'D)
FRANK?!

INT. SPIES SOUNDSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Eliza shoves her way through a door with a blinking red light: "CAUTION: DO NOT ENTER IF LIGHT IS ON."

She stomps past rows of empty SPIES sets - "TRAINING ACADEMY", "JEANINE'S LIVING ROOM", etc. - as Laurie scurries behind. Crew members stare as Eliza passes, raging -

ELIZA
Theft, fraud -

Eliza clears a set labeled "CRYPTOLOGY LAB" and finds the rest of the cast and crew, mid-take. Jorge sits at a breakfast nook with a young blonde (ASHLEY, 25) in black spandex. Frank is in talks with an AD as Eliza blows in.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
LARCENY, Frank! GRAND LARCENY!

Jorge, Ashley, and the crew all freeze. Frank's eyes get real big real fast.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
My dressing room has been
raided, a large man TOOK my
NAME -

FRANK
Let's just calm down -

ELIZA FRANK (CONT'D)
 I will not calm down, I demand to know who authorized this - Eliza, I -

Ashley perks up.

ASHLEY
 Oh my God - are you Eliza DuFrey?
 The original Jeanine Marquis?

ELIZA
 (brushing her off)
 Yes, yes, that's me, we're all
 excited - look, Frank, I -

Something clicks.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
 (to Ashley)
 Original?

Off Eliza's horror -

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - DAY

Eliza's shell-shocked face. She sinks into a couch in Frank's shiny showrunner office. Frank pours her a glass of scotch.

FRANK
 Say when.

ELIZA
 Would you listen?

Frank sighs. Hands her the glass, puts the bottle down.

FRANK
 It wasn't my decision - it just
 came from Network this morning -

ELIZA
 - The morning after the Emmys?

FRANK
 - I tried to catch you before your
 call time -

ELIZA
 - The Emmys, where my performance
 won them an Emmy?

FRANK

- but I guess our signals crossed -

ELIZA

Signals! I live in Wine Country,
Frank, not Tuscaloosa.

Frank tries to salvage this.

FRANK

But look at the bright side. Just
think of what you'll be able to do
with all the kittens.

ELIZA

Yes. And *vets*. True American
Heroes, Frank. People who
understand *loyalty* -

Her voice catches. Frank cleans his already-clean glasses
with his shirt, avoids her eyes.

FRANK

Look, I swear, if I had my way...
It's Network - they're pushing for
hot, young -

ELIZA

I'm young! I'm thirty-five!

FRANK

You've been thirty-five since I
started here. They're taking the
show back to its roots - sexy, hip
spies hooking up and hunkering down
to save the world. They don't want
a fight - just someone who looks
good in Spandex. Still. No offense.

ELIZA

All taken. And if you think I'm
going quietly, you have another
thing coming. I'm calling my agent -
this isn't over.

INT. IRA'S OFFICE - DAY

A sterile, beautiful place of minimalism and snappy dressing.
IRA, Eliza's agent, middle-aged with expensive shoes, sighs
into the phone.

IRA
 It's over. They activated a
 termination clause! But don't
 worry, we're ahead of this. I left
 word at *Soap Weekly* -

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE FRANK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Eliza, scotch in hand, stands stunned.

ELIZA
 - Please, not that dripping tampon -

INTERCUT IRA AND ELIZA.

IRA
 - and how's this: you *weren't*
 fired, you're focusing on your
 charities. Fans love the charities -

ELIZA
 - Can we fight it, Ira?

A beat. And Ira lays it out:

IRA
 There's nothing to fight. Your
 replacement is escaping from the
 hyperbaric chamber as we speak. I'm
 sorry.

Eliza falls silent.

IRA (CONT'D)
 So! Next steps. You need to get on
 your social media. Capitalize on
 that Emmy buzz. Let the fans know
 you've *chosen* to go out on top.

ELIZA
 Right. On top.

IRA
 Stay strong. We'll talk soon.

Ira hangs up. Eliza, dejected, lowers the phone. Looks down
 the long hall. Huge, old posters and portraits of the famous
 actors and actresses who once "spied" on the show. Look, it's
 a young John Stamos! And Morgan Freeman. Lucy Liu. The guy
 from *McGuyver*? And there's a young Eliza.

Eliza takes in her past self. Was she ever really that young?

Laurie approaches, hands Eliza a cold soda can.

LAURIE
La Croix? It's Peach.

