

THE KING OF COMEDY

Screenplay by Paul D. Zimmerman

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FADE IN:

EXT: MIDTOWN MANHATTAN STREETS - DAY

Behind the opening credits, we watch a montage of RUPERT PUPKIN making his daily rounds as a messenger delivering manila envelopes and packages to various New York offices, always courteous and polite in his demeanor, PUPKIN is an attractive-looking young man just past thirty and dressed in a stylish blue suit, broad tie and wide-collared shirt.

His shoes are neatly polished, his hair carefully groomed.

As the montage continues, we see that he has finished his deliveries and is walking rapidly towards his destination.

It turns out to be a television theater north of Times Square whose marquee announces THE JERRY LANGFORD SHOW.

It is dusk and the show is about to break. There is a very small crowd already positioned at the stage door -- a few young girls, a few curious passers-by who have stopped to see who will emerge. Three professional autograph hunters are clustered together:

MAE, a lady in her sixties, wears a red velvet dress, a lace hat and much too much rouge.

SIDNEY is in his mid-twenties, tall, badly-complexioned, slicked hair but otherwise neatly dressed. He carries a brown lunch bag.

CELESTE is an enormously fat woman in her mid-thirties.

She wears a large cape to conceal her obesity.

A middle-aged MAN, dressed in a corduroy suit, emerges from the backstage door which is guarded by a large, white-haired POLICEMAN. The non-professionals in the crowd just peer at the MAN but MAE immediately steps in front of him with her autograph book raised.

MAE
(to the MAN)
Are you somebody?

MAN
No, honey, I'm just a working stiff.

The MAN keep walking and MAE returns to her cohorts just as PUPKIN arrives.

MAE
Hi, Rupert.

CELESTE
(coolly)
Hello, Rupert.

SIDNEY
Who did you get?

PUPKIN
 (distractedly)
 Nobody.

PUPKIN carefully places himself near the door, a step or two away from the other professionals.

MAE
 (to SIDNEY)
 I got Mr. Raf Vallone outside 21.

CELESTE
 (to SIDNEY about
 PUPKIN)
 He'd never tell you anyway, Sidney.

MAE
 Then I got him again at the Pierre
 at four o'clock.

SIDNEY
 Be a dear, Mae. I don't happen to
 have Mr. Vallone.

MAE
 You know what I want for him.

SIDNEY
 But I have only six Barbra's left.
 You know how difficult she is to
 work with.

MAE
 I don't have her even once.

CELESTE
 (to MAE)
 Maybe Rupert would help you.

PUPKIN shoots a hostile glance back at CELESTE.

SIDNEY
 Would you do that, Rupert? You
 don't feel about Barbra the way I
 do.

MAE
 I'll give you Mr. Burt Reynolds
 too.

CELESTE
 (needling RUPERT)
 Look, Sidney, Rupert doesn't do
 that sort of thing.

SIDNEY
 How about it, Rupert? I'll give
 you whoever you want.

SIDNEY starts pulling little white cards out of his paper bag and reading them off.

SIDNEY

Rodney Dangerfield ... Richard Harris ... Liza Minelli ... and she's not so easy to work with either ... Louise Lasser!

CELESTE

You're wasting your time.

PUPKIN has been trying to remain apart from the other three. Finally he turns to SIDNEY.

PUPKIN

Look, Sidney. I'm just not interested. This isn't my whole life, you know.

CELESTE

What's that supposed to mean -- that it's my whole life, or Sidney's or Mae's?

MAE

It is so my whole life.

CELESTE

Shut up, Mae. What about your mother? Isn't she part of your life?

MAE

It's her whole life too.

The show breaks. The doors swing open and people pour out.

The crowd around the backstage door swells.

POLICEMAN

(to the crowd)

If you want Jerry's autograph, give me your piece of paper and I'll send it backstage.

A number of people in the crowd hand in pieces of paper.

PUPKIN is standing next to a young couple, about college age. The YOUNG GIRL has just sent in her paper.

PUPKIN

(to the GIRL)

What are you going to do with Jerry's autograph?

YOUNG GIRL

I don't know. Maybe I'll sell it.

BOYFRIEND

I'll tell you what she's going to do with it.

(MORE)

BOYFRIEND (CONT'D)

She's going to pin it on her
bulletin board and have an orgasm.

The YOUNG GIRL laughs unself-consciously.

CUT TO:

LANGFORD's limousine waits directly in front of the stage door. MAE has engaged the CHAUFFEUR who stands at the door of the car in conversation.

CHAUFFEUR

(wearily)

No, Mae.

MAE

I don't mean now.

CHAUFFEUR

No, Mae.

MAE

I'll get right out.

The CHAUFFEUR, smiling, shakes his head.

CUT TO:

A plain-looking GIRL in a black raincoat and black, floppy hat stands on the street side of the limousine, carefully watching MAE and the CHAUFFEUR talk.

CUT TO:

MAE

But I've never been in one.

We hear a cry as a celebrity emerges from the backstage door. MAE turns and goes back towards the door.

CUT TO:

The POLICEMAN is handing out the autographs. Suddenly LANGFORD emerges, flanked by three PAGES, husky young men in their early twenties dressed in theater uniforms.

There is screaming and some yelling of LANGFORD's name.

LANGFORD pays no attention. Smiling nervously, he makes his way towards the limousine. The CHAUFFEUR stands at the rear of the car, holding the door. LANGFORD enters the car and then suddenly springs back. The GIRL in the black raincoat and black hat has hidden herself in the back seat of the limousine. The three PAGES, who have already turned and headed back toward the theater, hear the commotion and swing around. The GIRL, who we shall come to know as MARSHA, hides herself in the far end of the limo, so two of the PAGES go around to the far side of the car and start pulling her out while the third PAGE moves into the limo from the street side.

She fights like a wildcat, but the PAGES slowly manage to drag her out. During the struggle, LANGFORD stands amid the crowd, a bit shaken. PUPKIN stands next to him, staring at him.

When finally catches LANGFORD's eye, PUPKIN smiles pleasantly.

PUPKIN
 (to LANGFORD who
 barely listens)
 How the hell did that girl get in there? Jesus, they certainly don't give you very good protection, do they?

LANGFORD says nothing, glancing nervously at PUPKIN.

PUPKIN
 Look at you here. Who the hell is watching you? Any one of these freaks could just walk right up to you and do whatever he wants.

A couple YOUNG GIRLS are pressing against LANGFORD.

FIRST GIRL
 Oh, Jerry. How can we get to talk to you?

PUPKIN
 Just a minute. This is crazy.

PUPKIN straightens up for action.

PUPKIN
 (yelling at the
 crowd)
 Okay! Stand back!

PUPKIN wades through the crowd towards the limousine, pushing SIDNEY and MAE among others out of the way.

LANGFORD follows in the path PUPKIN is clearing.

PUPKIN
 Didn't you hear me?!? Come on, people, have a heart.

The PAGES have succeeded in pulling the GIRL out of the far door of the limo just as PUPKIN and LANGFORD arrive at the near door. The CHAUFFEUR has been blocked by the crowd from opening the door so PUPKIN opens it.

PUPKIN
 Stand back! (To LANGFORD) Go ahead, Jerry.

LANGFORD slips in quickly. He looks up at PUPKIN who is holding the door, smiling pleasantly.

LANGFORD

Thanks. Thanks very much.

PUPKIN stares at LANGFORD for a moment and then slides into the limo next to him, closing the door behind him.

INT: LIMO - NIGHT

PUPKIN

I hate to bother you like this, Jerry, but could I speak to you for a minute.

LANGFORD

I'd like to but ...

PUPKIN

I know you're a busy man. I promise not to take very long, really. But I need your advice.

PUPKIN looks down at his hand which has been badly scratched.

PUPKIN

You don't have a handkerchief, do you? Jesus, these people will kill you for a cufflink.

LANGFORD hands him a monogrammed handkerchief, then checks his watch.

PUPKIN

Thanks. If you have to be somewhere, I don't mind talking as we drive. You can drop me off anywhere.

LANGFORD

Sorry, but I've got a strict rule never to ...

PUPKIN

I put myself on the line for you, Jerry.

Reluctantly, LANGFORD signals with his head to his CHAUFFEUR to start moving. As the car moves through New York traffic, PUPKIN and LANGFORD talk.

PUPKIN

Thanks, Jerry. I'm grateful for this chance to talk to you... I hope I'm not boring you.

LANGFORD

I'll let you know.

PUPKIN

Really? Fine. I'm Rupert Pupkin, Jerry.