Eliza shoots the remaining scotch in one big, burning gulp.
Takes a big swig from the can to chase.

LAURIE (CONT'D)
(taking the scotch glass)
Quick question... If you're not on
the show anymore, do I still get
paid?

The phone pings - a Twitter notification. Eliza stares at it.

LAURIE (CONT'D)
New Follower. I can stop the sound -

But wheels are turning. Eliza's grip on the phone tightens.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE / RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Eliza shoves her way back into Frank's office, Laurie behind her. Frank's adjusting the angle of his new Emmy on a shelf.

ELIZA
Frank, I want you to see something.

FRANK
If it's another kitten, I remain
allergic -

ELIZA
(hunting and pecking at
her phone)
Frank, the great thing about an
assistant is how much you can learn
from each other. While I'm a master
of the dramatic arts, Laurie is
very good with the Social. And
she's been teaching me.

There's a quiet ding. Eliza hands the phone back to Laurie,
triumphant. A beat.

FRANK
... Eliza, I'm very busy, so -

The office phone in the next room begins to ring.

Frank's Assistant (20s, a few zits shy of an Accutane
commercial) answers the ringing phone.

FRANK'S ASSISTANT
 Frank Baumgarten's office.
 Oh? Well, we appreciate your
 opinions and support of the show,
 but Frank is in a meeting -

Another line rings. Frank's Assistant looks at it, surprised.

FRANK'S ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
 Uh, could you please hold?
 (punches the other line)
 Frank Baumgarten's office - A fan?
 Of Eliza - No, I can't comment on
 production choices -

Another line rings. And another. And another.

FRANK'S ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
 Sorry, uh, could you please hold -

Phones down the hall begin to chime. Frank turns to Eliza -

FRANK
 What did you -

Eliza draws herself up to her full, super-spy height.

ELIZA
 I may not be a "hot, young thing",
 but I have a voice! And this show's
 audience - *my* audience - has a
 voice, too - a loud one. Your
 predecessor once tried to off me -

LAURIE
 Season 37 - The meth smugglers.

ELIZA
 - But this will be worse, Frank. I
 have the Social, now - The Twitter,
 and the Face Book with my face all
 over it. And I'll use them hard.

Laurie holds up the phone, where likes and retweets of the
 studio phone numbers are pouring in by the second. As Frank's
 frazzled assistant ad-lib juggles calls in the background,
 panicked -

ELIZA (CONT'D)
 We don't want a fight, do we?

As the ringing swells, Frank and Eliza lock eyes and we -

END ACT I

ACT IIINT. TOWNCAR - DAY

New day. Sweats-clad Eliza adjusts her makeup in the back of the parked towncar. She's on the phone with Meghan, Peach La Croix in the cup holder. Laurie texts next to her.

MEGHAN (V.O.)
Wait, you're a what?

ELIZA
A Spentor! A Spy Mentor. It's new -
Frank made it up just for me!

INT. VARIETY NEWSROOM - DAY

Meghan stands on her swivel chair, duct-taping a trash bag around the smoke detector on the ceiling. There's an unlit cigarette behind her ear.

MEGHAN
It sounds like off-brand Spam.

A young REPORTER bangs on the window to her office.

REPORTER
(muffled)
You can't smoke in there!

Meghan gives him the finger, tears another piece of duct tape from the roll.

INTERCUT MEGHAN AND ELIZA.

ELIZA
It's a promotion. Gives me more
creative control on the show - even
with all the new focus on *youth*.

MEGHAN
Is that what Frank said?

ELIZA
It's implied by the title.

MEGHAN

You know, maybe I could do an article on this blatant ageism at work, generate some outrage clicks - *Trash & Treasure* certainly has issues, and activists are all over *Pieces* -

LAURIE

(to Eliza)
It's time.

ELIZA

(to Meghan)
You do you. I've got to go - Spentor meeting. Mwah.

MEGHAN

Mwah.

Eliza hangs up. Stay on Meghan for a moment as she observes her handiwork. Pulls out a lighter, lights the cigarette - blowing smoke at the still-protesting reporter on the other side of the glass.

INT. TOWNCAR - DAY

Eliza primps her hair in the rearview mirror.

ELIZA

How do I look?

LAURIE

Like Lulu Lemon herself. Want a water bottle?

ELIZA

No, no, water makes me bloat.

Eliza opens the door. REVEAL: They're parked outside EPITONE, a very trendy gym. There are huge posters of oddly-posed models "working out" plastered on the front. A beat.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

On second thought -

Laurie hands Eliza a fancy water bottle.

LAURIE

Have your membership card out when you go in. Reception can't let you past without it.

ELIZA
Membership card. Of course.

LAURIE
You do have it, right? I asked, and
you said -

ELIZA
Laurie, please. At my level, cards
are basically a formality.

CUT TO:

INT. EPITONE FRONT DESK - MOMENTS LATER

Eliza stares blankly at the hot young HUNK behind the front desk.

ELIZA
What do you mean, I need my
membership card?

HUNK
Sorry, lady, all new patrons -
regardless of how attractive -

ELIZA
I must have left it - look, I'm
meeting a friend. Are you sure you
can't just print me a pass -

HUNK
Lady, you are Mom-hot as a sunset
in Palm Springs, but I can't break
protocol.

ELIZA
Mom-hot?

Ashley appears behind her.

ASHLEY
Eliza? Hey!

HUNK
Ash! My bro-dawg! Give it here!

They gym-bro secret-handshake fist-bump.

HUNK (CONT'D)
You know this luscious autumn
blossom?

ASHLEY
We're co-con-spy-ritors on *Spies!*

HUNK
Spies? Shit, my mom loves that show. (to Eliza) You get a pass anytime.

He winks at Eliza, begins to type. As the printer whirs:

ASHLEY
Eliza, I'm so excited you're spentoring me.

ELIZA
Network requests, I acquiesce.

ASHLEY
I hope I won't slow you down...

ELIZA
Nonsense, Spentee! You'll be -

HARD CUT TO:

INT. EPITONE WORKOUT ROOM - SHORTLY THEREAFTER

ELIZA
(gasping)
- Fine. Just fine.

Eliza and Ashley are mid-intense-circuit-workout in a fancy weight room - lunges, crunches, burpees... Ashley does every set with gusto. Eliza limps through, dripping sweat and mascara. Her adhesive guest badge is peeling off her shirt.

After a brutal attempt at a pull-up, Eliza stops, takes a long pull from her water bottle.

ASHLEY
You okay?

ELIZA
Just... Stretching for a minute. Stretching's the most important part, you know. The most spy-ssential.

She watches Ashley bounce through exercises like a superball. Swigs water. Notices a punching bag hanging across the room.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

You know, back in the day, I did
many of my own stunts - Watch this -

Ashley slows to observe as Eliza throws a floppy side kick
into the bag. The bag wheezes.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Still got it! Here, this is a
spontoring moment - you try. Get
good and square to the bag, then...

Ashley positions herself. Then, with a sudden grunt-yell, she
executes a perfect spinning side kick into the bag. It goes
flying and spinning on its chain, nearly hitting a baffled
Eliza.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Uh, well, that's not a bad start -

But Ashley's still going, now punching one of those floppy
kidney bags a bit. A lot. She'd cold-clock Rocky Balboa with
those fists, and she doesn't break a sweat as she explains -

ASHLEY

As a kid, all I wanted to be was a
spy - I took aikido, silver medaled
in Beijing... Then decided I wanted
to serve my country and interned at
Langley for six months, but -

ELIZA

But?

ASHLEY

Real espionage wasn't for me. Too
much blood. And paperwork.

She finally stops punching, leaving the kidney bag flapping,
and finds a towel to blot her face.

ELIZA

Ah. So now you've come to acting -

ASHLEY

Right! Pretending's much more fun!
And Hollywood doesn't care how much
cocaine I do. Want a bump?

She pops a compartment on her fitness-tracker. Eliza gapes.

ELIZA

No, thanks - mixes poorly with my
protein powder -

ASHLEY

Mm, protein powder. More for me!

Ashley does a thick, practiced line off her wrist.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Whew! Feelin' good! Hold that bag!

Eliza braces, unsure, as a flurry of punches takes us to -

INT. EPITONE FRONT DESK - A VIGOROUS WORKOUT LATER

The Hunk folds towels at the desk as a rejuvenated Ashley (glowing) and hobbling Eliza (dripping) exit.

ASHLEY

That was so great! Thanks for finding the time to do this -

ELIZA

I'm just glad you made time for pushups with an old bat like me.

ASHLEY

I just have to say, you're taking this whole situation so gracefully -

Eliza preens.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

If Frank were trying to force me out, I'd be a lot less pleasant.