I know that the name itself doesn't mean very much to you but it means an awful lot to me, believe me. Maybe you've seen me outside your show and wondered who I am.

Well, right now, I'm in communications but, by nature, I'm a stand-up comedian. I know what you're thinking -- 'oh no. Not another one.' And I wouldn't take up even one minute of your time if I wasn't absolutely convinced of my talent. I'm really good, Jerry, believe me, I'm dynamite. Now you're probably wondering if I'm so good why haven't you caught my act somewhere, right?

LANGFORD

Well...

PUPKIN

Well, up to now, I've been bidding my time, developing my act slowly and carefully so that when my big break finally comes, I'm ready -- like you were that night Paar got sick and you sat in for him. I was there that night, in the theater. That was the most important night of my life, until tonight, of course.

PUPKIN fishes a cigarette case out of his jacket pocket, flips it open and offers one to LANGFORD.

LANGFORD

No thanks. I don't smoke.

PUPKIN returns the pack to his pocket.

PUPKIN

Me neither. I just carry them as a courtesy. How about a cough drop?

LANGFORD

(smiling indulgently)
No thanks. I don't cough.

PUPKIN

I try not to but sometimes, you know ... Am I making any sense?

LANGFORD

(smiling)
Go on.

PUPKIN

Well, that night you did Paar, I walked out of the theater like I was in a dream.

All of a sudden, I knew what I wanted.

I started catching your guest appearances on Sullivan and taping them and, when you got your own show, it got to be

a kind of regular thing. I studied how you built to your one-liners, nice and relaxed like you were chatting, and how you delivered the jokes without leaning too much on them, without saying "here's the punchline, folks." And I watched the way you played off dead audiences, how you let those long silences build until people couldn't stand it and then the way you got them off the hook with that slow smile. You were my college of comedy, Jerry, like a kind of teacher, a friend. I know it sounds crazy, but when you watch someone every night ... But that's all in the past. What I'm trying to say is this.

I'm ready now. I've finished the course.

And I'm thinking as we sit here talking "Is this it? Is this that one big break?"

Is it, Jerry?

There is a long pause.

PUPKIN

Jerry?

LANGFORD

Look ... er ... what was the name?

PUPKIN

I'm Rupert, Jerry.

LANGFORD

Look, Rupert. I know what you're saying.

But things don't work that way. You can't just walk onto a network show without any experience. You've got to start at the bottom...

PUPKIN

But that's where I am!

LANGFORD

You've got to work your way up, learn your trade in front of live audiences, start playing the little clubs.

PUPKIN

But that can take years, Jerry! Look at me. I'm already 31 years old! People my age are way ahead of me. I've got some catching up to do and I need your help.

What do you say, Jerry? All I'm asking you to do is listen to my act. That's all.

Is that asking too much?

LANGFORD

I get calls from agents every day.

All they want ...

PUPKIN

I tried getting an agent. I did,
Jerry.

But you know how it is. You can't get an agent unless you're working and you can't get work unless you've got an agent ... or unless you know somebody. And the only person I know is you, Jerry.

There is a long pause.

LANGFORD

Look, why don't you call my office.

PUPKIN

Could I?!? Oh, I knew you'd say that, Jerry. You don't know how many times I've had this conversation in my head. And this is the way it always turns out. That's why I had to sort of invite myself into the car tonight. I know it's kind of presumptuous and I really appreciate the time you've given me. But breaks like this don't just happen. You have to make your own breaks.

The limousine starts slowing down as it pulls up before U.N. Plaza. It stops. LANGFORD gets out. PUPKIN follows.

EXT: U.N. PLAZA APARTMENTS - NIGHT

LANGFORD turn to PUPKIN, looking to get rid of him as cleanly and gracefully as possible. LANGFORD extends his hand. PUPKIN goes to shake it but his hand is wrapped in the handkerchief. He extends his left hand. LANGFORD shakes it awkwardly.

LANGFORD

Nice meeting you, Rupert. I hope it all works out for you.

PUPKIN

Thanks, Jerry. I don't know how to repay you. I'm a little short on cash this evening, but, if you don't mind some good, hearty food, I'd be honored to take you to dinner.

LANGFORD

Thanks, but some people are waiting for me.

PUPKIN

Oh, I understand. Well, then, maybe I could repay you with a joke.

LANGFORD is starting to walk into the building.

PUPKIN

Wait a minute. How's this? The first night you do your show from the coast, you open this way. "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, it's great to be back here in Southern California where you can wake up in the morning and listen to the birds coughing ... "

LANGFORD

(nodding but
unsmiling)
Not bad. Maybe.

PUPKIN calls after LANGFORD who heads for the entrance to his building.

PUPKIN

Consider it a gift. Hey, Jerry!

How about lunch? My treat!

LANGFORD

(turning back before
he enters the
building)
Call my office.

PUPKIN waves with his bandaged hand, notices LANGFORD's handkerchief and unwraps it.

PUPKIN

(to the handkerchief)
Thanks, Jerry.

The CAMERA MOVES IN for a CLOSE-UP of PUPKIN in a kind of daze.

FADE TO:

INT: SARDI'S RESTAURANT - DAY

PUPKIN and LANGFORD stand at the edge of the foyer, waiting for the Maitre d' to seat them. VINCENT, the owner, spots them and hurries over.

VINCENT

I'm sorry, Mr. Langford.
(To PUPKIN, angrily)
How did you get in?

LANGFORD

That's alright, Vincent. Mr. Pupkin's a friend of mine.

VINCENT

(puzzled)
Oh, I see.

PUPKIN

That's alright. Now if you'd be good enough to find us a nice table.

PUPKIN pushes a five dollar bill into VINCENT's hand.

VINCENT

Certainly. This way, please.

VINCENT leads PUPKIN and LANGFORD to the "bullpen," a select spot in a corner of the restaurant.

VINCENT

Here you are. Enjoy your lunch, gentlemen.

LANGFORD

Is Eddie here today, Vincent?

VINCENT

I'll send him over.

A WAITER arrives and hands them the menu.

WAITER

Our specialty today is Rizzofino Dolce Acqua a la Marinara con Spezi. Very good.

PUPKIN

Sounds like a new opera.

LANGFORD

Fine. What comes with it?

WAITER

Me.

The three laugh.

PUPKIN

Fine. For two.

WAITER

Very good.

The WAITER leaves.

PUPKIN

You look tired, Jerry.

LANGFORD

It shows, does it? It's all these problems with the show. That and the custody suit.

PUPKIN

I was sorry to read about that, Jerry.

Charlene never should have gotten the kids. If there's anything I can do.

LANGFORD

I appreciate it, Rube. Just talking about it a little with you helps.

Eddie arrives. He is a small, slightly-bald man with greying hair and a goatee. He wears a foulard under an open-necked shirt. He carries a long sketch pad. He immediately sets up a small easel and starts sketching.

PUPKIN

Hasn't Eddie already done you?

LANGFORD

Never mind. You were saying ...

PUPKIN

Well, I've been giving a lot of thought to your situation, Jerry, ever since I saw you starting to lose ground in the ratings. And I think I know what the problem is. Too many of the same faces.

LANGFORD

Yeah?

PUPKIN

Sure, people are getting tired of these people who live off game shows and talk shows and can't really do anything. They've seen 'em and heard 'em till they can't stand it anymore.

LANGFORD

You know, maybe you're right, Rube.

PUPKIN

I'm sure I am. When a show runs out of surprises, it loses its audience.

A YOUNG GIRL stands before PUPKIN and LANGFORD. She hands PUPKIN her autograph book.

PUPKIN

What's your name, dear?

GIRL

Dolores.

PUPKIN

(writing)

To Dolores, who sensed greatness.
Rupert Pupkin.

GIRL
 (reading it)
 Thanks, Mr. Pupkin.

The GIRL leaves.

PUPKIN
 You see what I mean? What you
 need on the show is some unknown
 quantity, some brilliant talent
 making his television debut.
 Imagine the suspense. Who is this
 young guy? How will he do with
 the eyes of all America on him?
 Something like that has got to
 help.

LANGFORD
 And that's where you come in.

PUPKIN
 Why not? Believe me, Jerry, I'd
 give you the credit you deserve
 and I'll stick with you. Anytime
 you need me, I'll be there, doing
 a few minutes at Guild scale.

LANGFORD
 I'd be grateful, Rube. I really
 would.

EDDIE
 All finished, Mr. Langford.

EDDIE turns the caricature so PUPKIN and LANGFORD can see
 it. It's a picture of the two of them, facing each other
 and smiling.