Record scratch. Hard.

ELIZA

He's not - my sponsorship's a *promotion*.

Ashley shakes her head, buzzed off endorphins & coke.

ASHLEY

See, that's what I love about you - so positive! I don't know why he said you were so hard to work with.

Off Eliza's incredulity -

INT. ELIZA'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Eliza's dressing room has been restored to its former glory. Photos of Eliza with famous actors and former co-stars everywhere. A shrine to her life and work.

Bathrobe-clad Eliza steams as ANGELICA (60s) styles her hair. In the corner, Laurie reads an article on her phone ("RESUME-BUILDING 101").

ELIZA

"Hard to work with." Can you imagine? Me, the zenith of professionalism! And after all I've given to this show -

A knock at the door saves Laurie from responding.

LAURIE

I've got it.

She steps out. Eliza turns to Angelica.

ELIZA

Angelica, you don't think I'm difficult, do you?

Angelica's face says it all. But she distracts:

ANGELICA

Shield your eyes -

Eliza obliges. Angelica douses her in hairspray.

ELIZA

This is the good stuff, right? None of that organic nonsense?

ANGELICA

Only the finest fluorocarbons for you.

ELIZA

Good, good.

She fans the lingering spray away from her face. Coughs.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Good.

Laurie returns:

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Laurie, great - can we run the speech in 6D? Lots of big moments today; I want to be ready. Make it easy for *some* people.

LAURIE

About those moments...

Laurie hoists a hefty stack of pink pages, a post-it on top labeled "CUTS."

Eliza's eyes narrow.

INT. SPIES SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Eliza, in her bathrobe, confronts Frank (& nearby Frank's Assistant) with a fistful of pink pages, Laurie at her elbow. In the background, Ashley and Jorge, in black catsuits, stretch on a long hallway set surrounded by cameras and crew.

FRANK

They're just cuts for time. Don't take it personally.

ELIZA

It certainly feels personal - Doesn't sponsorship entitle me to more than two lines of voiceover?

From across the room, an AD calls:

AD (O.S.)

Cameras rolling -

FRANK

We'll, uh, discuss it later.

ELIZA

We'll discuss it now -

FRANK (CONT'D)

Shh -

AD (O.S.)

Quiet on set - and - action.

Eliza watches as Ashley begins her scene with Jorge. It's very dramatic.

ASHLEY (AS AGENT X)

Horatio, I'm scared. There are so many lasers - and one false step might mean the end of a limb.

JORGE (AS HORATIO)

The end of a limb, maybe - but never the end of our love.

Jorge dodges a series of "lasers" (to be added in post) and awkwardly shoulder-rolls his way down the hallway set. He bumps a wall in the process; it wobbles slightly.

ASHLEY (AS AGENT X)

If only my feet could fly as
swiftly as my feelings for you.

Ashley gears up and begins to sneak over and under the invisible lasers. She is acting her guts out.

MEGHAN (O.S.)

Hey there, super spy -

Eliza turns, surprised to find a pantsuited Meghan holding a tape recorder in one hand, a lit cigarette in the other.

ELIZA

Meghan! I thought you stopped
making house calls.

MEGHAN

I decided to come out to write this
piece on your "promotion." Wondered
if I could get some quotes about
this new, air-quote, *spentorship* -

AD

Quiet on set!

Eliza scowls at the AD. Turns back to Meghan, voice lowered:

ELIZA

Have you talked to Frank?

MEGHAN

He's told me to stop smoking twice
already. I said I'll quit if he
gives me something else to suck on.
So - *spentorship*?

ELIZA

It's a promotion.

MEGHAN

It's a damn shame.

ELIZA

... I have to prepare.

She stalks off. Meghan calls after her:

MEGHAN

Don't shut me out! Ageism's a young woman's fight, too!

Eliza finds Frank, directing across the room.

FRANK

Good, Ashley - good.

ELIZA

So, Frank, this voiceover -

FRANK

Hang on, we'll get you -

Ashley continues to bob and weave. Eliza watches, annoyed. Jorge approaches, mopping his face with a towel. They watch together for a moment.

JORGE

Remember when that was us? Nimble, lithe - the apples of every eye -

Eliza's hardly listening, caught up looking at the cameras - all pointed and focused on Ashley. Jorge looks at Eliza, concerned.

JORGE (CONT'D)

You okay?

ELIZA

Um, excuse me, Frank? Can we cut?

Eliza clambers over cables and around crew onto the set.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

I just realized I can't be a good Spentor without some on-the-job training for my Spentee.

As she nears Ashley, she begins artfully dodging the invisible lasers as she walks.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Ashley -

ASHLEY

- You missed one -

Eliza clears the last invisible laser. Plants her feet.

ELIZA

I was just remembering my old "Spy Academy" techniques, from when the show was younger than you are - and I thought you could incorporate a few of them? For old time's sake.

She sheds her bathrobe to reveal her unflattering catsuit. Frank watches from a distance, begins cleaning his already-clean glasses again with his shirt. Jorge interrupts Eliza:

JORGE

Is this about the pinks? I lost lines, too -

ELIZA

(ignoring Jorge, to Ashley)

This move is the "wall-up." Name's clunky, but the action's sleek -

Eliza demonstrates, becoming a fleshy, constipated piece of bas-relief. Frank, Laurie, Frank's Assistant, and Meghan watch, riveted. Laurie takes a quick photo for Instagram, tags it "#SPENTORSHIP101." Meghan taps ash off her cigarette and leans flirtatiously towards Frank, recorder ready.

MEGHAN

Frank, are these moves safe? You know, for a *woman her age*?

FRANK

Please stop smoking in here.

Back on Eliza -

ELIZA

Here, Ashley, you try - Really feel the wall, become part of it.

Ashley mimics Eliza, smooshing herself against the wall. It wobbles dangerously. Frank decides to intervene:

FRANK

Okay, Eliza, thank you -

ELIZA

(to Ashley)

And sometimes, for verisimilitude, I'd pick where security cameras might be in the world and dodge them -

She "spots a camera" on the ceiling, somersaults badly to dodge its frame.

FRANK

Okay, really, we have to move on.

ELIZA

Move on! Of course! I don't want to hold you up, no sir! Wouldn't want someone upset with me because after twelve lovely years of service I'm suddenly considered *HARD TO WORK WITH*.

The entire room gasps. Frank blanches. Meghan drops her cigarette.

MEGHAN

Oh, shit.

FRANK

Eliza, step away from the set -

ELIZA

(loud)

One more move, Ashley - the Zebra.

Eliza commits, hard. Springs back and forth like, well, a Zebra. The effect is more a like a wounded doe - large eyes, uneven gait. Ashley hops to imitate her - and Jorge spots the camera cables before either of them -

JORGE

Eliza, look out -

Too late! Eliza's foot snags a cable, toppling a tripod. It knocks into the wall, starts it rocking - then tipping - PLUMMETING TOWARDS ASHLEY.

ASHLEY

Oh my God -

CRASH with the falling set to BLACK.

END ACT II

ACT IIIINT. TALENT AGENCY - DAY

A bustling talent agency. Phones ring off hooks, and well-dressed assistants scurry past a sunglassesed Eliza as she sits in a waiting area with as much dignity as she can muster.

At a desk nearby, IRA'S ASSISTANT mans her phone -

IRA'S ASSISTANT
Ira Himmel's office, please hold...

A TV on a nearby wall plays E! News - a photo of Ashley in gym gear up on the screen. Eliza feigns disinterest. Badly.

E! ANCHOR
And hot from the daytime soap dish, former Olympian and newly-minted *SPIES* star Ashley Clifford has been released from Cedars-Sinai following last week's on-set mishap, first reported by *Variety's* Meghan Nichols. Network reports *SPIES* filming has been indefinitely postponed -

Laurie approaches Eliza with a cold soda can. Eliza's fixated on the screen.

E! ANCHOR (CONT'D)
- due to what anonymous sources are calling longtime player Eliza Dufrey's "erratic" behavior -

LAURIE
Eliza?

Eliza looks up, takes the offered drink. Looks at it.

LAURIE (CONT'D)
Coconut. They're out of peach.

Eliza considers the can, then throws it, hard, across the room at the television.

It shatters the screen and drops, bouncing and slamming into a closed door, where it rips open and fizzes all over the carpet. Laurie and Ira's Assistant watch the geyser, paralyzed in shock.

Pan up the door to reveal a name: IRA HIMMEL, TALENT AGENT. Ira opens the door. Looks at the La Croix now spewing all over his expensive shoes, looks up at Eliza, tense.

IRA
Eliza? C'mon in.