PUPKIN
 Oh, Jerry, you sneaky ...

LANGFORD
 Looks good, Eddie.

The WAITER arrives with a bottle of champagne.

PUPKIN
 What's this?

WAITER
 Compliments of Mr. Sardi.

EDDIE hangs the picture of LANGFORD and PUPKIN on the wall
 behind them among the hundreds of other caricatures --
 from Bankhead to Sid Caesar to Bette Davis. The CAMERA
 PANS over these. We hear the champagne pop.

PUPKIN'S VOICE
 How does your afternoon look?

LANGFORD'S VOICE

What have you got in mind?

PUPKIN'S VOICE

Well, we've still got time to catch the Cubs and the Mets out at Shea.

LANGFORD'S VOICE

Why not? But first, a toast. To you, Rube and your success.

PUPKIN'S VOICE

Thanks, Jerry.

FADE TO:

EXT: U.N. PLAZA - NIGHT

PUPKIN

Thanks, Jerry.

PUPKIN takes LANGFORD's handkerchief and folds it reverentially, tucking it carefully into his breast pocket.

He claps his hands together a few times for joy and dashes into the street to hail a cab.

CUT TO:

INT: LANGFORD'S APARTMENT

LANGFORD enters his apartment. It is tasteful, modern, spacious and empty. A floodlight shines on a single setting at the end of a long dinner table. He walks over to a large aquarium and sprinkles some food for the fish.

LANGFORD

(to the fish)

Say hello to Jerry.

On a shelf above the aquarium stand three pictures, one of two boys, roughly eight and eleven, flanked by a shot of each boy alone. LANGFORD walks to the end of the table where a covered dish and a New York Post await him. He lifts the covered dish which reveals a large, cold salmon.

LANGFORD

(to the fish)

Say hello to Jerry.

LANGFORD begins poking at the fish with his fork. The phone rings. He answers it.

LANGFORD

Yeah.

GIRL'S VOICE

It's Marsha, Jerry. Did you get my note? I left it on the back seat. Did you get it?

(MORE)

GIRL'S VOICE (CONT'D)

I dropped it there before they
pulled me out. Those guys hurt
me, Jerry.

(pause)

Jerry?

LANGFORD

(icily)

Who gave you this number?

MARSHA'S VOICE

Don't be angry with me, Jerry. I
didn't know what else to do; I've
been trying you every five minutes,
I miss you, baby ... Jerry?

LANGFORD hangs up the phone and then takes it off the
receiver.

LANGFORD

Say goodbye to Jerry.

He shakes his head wearily, returns to his dinner and turns
to the inside pages of the New York Post.

CUT TO:

EXT: LEXINGTON AVENUE IN THE SIXTIES - NIGHT

A cab pulls up in front of an all-night florist shop.

PUPKIN dashes out of the cab and into the florist's.

The cab waits.

CUT TO:

EXT: LEXINGTON AVENUE IN THE SIXTIES - NIGHT

PUPKIN dashes out of the florist's clutching a single red
rose. He hops back into the cab which starts moving.

CUT TO:

EXT: A STREET OFF BROADWAY - NIGHT

The cab pulls up in front of Gil's Steaks and Chops, a
restaurant of little distinction that has a few checkered
tableclothed tables in the rear and a long bar at the front.
PUPKIN stares through the window of the bar at RITA, the
bargirl, an attractive, somewhat shopworn blonde in her
late twenties. PUPKIN enters.

CUT TO:

INT: BAR-RESTAURANT

PUPKIN goes to the near end of the sparsely-populated bar.

PUPKIN

Miss!

RITA comes over. PUPKIN smiles knowingly.

PUPKIN

A beer please, Miss. Something imported.

RITA

Heineken's alright?

PUPKIN

Fine.

RITA serves him a Heineken's. She stares at him, searching his face.

PUPKIN

How have you been, Rita?

She stares again.

RITA

You're not Rupert Pupkin!

PUPKIN smiles broadly.

RITA

How the hell did you find me?

PUPKIN

Sally Gardner, I met her after a matinee. Aren't you glad to see me?

RITA

Sure, sure. How is old Sally?

PUPKIN

The same, I guess. You know, two kids, a nice husband, living in Clifton.

RITA

It figures.

PUPKIN

A lot of the kids in our class have moved back.

RITA

What are you doing here?

PUPKIN

I just thought I'd say hello. Here, I brought you a little something.

RITA
 (recognizing his
 style)
 Oh, yeah, Mr. Romance.

PUPKIN
 Don't forget to put in an aspirin.
 It lasts longer.

RITA fills a glass of water and puts in the rose.

RITA
 Nothing's gonna keep it alive in
 this place.

PUPKIN
 How have you been, dear, sweet
 Rita?

RITA
 I don't have an aspirin.

PUPKIN
 Maybe a Roloids would work.

PUPKIN pulls out a pack of Roloids and hands one to RITA
 who smiles vaguely and drops it into the glass.

RITA
 Well, what are you up to these
 days, Rupert?

PUPKIN
 Didn't you know you'd see me again?

RITA
 You still going to the movies?

PUPKIN
 You're looking as beautiful as
 ever.

RITA
 Oh, yeah. I was a real knockout.

PUPKIN
 I thought so.

RITA
 Well, here I am. Local cheerleader
 makes good.

PUPKIN
 I voted for you for Most Beautiful.

RITA
 Yeah?

PUPKIN

I didn't have the nerve to tell you then, but I guess it's alright now.

RITA

Well, nothing terrible's gonna happen, if that's what you mean.

There is an awkward pause. PUPKIN stares admiringly at RITA.

RITA

Well, how are things with you, Rupert?

PUPKIN

Great! Everything's starting to break.

RITA

Is that right?

PUPKIN

Yeah. As a matter of fact, that's why I'm here. I've known about this place for a long time. I just didn't want to make my move until I had something to offer you. Everything's a question of timing.

RITA stares at PUPKIN as he rattles on.

PUPKIN

What's the matter?

RITA shakes her head in disbelief and chuckles.

RITA

Jesus Christ, Rupert Pupkin!

PUPKIN

(smiling)

The two of us are often confused. He's the one with the famous father.

PUPKIN waits for a laugh. RITA just keeps shaking her head. PUPKIN looks around.

PUPKIN

(critically)

You like this place?

RITA shrugs.

RITA

Why, you got something better?

PUPKIN

Maybe.

RITA

What?

PUPKIN

What are you doing tonight?

RITA

Tonight?

RITA starts laughing.

PUPKIN

(smiling reluctantly)

What's so funny?

RITA

(still laughing)

You call me up all junior and senior year. Night after night after night, right? And every time I'm wondering 'when is this guy going to stop talking and ask me out?' Well, now I know the answer. August twelfth, nineteen seventy-six. It only took you ten, eleven years to work up to it.

PUPKIN

If I had asked you out? Would you have gone?

RITA

Oh, no.

PUPKIN

Why not?

RITA starts laughing again.

RITA

Because I thought you were a jerk!

PUPKIN

You see! I was right! But that guy isn't me anymore. I look at my picture in the yearbook and I don't even recognize myself.

I'm not the same guy, Rita.

A bull-necked MAN in his early forties enters. He waves a brief hello to RITA as he walks by. RITA smiles and the MAN takes a seat at the far end of the bar.

MAN

Rita!

RITA

(to PUPKIN)

Excuse me a minute, honey.

PUPKIN

I'm not honey! I'm Rupert.

RITA goes to the far end of the bar and serves the MAN a beer. They chat briefly as PUPKIN watches uneasily.

Finally PUPKIN downs his beer and raises his glass.

PUPKIN

Miss! Miss!

The MAN gets RITA's attention for PUPKIN. RITA returns to PUPKIN and serves him another beer.

PUPKIN

I'm in the mood to celebrate tonight. Why don't we go to this nice restaurant I know, talk over and times, get to know each other all over again.

RITA

And then?

PUPKIN

Well, tomorrow night I thought we'd go out again, talk some more, get to know each other even better.

RITA

How much?

PUPKIN

How much what?

RITA

How much do we have to get to know each other?

PUPKIN

I don't understand.

RITA

(emphatically)

How much do we have to get to know each other before we start talking about that job?

PUPKIN

I'm not talking about any job.

RITA

Then what's this big offer you were talking about?

PUPKIN

You'll see. Right now I'm asking you for a date. How about it?

RITA

I'm sorry, Rupert. But I'm busy.

PUPKIN

Busy?

RITA

Yeah. Busy.

PUPKIN

But this is the biggest night of my life.

RITA

I've already got a date.

The MAN at the end of the bar raises his glass.

MAN

Rita!

RITA goes to the far end of the bar. She pours him another beer and settles against the bar, resuming her chat with him. PUPKIN looks for a moment and downs his beer. He raises his glass.

PUPKIN

Miss! Miss!

RITA returns to him.

PUPKIN

Is that your date?

RITA

None of your business.

PUPKIN

What do you want to go out with him for?

RITA

He's a good friend of mine.

PUPKIN

Tell him you're busy.

RITA

What's so important about tonight?

PUPKIN

Everything! You don't understand.

RITA

No. I don't. It's been really nice seeing you, Rupert. Thanks for dropping in. But I've got some work to do.

RITA leaves PUPKIN and returns to the far end of the bar where she once again resumes talking with the MAN. PUPKIN sits for a moment, gets up slowly and heads for the john.

INT: THE JOHN - NIGHT

He enters the john and goes to the farthest of the three urinals. A moment later, the MAN enters. He goes to the nearest of the three urinals. The two men stare at the wall before them but the obvious tension between them renders them both incapable of relieving themselves.

PUPKIN glances over at the MAN's face, then immediately turns back to the wall as the MAN turns to look at him.

The MAN glances quickly at PUPKIN and then returns to staring at the wall. PUPKIN sneaks a furtive glance at the MAN's penis. The MAN sneaks a furtive glance at PUPKIN's penis.

CUT TO:

INT: THE BAR - NIGHT

PUPKIN emerges from the john, followed a moment later by the MAN. They resume their seats at each end of the bar.

A third MAN has come in and is seated midway between PUPKIN and the MAN.

PUPKIN

Miss!

RITA walks over reluctantly.

PUPKIN

Listen to me for a second.

RITA

I have work to do, Rupert.

PUPKIN

Just listen. I'm at the start of something really big. I don't want to talk about it here but it's going to happen soon and it's going to be great -- for both of us.

RITA

No kidding?

PUPKIN

So see that guy some other night.

MAN

Rita!

RITA turns to go.

PUPKIN

But I haven't finished!

RITA returns to the MAN and pours him another beer. PUPKIN sits for a few moments, then downs his beer quickly.

Again, he raises his glass.

PUPKIN

Miss! Miss!

The MAN leans over the bar and tells RITA something. She opens a bottle of beer and hands it to the MAN who slides it down the bar towards PUPKIN. As the beer reaches the middle of the bar, the THIRD MAN seated midway between PUPKIN and the MAN raises his beer glass to take a sip just as the sliding beer bottle passes under his hand. The bottle stops right in front of PUPKIN who takes it and slides it back with equal force. At this moment, the THIRD MAN in the middle has finished his sip and has just placed the THIRD MAN's glass on the counter. The beer bottle collides with the THIRD MAN's glass, creating a mess. RITA glares at PUPKIN as does the THIRD MAN. PUPKIN shrugs an apology and RITA cleans up the mess.

RITA

(to the THIRD MAN)

I'll get you another one.

As RITA cleans up the mess and pours a fresh beer, the MAN walks down the bar towards PUPKIN. He leans over him and puts a supposedly friendly paw on his shoulder. PUPKIN glances distastefully at the MAN's hand on him.

MAN

(to PUPKIN)

Look, friend. I'm trying to have a nice civilized conversation with the young lady. Be a good little lad, huh, and give us a break.

PUPKIN looks up at the MAN who pats him on the back in a gesture of fraudulent friendship and menace. PUPKIN burps.

With an effort, the MAN controls his temper and returns to his seat at the end of the bar. PUPKIN instantly raises his glass.

PUPKIN

Miss! Miss!

The MAN advances towards PUPKIN with another bottle of beer. PUPKIN watches passively as the MAN pours half the bottle into PUPKIN's breast pocket and slams the half-empty bottle on the counter. The MAN walks down to the end of the counter where a smiling RITA is waiting.

PUPKIN again gulps his beer down. RITA and the MAN stare at PUPKIN expecting him to raise his glass and call for another beer. PUPKIN just sits there. After a few moments, RITA and the MAN resume their conversation, but they keep glancing over at PUPKIN, expecting him to interrupt them with a call for beer at any moment. PUPKIN continues to sit there. Just as RITA and the MAN have settled back into their conversation, PUPKIN falls like a stone from the barstool onto the floor. He lies motionless.

RITA and the MAN look at PUPKIN for a moment while the handful of other patrons glance at him and return to their drinks. RITA leaves the bar and goes to the rear of the restaurant, disappearing into the kitchen. As she does, the MAN walks over to where PUPKIN is lying inert and prods him cruelly with his foot.

MAN

C'mon, schmuck, wake up so I can
kick your ass outta here.

The MAN turns to the kitchen to see if RITA is returning.

As he does, PUPKIN carefully opens one eye, grabs a free chair from a nearby cocktail table, rises and bangs the MAN smartly over the head. The MAN falls, out cold. PUPKIN straightens up quickly as the other patrons look on with interest. PUPKIN brushes off his suit, which is blue, just like the MAN's, and stands above the MAN just as the MAN stood above him, his back to kitchen. RITA emerges from the kitchen with the owner, MR. NICHOLS and a large black COOK.

RITA

(to NICHOLS)

He was making trouble one minute
and the next he was on the floor.

RITA automatically reaches out as she talks for what she thinks is the MAN's arm. Instead, PUPKIN turns around smiling, leaving her too startled to speak. NICHOLS and the COOK lift the MAN to his feet.

COOK

Okay, buddy, here we go.

NICHOLS and the COOK lead the MAN, who is still groggy, out of the bar as RITA continues to stare at PUPKIN with a mixture of curiosity and amusement.

RITA

Okay, Tarzan. Where do we eat
tonight?

CUT TO:

INT: CHINESE RESTAURANT ON UPPER WEST SIDE - NIGHT

We are in the kitchen watching two dishes being chopped, shredded and boiled in deep fat. The activity is frantic.

WE FOLLOW the two dishes as a WAITER carries them from the kitchen to a booth where PUPKIN and RITA are talking. It is a painfully plain restaurant, shaped in a rectangle, with booths lining either side and a row of little tables in between. At the back is the kitchen and two phone booths, facing each other. An old Chinese WOMAN mans the cash register by the door. The WAITER sets the dishes down before RITA and PUPKIN and clears an enormous plate of spare rib bones from RITA's place. RITA hands the WAITER her empty cocktail glass.

RITA and PUPKIN are facing one another.

RITA
Another one, Chan.

PUPKIN
(to WAITER)
Chopsticks, please.

The WAITER nods and leaves.

RITA
So all this time you've been
thinking about me, huh?

PUPKIN
That's right, Rita.

RITA
What kinds of things were you
thinking?

PUPKIN drops his eyes shyly. RITA starts laughing.

RITA
Oh, ho! Those kinds of things!
Shame on you, Rupert.

PUPKIN
Rita, I assure you there was ...

RITA
Rupert Pupkin is an unclean person!

PUPKIN
Come on, Rita. People will hear.

RITA
(in a whisper)
Rupert Pupkin is an unclean person.
Oh, come on, Rupert. Relax. Have
a little fun.

WAITER arrives with RITA's drink and chopsticks and a beer
for PUPKIN.

PUPKIN
This is a very important evening
to me, Rita.

RITA
Did you know your nose wiggled
when you talked?

PUPKIN
It does?

RITA
Yeah. Just the tip. Like a rabbit.
(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

(pause)

Hey, are we gonna eat or what?
I'm starving.

PUPKIN serves RITA.

RITA

It always looks like they put worms
in this stuff.

PUPKIN

Just taste.

RITA tastes.

RITA

Well, I guess it won't kill me.

PUPKIN

This is supposed to be the finest
Cantonese cuisine in the city.

RITA

Yeah? Then what happened to the
tablecloths?

PUPKIN drops his eyes.

RITA

Oh, don't worry about it. This is
fine.

(She takes a long
drink)

I'm having a good time. So you've
been devoted to me, huh?

PUPKIN

I used to see you at the Garden
every year.

RITA

Oh, the Follies. That was the
right name for 'em. How did you
know which one was me? We all
looked like chickens. What I mean
is, we all looked like the same
chicken. I thought it was gonna
be Rita Keane in the Ice Follies
and I wind up looking like Henny
Penny.

RITA chuckles to herself.

PUPKIN

You just didn't get the breaks.

RITA

Breaks, bullshit! My parents didn't
have the money for the right coach.
But what difference does it make?

She starts laughing to herself.