Eliza rises with incredible decorum, sweeps into his office. Laurie follows - but the door shuts in her face.

INT. IRA'S OFFICE - DAY

Ira gestures to Eliza to sit. She slumps in a chair. Pulls off her sunglasses, goes to set them on the glass-top desk in front of her. Ira swoops in with an oblong coaster.

IRA
Let's not scratch the desk.
(beat)
Frank's pretty angry.

Eliza explodes:

ELIZA
Well, I'm angry at him! Bringing in that coked-up hack, promoting me then cutting my lines, and now not even deigning to apologize - *blaming* me, even! - after such a scare when that set fell - they're filleting a nose to spite their face -

IRA
And they hope you're onboard with the rhinoplasty. I called you in because Frank's assistant faxed over your termination paperwork.

He produces a letter-sized coaster and drops a hefty stack of paper onto the desk on top of it.

ELIZA
He's - what? What about the spentorship? We agreed -

IRA
You don't have to sign them right away, but the sooner the better.

ELIZA
But - I won them an Emmy. It's my show -

Ira laughs sadly.

IRA

Your show? No - it's Network's show. Frank's show. You've been a tiny sud in their big, foamy ratings machine.

Eliza doesn't answer. After a long beat -

ELIZA

If I sign these, what happens?

IRA

When you sign, you cash out, head back to Wine Country and your charity cats -

ELIZA

Kittens, Ira -

IRA

- Unless... If you're willing to pop the soap bubble, I found you a couple auditions...

He produces a bulging folder.

IRA (CONT'D)

- a couple hip indie features, a few prestige cable pilots... You've been foam for too long, Eliza. Let's give you something solid, huh?

Eliza slowly takes the folder. Looks at her headshot on the cover. It's clearly thirty years old. Goes to set it down -

IRA (CONT'D)

Ah! Not on the glass!

INT. TALENT AGENCY - CONTINUOUS

Laurie's deep in talks with Ira's Assistant over twin La Croixes as Ira and Eliza exit Ira's office, Eliza clutching the folder and Ira carrying the hefty Termination Agreement. The shattered TV still sparks on the wall.

IRA'S ASSISTANT

I'd also check Entertainment Careers, the UTA List, Craigslist only if you're *really* des -

Laurie notices Eliza, snaps to attention.

LAURIE
Uh, ready to go?

INT. TALENT AGENCY HALLWAY - DAY

Eliza trails Laurie (hauling the Termination Agreement in both arms), opening the audition folder and flipping through.

ELIZA
See, Laurie, screw Frank! Screw Network! Screw their ageist policies and their "agreements"... *This* is why you need a good agent: so whatever shitstorm may brew, you know they, at least, will look out for your best -

She stops in her tracks.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
(reading)
"Character Breakdown: Faithless First Wife?"

She paws to the next page.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
"Seeking character actress for spunky, over-the-hill grandmother?"
"MATRONLY HOUSEKEEPER?"

Eliza turns on her heels, storms back towards -

INT. TALENT AGENCY - CONTINUOUS

Ira's Assistant, blotting the La Croix spill in front of Ira's door, looks up to steamrolling Eliza.

IRA'S ASSISTANT
Uh, Ira's in a meeting -

Eliza shoves into the office past her, Laurie right behind, slamming the door against the wall as -

INT. IRA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

ELIZA
How dare you! How dare you present me with these - insipid, septic -

She throws the file at Ira - papers go everywhere.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

I've been working as an action heroine for two decades, and you want to pop my soap bubble with this Diva Cup of domesticity?

IRA

Eliza -

Eliza barrels on:

ELIZA

It's not easy, hearing someone doesn't want you. But Ira, if these ridiculous parts are the alternative to the action-packed work I've been doing - the work I've loved doing year after year - bring on the suds!

She slams both hands on the desk. Ira viscerally cringes.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Maybe I haven't been the easiest to work with. But if Jeanine as an undercover jewelry smuggler can uncover her heart of gold every week, maybe I can change, too. Because it's possible the show can go on without me, but I don't know if I -

FRANK (V.O.)

Eliza! Stop.

Eliza looks sharply at the source. Reveal: Ira's speakerphone's been on the whole time.

ELIZA

...Frank?

FRANK (V.O.)

Eliza, you've made my job a nightmare. But trying to get rid of you has been worse.

ELIZA

I'll take that as a compliment.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Frank sits on his windowsill.