RITA

I remember once we were down in Atlanta and the ice machine broke down. We did three hours of slush. Everyone was falling on their faces and hopping up with their arms open for a bow like the whole thing was planned. And the people ate it up.

PUPKIN

I liked the show.

RITA

Yeah? The Follies? You really must have been carrying the torch. What did you think when I got married? You knew I got married?

PUPKIN

I knew it wouldn't last.

RITA

You think I should have married you, instead, huh?

PUPKIN

Peter Drysdale! Really, Rita!

RITA

If he'd only been hit by a train. He was worth a helluva lot more dead than alive, I can tell you that.

RITA raises her glass to the WAITER who is standing nearby, talking with another WAITER. As she does, a nice-looking young MAN sitting in the middle aisle raises his glass of beer to her and drinks it, as a kind of toast. RITA smiles briefly and her eyes return to PUPKIN. The YOUNG MAN is seated behind PUPKIN, facing RITA. The WAITER comes over and collects the glass. Throughout the rest of the scene, a subtle flirtation continues between RITA and the YOUNG MAN.

PUPKIN

Are you seeing anyone?

RITA starts for a moment, thinking PUPKIN has caught her looking at the YOUNG MAN.

RITA

What do you mean?

PUPKIN

I want to know about the competition, that's all.

RITA

Well, tomorrow night, I've got a date with Joe Namath -- you know Joe. And Thursday --- let's see --

PUPKIN

I'm serious, Rita.

RITA

(imitating him)

I'm serious, Rita.

(In her own voice)

Sure I see people. I'm not a nun, Rupert. I see a lot of people.

PUPKIN

Anyone special?

RITA

(chuckling)

You mean am I "going steady"?

Rupert, I'm thirty-one years old!

PUPKIN

What about that guy tonight?

RITA

Him?

PUPKIN

Why him?

RITA

What am I supposed to do, huh?

Sit home watching TV? He's just some guy. He's got his own aluminum siding business. He comes into the city sometimes, that's all.

PUPKIN

You don't go out with him for his money?!?

RITA

Oh, horrors! Look, Rupert, what do you think they pay me in that dump? Ninety-five bucks. And you don't get the world's greatest tippers in there either. Somebody has to take care of me.

PUPKIN

That's what I want to talk to you about, Rita.

The WAITER arrives with RITA's drink.

PUPKIN

Who's your favorite movie star?

RITA

You are, Rupert. Especially your nose.

PUPKIN

Just tell me.

RITA

Is this some kind of game? Are you going to tell me something about my character?

PUPKIN

You'll see. Give me his name.

RITA

I can't think of anybody.

PUPKIN

You've got to have one, Rita. Everybody does.

RITA

Okay. Okay. Let's see.

(pause)

Marilyn Monroe.

PUPKIN slowly pulls out a leather-bound book from his inside jacket pocket.

RITA

Oh, Rupert! Are we going to exchange phone numbers!?

PUPKIN expertly flips to a middle page in the book and, keeping the book open, his finger pointing under a name, he turns the book to RITA.

RITA

That's her name.

PUPKIN

Her name! She signed this herself, especially for me.

RITA starts flipping through the book, curious about the other names. She isn't paying any attention to what PUPKIN is saying.

PUPKIN

She wasn't a great actress but she had a real gift for comedy. She died tragically, you know, alone, like so many of the world's most beautiful women. I'm going to see that doesn't happen to you, Rita.

RITA

Who's this one?

PUPKIN checks the book.

PUPKIN

Burt Reynolds.

RITA

Oh yeah, the guy with no clothes.
Who's this?

PUPKIN

Mel Brooks.

RITA

And this?

PUPKIN

Carol Burnett.

RITA

No kidding. How about this?

PUPKIN

Glenda Jackson.

RITA

Never heard of her.

PUPKIN

(pointing to other
names)

And that's Woody Allen and there's
Ernie Kovacs -- he's dead -- and
that one's Lauren Bacall.

RITA

You don't really know any of these
people?

PUPKIN

Take a look at this.

PUPKIN flips to one of the back pages and shows a name to
RITA.

RITA

(squinting)

I can't make it out.

PUPKIN

Try.

RITA

This is really weird handwriting!

Exasperated, PUPKIN follows the name in question with his
index finger.

PUPKIN

Rooper

RITA

(guessing)

Redford!

PUPKIN
That's Robert Redford.

RITA
It is?

PUPKIN
No! It's ... it's Rupert Pupkin

PUPKIN tears out the page and hands it to her shyly. RITA just stares at it and back at PUPKIN.

PUPKIN
Don't lose it. It's going to be worth something in a couple of weeks.

RITA start laughing.

PUPKIN
That's what I've been trying to tell you. Things are really breaking for me. I'm ticketed for stardom.

RITA laughs harder, despite efforts to be serious.

PUPKIN
Only a couple of hours ago, I was talking to Jerry Langford, the Jerry Langford. Stop it, Rita!

RITA pulls herself together for a moment.

PUPKIN
We were talking about my doing my act on his show.

RITA
(suppressing a smile)
Your act?

PUPKIN
Get that guy you knew from Clifton out of your head right now. You're looking at Rupert Pupkin, Rita. Rupert Pupkin, the new King of Comedy.

RITA starts laughing hysterically, in spite of herself.

RITA
(getting a grip on herself)
I'm sorry.

PUPKIN
Why not me, Rita? A guy can always get what he wants if he's willing to pay the price.
(MORE)

PUPKIN (CONT'D)

All it takes is a little talent
and sacrifice and the right break.
If you've got a friend in the right
place, that's all it takes. And
that's exactly what I have going
for me right now. After all,
crazier things have happened.

RITA listens silently for a moment, then begins to giggle.

As PUPKIN resumes speaking, we CUT between RITA and the
YOUNG MAN. Their flirtation picks up steam. The YOUNG
MAN raises his eyebrows as if to ask, "Are you interested
in me?" She smiles. All the while, PUPKIN rattles on.

PUPKIN

You just don't realize what a shot
on the Langford Show can mean.
That's coast to coast, national
TV, a bigger audience than the
greatest comedians used to play to
in a lifetime. A shot like that
means a free ticket on the comedy
circuit -- Flip Wilson one week,
Cosby the next, then Sonny and
Cher or Carol Burnett. And you've
always got those other talk shows
to fall back on -- Carson, Griffin.
And all that leads straight in one
direction, Rita -- Hollywood!
That's when we really start living.
How does this sound to you -- a
beach house in Malibu, right on
the ocean. You'll get a beautiful
tan, believe me. And we'd keep a
suite at the Sherry. That's the
only place to stay when you're
big. We could get something on a
top floor and look down on all our
old friends in Clifton and just
laugh. How does that sound to
you?

RITA

It sounds wonderful, Rupert, and I
really hope you get what you want.
But it's getting late and I'm a
working girl. You know what I
mean?

The telephone at the back of the restaurant starts ringing.

A WAITER in the background moves slowly to answer it.

PUPKIN

You going to spend the rest of
your life in that place? Is that
what you really want, talking about
nothing with nothings?

(MORE)

PUPKIN (CONT'D)

I thought you wanted something a little better than that and that's what I'm offering. Every King needs a Queen, Rita. I want you to be mine. What do you say?

RITA

You really want to help me out? You see this. (She points to her lower back molar) A hundred seventy-five bucks. If you could spare fifty, say, until next Monday, that would keep three people really happy -- me, my landlord and my dentist.

During RITA's speech, the WAITER has been working his way from the phone booth towards the front of the restaurant.

WAITER

Telephone for you, Miss.

RITA

(looking puzzled)
Me? Nobody knows I'm here. You didn't tell anybody, did you?

PUPKIN

No.

RITA

(getting up)
What the hell's going on?

CAMERA FOLLOWS RITA, who walks to the back of the restaurant and picks up the dangling receiver in one of the two facing booths, the other of which is occupied.

INT: THE PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

RITA

Hello?

MAN'S VOICE

Hi.

RITA

Who is this?

MAN'S VOICE

Who do you think it is? I've been staring at you all evening.

RITA

Where are you?

The YOUNG MAN taps forcefully with his index finger on the glass door of his booth. RITA, hearing the noise, turns around and finds herself staring at the YOUNG MAN.

She smiles.

CUT TO:

INT: THE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

PUPKIN at the table looking over the check. He gets out a ten dollar bill. RITA emerges from the booth in nervous high spirits.

RITA
(with repressed
gaiety)
You know who that was -- the bar.
I have to go back to work.

PUPKIN
How did they know you were here?

RITA
(gathering her things)
I guess I must have told them.
They need someone right away.

PUPKIN
(accusingly)
You don't even care, do you?

RITA
Oh, no. I do. Really!

PUPKIN
It's not the bar, Rita. Don't
tell me it's the bar.

RITA
Don't be angry. It has nothing to
do with you. I had a nice dinner,
really. It was great seeing you
again.

PUPKIN stare at her icily.

RITA
Come on. Let's see a smile.

PUPKIN
Why don't we finish the evening up
at the bar together? End the
evening where it began?

RITA
After what happened there?

PUPKIN
Well, I could at least drop you
off!

RITA
 (hurriedly making
 up her face)
 That's okay. Really. I can manage.

Why don't you just go to a movie or something? Don't let me spoil your evening.

PUPKIN
 But that wouldn't be right.

RITA gets up and stands before PUPKIN.

RITA
 (firmly)
 Look, Rupert. It's been a lot of fun, really. I'll see you sometime, huh?

PUPKIN
 But Rita!

RITA starts moving towards the door.

RITA
 Come on, Rupert. I'm in a hurry.

RITA marches out with PUPKIN trailing behind. He throws the check and the ten dollar bill at the CASHIER.

EXT. THE STREET - NIGHT

CAMERA FOLLOWS PUPKIN as he streaks out the door and jumps into the adjacent doorway, immediately peering down the street. He spies the YOUNG MAN and RITA walking about three quarters of a block down and follows them, keeping out of sight. They turn occasionally to see if he's around, then stop turning. They go around the corner and disappear into a large apartment building. PUPKIN rushes after them, positioning himself across from the building.

He searches the windows for some clue as to where they have gone. Finally a set of lights go on on the fourth floor and a MAN's shadow is seen closing two sets of blinds.

CUT TO:

INT: THE APARTMENT BUILDING FOYER - NIGHT

PUPKIN enters the building and finds himself in a small entranceway. The door to the lobby is locked. Next to the door, on the wall, are listed the tenants, their apartment numbers and a button next to each name. There is an intercom speaker. There are eight apartments listed on the fourth floor, running from 4A to 4H. PUPKIN looks them over, takes a deep breath and pushes 4A.

CUT TO:

INT: YOUNG MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It is an extremely well-furnished studio apartment with all the requirements of a contemporary bachelor pad -- an imitation bearskin rug, nice bookshelves including an elaborate stereo system, recessed lighting, including a soft spotlight on the Queen-sized bed with its pseudo-satin cover. The YOUNG MAN and RITA stand in the middle of the room. RITA looks about uneasily. No intercom buzzer sounds.

YOUNG MAN

Welcome to the pleasure dome.

RITA

You don't kid around, do you?

YOUNG MAN

(smiling)

I do alright. What's your libation?

RITA

Huh?

YOUNG MAN

Your potion. Your drink.

RITA

Bourbon and soda. Make it light.

The YOUNG MAN goes to his chic little bar and starts fixing RITA a strong bourbon and soda. He also fixes himself a strong scotch and water. As he works, they talk.

YOUNG MAN

You from the South?

RITA

Me?

YOUNG MAN

That's what Southern people drink.
Lots of bourbon.

RITA

What do people from Jersey drink?

YOUNG MAN

I make it a point to study things like that. It's important to know people's backgrounds, their tastes, their culture. It gives you a little head start.

The YOUNG MAN turns from the bar and hands RITA her drink.

YOUNG MAN

I'm Chet. Whom do I have the pleasure of serving?

RITA

I'm Mary.

YOUNG MAN

Pleased to meet you, Mary.
(He lifts his glass)
To our evening.

CUT TO:

INT: THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

PUPKIN stands before the intercom.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Who?

PUPKIN

Rita Keane. I want to talk to her.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Rita Keane?

PUPKIN

That's right. Oh, never mind. I must have the wrong apartment.

WOMAN'S VOICE

There's no Rita here.

PUPKIN

I know. I know. I'm sorry to bother you.

WOMAN'S VOICE

You must have the wrong apartment.

PUPKIN

I'm sorry.

PUPKIN pushes 4B.

CUT TO:

INT: YOUNG MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

RITA is seated on the couch. The YOUNG MAN is putting a record on the phonograph. Once again, the intercom doesn't sound. PUPKIN has drawn another blank.

YOUNG MAN

Leisure is America's fastest growing industry. Did you know that? Think about it. Short work weeks, more vacation. People need something to do with all that time and that's where I come in. Leisure Villages, Inc.

(MORE)

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

We buy land an hour or so outside your metropolitan centers. We set up the bungalows, dig some lakes, lay out a golf course, you know, fix the whole place up so it's usable. Then young, personable guys like me show the people around. If the guy seems tight, we point out the investment factor. If he's a swinger, well, the bungalows are very private. If he's a sports nut, we talk up skiing and fishing and tennis.

The phonograph starts playing Burt Bachrach.

YOUNG MAN

What's your work, Mary?

The YOUNG MAN walks back to her and stands over her.

RITA

Me. I fly for National.

YOUNG MAN

(delighted)

No kidding?

RITA

What's that smell?

YOUNG MAN

Sandalwood incense. It seemed very you.

CUT TO:

INT: THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

PUPKIN yells into the intercom.

PUPKIN

I said I'm sorry!

We hear the intercom at the other end click off. PUPKIN pauses a moment and pushes 4C.

CUT TO:

INT: YOUNG MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

RITA and the YOUNG MAN are seated on the couch. Still no buzzer. As the YOUNG MAN talks, RITA is staring at a woman's shoe lying underneath a small table that holds a lamp.

YOUNG MAN

Did you know that you have remarkable hair?

RITA

Yeah? You know what? I feel like going to a movie.

YOUNG MAN

Now?

RITA

Sure. Why not? It's only twenty of ten. We can make a ten o'clock show.

The YOUNG MAN takes her hands and looks deep into her eyes.

YOUNG MAN

Why don't we make our own movie?

RITA

No. I don't think so.

YOUNG MAN

Don't be so uptight. Give it a chance.

RITA

I want to go to the movies, that's all.

YOUNG MAN

We can go to the movies later.

RITA pulls her hands away.

RITA

Let's stop playing games, okay. I'm not a kid.

YOUNG MAN

You have something against pleasure?

RITA

I'm just not interested in being tonight's ritual sacrifice, okay?

YOUNG MAN

Shall I freshen up your drink?

RITA shakes her head.

YOUNG MAN

(growing irritated)

What exactly did you think we were going to do up here?

CUT TO:

INT: THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

PUPKIN pushes 4D and waits.

MAN'S VOICE

Yeah?

CUT TO:

INT: YOUNG MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The YOUNG MAN is practically sitting on RITA's lap. He has RITA backed up against the end of the couch.

YOUNG MAN

Look, if you've got sexual problems let's talk about them. It helps clear the air.

RITA

There's nothing wrong with me.

YOUNG MAN

Then it's me?

RITA

I don't even know you.

YOUNG MAN

Then find out. Sex is a great way of breaking down barriers.

RITA

I don't think so.

YOUNG MAN

I'm sure this could lead to something beautiful.

The YOUNG MAN kisses RITA roughly.

YOUNG MAN

Passive resistance, huh?

RITA

Let's just write this thing off as a big mistake. What do you say?

YOUNG MAN

What's wrong with me?

RITA

Nothing. I just want to go home.

YOUNG MAN

I can see I'm not turning you on.

RITA

(smiles)
You noticed that, huh?

YOUNG MAN

Come on. What's wrong with me?

RITA
You really want to know?

YOUNG MAN
Yeah.

RITA
How can I put it? Well, it's like
you've got your fly open and your
tongue hanging out.

CUT TO:

INT: THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

PUPKIN, growing more frantic, pushes 4E.

CUT TO:

INT: YOUNG' MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The YOUNG MAN is all over RITA. No buzzer sounds.

YOUNG MAN
I'm really a very sensitive person.

RITA
Come on. Get offa me.

YOUNG MAN
Sometimes I write poetry.

RITA pulls herself away.

RITA
No!

YOUNG MAN
So you wanna play hard to get,
huh?

The YOUNG MAN grabs her.

CUT TO:

INT: THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

PUPKIN, even more desperate, pushes 4F.

OLD LADY'S VOICE
Que es, por favor?

CUT TO:

INT: YOUNG MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The YOUNG MAN is strong-arming RITA who is beginning to
get frightened.

RITA
Come on. Let's talk this over.

YOUNG MAN
I admire you very much. I respect
you, Mary.

RITA
(her eyes beginning
to fill with terror)
You're hurting me.