FRANK

Thanks to you, I've got an Olympian in a body cast and the Elks Club picketing on the lot. Seems your new charity struck a chord with the unemployed military community.

Pan to reveal: marching veterans, hoisting both kittens and signs: "VETS FOR ELIZA" and "SAVE OUR SPY!"

INTERCUT FRANK AND ELIZA.

ELIZA

They're the best-kept secret in Daytime.

FRANK

But look, Eliza, if we're going to have you back, there'll have to be some changes. Punctuality, for one -

ELIZA

Oh, Frank!

FRANK

No more kittens at award shows -

ELIZA

Cross my heart -

FRANK

- And we'll need you to do some immediate positive press. A few good interviews in the trades, a solid sweeps junket -

Eliza pauses, considering:

ELIZA

Will I get my monologues back?

FRANK

Yes.

ELIZA

And a number of suitable flashbacks to my Emmy-winning Season 37, the meth smugglers?

Another long pause. Eliza and Ira wait with bated breath -

FRANK
... We'll see.

Eliza smiles.

ELIZA
Let me make a few calls.

INT. ELIZA'S DRESSING ROOM - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Angelica douses Eliza in hairspray. Pan to reveal: Meghan, also in the room, recorder ready. She coughs as Eliza speaks:

ELIZA
- So, I wanted to talk about my experience because the *SPIES* team has been so *different* than the rest of that ageist Daytime tripe - Take, well, the rampant abuse in *Pieces*, or *Trash and Treasure* -

AD (V.O.)
(over)
Jeanine to the stage, Jeanine to the stage -

INT. SPIES SOUNDSTAGE - SLIGHTLY THEREAFTER

Eliza strides onto set - the same path as before, a distinctive new spring in her step.

She reaches the active set (a hospital room), where a body-cast, bed-ridden Ashley glances up at her from her script.

ASHLEY
Come to finish me off?

ELIZA
Came to bring you this.

She hands Ashley a small ziplock bag crammed with white powder. Ashley's eyes widen.

ASHLEY
Is that -

ELIZA
Protein powder! For our next gym date? If you still want - I realize I may have come on strong, but -

Ashley smiles, cuts her off with an awkward, plaster hug.

ASHLEY
Thanks, Spentor.

ELIZA
Anytime, Spentee.

Frank approaches, his assistant and nearby Jorge in tow.

FRANK
So, we'll start from the top of 3E,
Ashley and Jorge, from Ashley's
speech - Can I get cameras ready?

Ashley and Jorge stash their scripts under the bedsheets and prepare, but Eliza hesitates -

ELIZA
Wait, Frank -

Eliza pulls a tiny stuffed cat out of her robe.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
Not allergic to this one, are you?

Frank takes the cat, cracks a hesitant but amused smile.

FRANK
I thought these were just for
veterans?

ELIZA
I think we've been through the
wars, too.

It's a nice moment, interrupted as Laurie holds up her cell:

LAURIE
Hey, big smiles for Instagram!

Eliza turns to pose with Frank and the cat, flinging her arms out - and accidentally whacking Frank in the face. Hard.

ELIZA
(oblivious)
Smiles!

FRANK
(in pain)
My face!

FREEZE on Eliza, a staggering Frank beside her. See Laurie's Insta caption: #BSF - BEST SPIES FOREVER - racking up the "Likes" - and

FADE TO BLACK:

END OF ACT III

TAGINT. ANIMAL SHELTER - DAYS LATER

A crowded animal shelter. A huge sign in the background:
 "KITTENS 4 VETZ!" Laurie, wearing a name tag, holds a number
 of reporters (including Meghan) at bay.

LAURIE

Eliza will be right with you -

MEGHAN

Quit the yappin', Karen. We came
 for the pussy.

LAURIE

(seriously?)

You were at my bat mitzvah.

Rack to: Eliza emerging from the back, snuggling a kitten and
 accompanied by a number of decorated military veterans (in
 uniform).

ELIZA

And what's your name, kitty? Did
 you oppose the war in Iraq?

Laurie waves to her and the veterans, holding up her phone.

LAURIE

Say "kitties"!

Eliza and the veterans turn and pose. Eliza lifts the kitten
 to her face.

ELIZA

And how about a little kiss for
 your pacifist soap star meow-my?

The kitten bites her nose. She nearly drops it in pain.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Ow! Mother fuck- LAURIE!

BLACK.

END OF SHOW