YOUNG MAN
I'm only doing what you want.

RITA
(pleading, on the
verge of tears)
Oh, please.

CUT TO:

INT: THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

PUPKIN, frantic, pushes 4G.

CUT TO:

INT: THE YOUNG MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The YOUNG MAN has RITA securely pinned and is starting to
undo her blouse. She is desperate.

YOUNG MAN
Afterwards, you'll thank me.

The buzzer sounds with great force. It is one, long,
protracted blast that breaks the YOUNG MAN's concentration.

RITA takes advantage of the distraction to grab her bag
and rush out as the buzzer continues to sound.

CUT TO:

INT: THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

PUPKIN still has his finger on 4G as RITA rushes out the
EXIT door next to the elevator and comes rushing towards
him. She is numb and emotionally exhausted.

PUPKIN
Rita!

RITA
(in desperation)
What do you want?

RITA keeps walking out of the entranceway and onto the
street. PUPKIN is at her side.

PUPKIN
Don't be angry with me. I was
worried about you, that's all.

RITA
Just go home and leave me alone.

PUPKIN take off his jacket and puts it around RITA's shoulders.

PUPKIN
(quietly)
Here. You'll need this. It's getting chilly.

RITA
I'm so bad. I'm such a dummy.

PUPKIN
Don't say that, Rita. Everyone does crazy things.

RITA
Not all the time.

PUPKIN
I'll get us a cab.

PUPKIN rushes into the street and hails a cab.

CUT TO:

EXT: WEST 56TH STREET BETWEEN EIGHTH AND NINTH AVENUES - NIGHT

WE SEE the taxi pull up in front of one of those middle-class tenements -- a fairly well-preserved six-story building with a fire escape running up the front. PUPKIN helps RITA out of the taxi. A dime bounces at PUPKIN's feet.

CAB DRIVER'S VOICE
Stuff it, big spender!

PUPKIN pays no attention. He walks RITA to her front stoop.

RITA
Well, I guess you're entitled to come up for coffee.

PUPKIN
That's okay, Rita. You're tired and I know I'm not always the easiest guy to be with.

There is a pause.

RITA
(puzzled)
What do you want, Rupert?

PUPKIN

(softly)

You don't understand anything, do you? I love you, Rita. I want to change your life ... if you'll only give me a chance.

RITA just shakes her head sadly.

PUPKIN

Look, what if I arranged it so you could meet Jerry? You'd have to believe me if you heard it from him.

RITA

There's no ...

PUPKIN

I'll arrange that, Rita. We'll all go out to dinner some night or maybe out to his place, on a weekend. You'll see. The trouble with you is you've got no faith. Now go to bed and get a good rest and I'll see you in a couple of days.

PUPKIN gives RITA a very gentle, sweet kiss on the forehead.

PUPKIN

(gently)

Now run along in.

RITA just stares at him.

PUPKIN

Go on.

RITA turns slowly and goes in. She looks back. PUPKIN is gone.

FADE TO:

EXT: MADISON AVENUE AND 48TH STREET - DAY

PUPKIN carries a large manila folder into 424 Madison. As usual, he is impeccably dressed.

CUT TO:

INT: OFFICES OF KOERNER-LIBERMAN TRAVEL - DAY

It is a large corner office, broken up by glass dividers.

A RECEPTIONIST sits at a desk facing the door. PUPKIN enters.

RECEPTIONIST

Yes.

PUPKIN hands the RECEPTIONIST the package.

PUPKIN
I need somebody to sign. You can
sign anything you want -- Cary
Grant, Art Carney, I don't care.

The RECEPTIONIST signs.

PUPKIN
Would you mind very much if I used
your phone? It's local.

RECEPTIONIST
Don't be, long. Dial nine.

PUPKIN takes out a little piece of paper from his suit
pocket and dials a number.

PUPKIN
(tense, nervous)
May I speak to Jerry Langford,
please? Thanks ... Jerry Langford,
please. Rupert Pupkin ... Jerry
knows. I'm calling at his request
... I see. That's alright. I'll
call him again.

RECEPTIONIST
That's not Jerry Langford, the ...

PUPKIN
(smiling proudly)
That's right. Thanks for your
phone.

CUT TO:

EXT: TIMES SQUARE - DAY

PUPKIN approaches Times Square phone booth. He rests a few
folders on a trash basket just outside the booth. He enters
the booth and dials.

PUPKIN
Jerry Langford, please ... May I
speak to Jerry Langford, please
... Rupert Pupkin, I called earlier
... I see. How long do you expect
that'll last?
Oh, fine. I'm at
(PUPKIN checks the
number on the phone)
CH 4-1482 ... I'll be here for
another half hour, forty-five
minutes. Please be sure he gets
my message. Thanks.

PUPKIN hangs up.

CUT TO:

EXT: TIMES SQUARE - DAY

A SHOT of the clock on the Allied Chemical Building. It reads 10:10. A nearby record store starts blasting music into the street through a loudspeaker. The music serves as background for a montage in which we CUT BETWEEN the clock, which moves in bites towards 11:30 to Broadway as it looks to PUPKIN in the booth -- that cavalcade of hustlers, whores, housewives, kids, weirdos and working people; and SHOTS of various people waiting to use the phone -- their impatience, anger, disgust. Each time one of them arrives, PUPKIN pretends to thumb through the phone book and dial a number. WE WATCH him chatting with animation until the waiting party leaves. Then WE SEE him push the coin return to retrieve his dime. Finally, PUPKIN takes a last look at the clock. WE SEE that it reads 11:30. He leaves the booth and goes to the trash basket.

His packages have been swiped.

CUT TO:

EXT: AN UPPER BROADWAY HIGH-RISE OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

WE SEE PUPKIN enter. He is watched by a plain girl of about twenty in a black raincoat and a floppy black hat whom we recognize as MARSHA.

CUT TO:

INT: A CORRIDOR IN THE HIGH-RISE OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

PUPKIN emerges from the elevator and walks down the corridor looking for the door the Jerry Langford Show offices. He finally finds it and enters.

CUT TO:

INT: THE RECEPTION AREA OF THE JERRY LANGFORD SHOW

OFFICES - DAY

A bored, plump, middle-aged RECEPTIONIST sits behind a large desk that holds a phone receiver connected to a small switchboard. PUPKIN presents himself.

RECEPTIONIST

Yes sir?

PUPKIN

Mr. Langford, please.

RECEPTIONIST

Your name?

PUPKIN

Pupkin. Rupert Pupkin.

The RECEPTIONIST puts a call through. Wide-eyed, PUPKIN observes the blow-ups of Langford talking with various celebrities.

FADE TO:

INT: A TELEVISION STUDIO - DAY

LANGFORD is seated at his desk on stage and PUPKIN is his guest. WE SEE television cameras and in the background, the control room.

PUPKIN

You know the secret of dieting, Jerry? Grapefruit. It's good for you. It's filling. And it's low in calories.

LANGFORD

(to the camera)

Take note of that, you ladies.

PUPKIN

As a matter of fact, yesterday I went to the outdoor market near where I live and I bought twenty grapefruit. The grocer looked at me and said, "What are you gonna do with all those?"

So I bent over and told him

(in a confidential tone)

"I'm gonna take 'em back to Florida and set 'em free!"

LANGFORD and the AUDIENCE laugh heartily.

FADE TO:

INT: THE RECEPTION AREA -- DAY

RECEPTIONIST

(holding the phone and talking to

PUPKIN)

I'm sorry, Mr. Pupkin, but Mr. Langford's secretary has no record of any appointment.

PUPKIN

Pardon me?

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Langford's secretary has no record of any appointment.

PUPKIN

Well, technically speaking, I don't actually have an appointment.

(MORE)

PUPKIN (CONT'D)

Jerry asked me to call him today
and when I couldn't get through, I
thought ...

As PUPKIN talks, a VISITOR has entered and stands behind
him waiting for the RECEPTIONIST's attention.

RECEPTIONIST

I see. (Into the phone) He says
Mr. Langford asked him to call.
(To PUPKIN)
Mr. Langford's secretary wants to
know what this is in reference to.

The RECEPTIONIST glances past PUPKIN to the VISITOR waiting.

RECEPTIONIST

(to PUPKIN)
Would you mind talking to her
yourself?

The RECEPTIONIST hands the phone to PUPKIN and occupies
herself with the VISITOR.

PUPKIN

Hello? ... Jerry and I discussed
my being on the show last night
and he told me to call ... No. I
don't mind.

PUPKIN hands the phone back to the RECEPTIONIST.

PUPKIN

I'm supposed to wait.

The RECEPTIONIST listens to the phone for a moment and
then hangs up. The VISITOR has just disappeared into the
back offices. PUPKIN stands there, smiling politely at
the RECEPTIONIST who returns a professional smile.

PUPKIN

Who was that gentleman?

PUPKIN indicates with a glance to the entrance to the back
offices that he is referring to the VISITOR.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Gangemi.

PUPKIN draws a complete blank but wants to appear
knowledgeable.

PUPKIN

Oh, I see. Mr. Gangemi.

RECEPTIONIST

He takes care of our air
conditioning.

CATHY LONG emerges from the back offices. She is a tall, modishly-dressed, attractive woman in her early thirties.

CATHY LONG
Uh ... Mr. Pupkin?

PUPKIN
Yes?

CATHY LONG
I'm Cathy Long.

PUPKIN
I'm Mr. Pupkin.

CATHY LONG
Can I help you?

PUPKIN
I'm sorry, but you are?

CATHY LONG
I'm Bert Thomas' assistant.

PUPKIN
Bert Thomas?

CATHY LONG
He's our executive producer.

PUPKIN
Oh, yes. I'm sure he is. But, you see, I've already talked directly with Jerry about my being on the show and he told me to get in touch with him. I'm just here to follow up on that.

CATHY LONG
What do you do, Mr. Pupkin?

PUPKIN
Stand-up comedy.

CATHY LONG
Fine. Where are you working?

PUPKIN
Well, right now I'm developing new material.

CATHY LONG
I see. Well, as soon as you start performing again, let us know where you are and I'll send my assistant down to check you out.

PUPKIN
Sure. Sure. But that's not necessary, Miss Long. Jerry and I already went over all this.

CATHY LONG

Does Jerry know your work?

PUPKIN

(nodding)

Yes. I don't think he does.

CATHY LONG

You don't happen to have a tape or a demo that we might listen to?

PUPKIN

Oh, sure. I've got lots of tapes. That's no problem.

CATHY LONG

Good. Why don't you just send one to us and I assure you we'll listen to it promptly.

PUPKIN

Great. I'll do that. I can see that'd be a lot easier for Jerry. Thanks a lot, Miss Long.

CATHY LONG

Don't mention it, Mr. Pupkin. Now, if you'd excuse me ...

PUPKIN

Sure. Sure. Thanks again.

CATHY LONG leaves. PUPKIN, left standing there, smiles at the RECEPTIONIST who returns another professional smile.

PUPKIN

(to the RECEPTIONIST)

Thanks.

CUT TO:

EXT: THE UPPER-BROADWAY HIGH-RISE OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

PUPKIN comes out of the building elated. He is immediately confronted by MARSHA. PUPKIN continues to walk as MARSHA skips beside him.

MARSHA

I've got to speak to you for a minute. I'm Marsha.

PUPKIN

Yeah. I know.

MARSHA

Look. Did Jerry say anything about me last night?

PUPKIN

I'm really in a hurry, Marsha ...

MARSHA

Was he angry? ... In the car last night, I saw you. Did he talk about me?

PUPKIN

I thought that was you. That was some stunt.

MARSHA

What did he say?

PUPKIN

We didn't talk about you.

MARSHA

You know Jerry?

PUPKIN

Yeah.

MARSHA thrusts an envelope into PUPKIN's hands.

MARSHA

Give him this for me.

PUPKIN

Why don't you ...

MARSHA

Because I can't! Please. I need your help. You'll be my friend forever. Come on. I'll buy you something. What do you want?

She takes a great messy bunch of bills out of her raincoat pockets and jams them into PUPKIN's hands.

PUPKIN

I don't want this.

MARSHA

Take it. I can get all I want.

PUPKIN shrugs and pockets the money.

PUPKIN

Okay. I'll try.

MARSHA

(turning cold)

Don't try. Do it. Remember. We just made a deal.

PUPKIN stares at the envelope.

MARSHA

And don't open it. It's private.

PUPKIN

Okay. Okay.

MARSHA

How soon can you get it to him?

PUPKIN

I don't know. Couple a days.

MARSHA

(menacingly)

You'd better.

MARSHA turns and walks in the direction from which they came. CAMERA FOLLOWS PUPKIN who walks on for a block or so, then opens the envelope. It contains a set of apartment keys, a scrap of hand-knitted woolen cloth and a note in lipstick that reads: "I've made you a sweater, honey. Come try it on. I miss you. Love, M. 74 East 83rd Street, Apartment 2B!" He takes out the money MARSHA gave him. There are wads of tens, twenties and fifties with a sprinkling of fives and ones.

CUT TO:

EXT: A TIMES SQUARE HOTEL - DAY

The hotel is just one step up from a flophouse. WE SEE PUPKIN enter.

CUT TO:

INT: PUPKIN'S ROOM - DAY

PUPKIN enters. WE SEE that it is a small room, furnished by the hotel in the plainest way. Nicely-done home-made collages of show business figures decorate the drab green walls. The room is neat and clean. PUPKIN goes directly to a plain table which holds two tape recorders -- one a small cassette the other a large table tape recorder. He picks up the microphone of the larger one and speaks into it.

PUPKIN

Testing. Testing. Testing.

In the following montage, we hear in the background the replay of his "testing, testing testing" and various other noises -- a bit of his voice taped, a burst of laughter, the squeal of a tape recorder sent fast-forward, a sudden burst of applause, a scrap of theme music. At the same time, the CAMERA PANS about the room. We look at the collages which include all the obvious show business figures, with a heavy emphasis on comedians from Chaplin and Keaton to Sid Caesar and Woody Allen. The collages also include such varied figures as Jimmy Carter, Julia Childs, Tom Seaver, David Brinkley, Muhammad Ali, Clifford Irving, Walter Cronkite and Mark Spitz. There is a special Kennedy section -- John F. and Bobby framed in black, Jackie in mourning and a picture of Teddy. There is also a trio of assassins -- Sirhan, Oswald and James Earl Ray.

There is also a talk show collage with a photo of Langford in the center like a sun surrounded by Snyder, Walters,

Carson and Griffin. One bookshelf holds a veritable library of comedy -- joke books, biographies of comedians, treasuries of American humor. Another shelf holds scores of tapes in their own little boxes, each one neatly marked, i.e., "LANGFORD MONOLOGUES: 7/5/72 to 9/9/72." "MISC.

MONOLOGUES 6/13/68 to 8/1/69."

CUT TO:

PUPKIN sitting before the tape recorder lost in thought.

Finally, he starts the larger recorder and lifts the mike.

PUPKIN

First, Miss Long. Thanks very much for your help at the office and for passing this along to Jerry. I appreciate it more than you know.

PUPKIN stops the tape recorder and thinks again for a few beats. He then starts the large recorder.

PUPKIN

Now, Jerry. Before I begin, I just want to thank you for listening to this material and for the opportunity that you've given me. You know, lots of people think that guys like you, you know, people who have made it, lose their feeling for struggling young talent such as myself. But now I know from experience that those people are just cynics, embittered by their own failure. I know, Jerry, that you're as human as the rest of us, if not more so. (pause) Oh well, I guess there's no point going on about it. You know how I feel. So let's get on with the show. The best of Rupert Pupkin! I've sketched out this little introduction in order to save you a little time. So close your eyes and imagine it's exactly six o'clock. You're standing in the wings and we hear Rick Ross and the Orchestra strike up your theme song.

PUPKIN pushes a button on the cassette and we hear the theme song of the Jerry Langford Show, followed by the voice of BERT CANTER, the announcer.

BERT CANTER'S VOICE

And now, direct from New York, it's the Jerry Langford Show! Tonight, with Jerry's special guest...

PUPKIN deftly shuts off the cassette and substitutes his own voice for that of CANTER's. The large tape recorder keeps rolling.

PUPKIN

... the comedy find of the year
making his television debut, Rupert
Pupkin, the King of Comedy!

PUPKIN rapidly races the cassette tape forward, then pushes down the "play" button. We hear a burst of thundering applause. PUPKIN lets the applause run for a while and then shuts it off. The large recorder keeps rolling.

PUPKIN

Now you come on, Jerry, and do
your monologue. Then, when the
time comes, this is how I see you
introducing me. You'll say
something like this. "Ladies and
Gentlemen we're going to do
something a little bit different
tonight. It isn't often that you
can call someone a sure thing in
the entertainment business. After
all, the verdict is always in your
hands. But I think after you've
met my next guest, that you'll
agree with me that he's destined
for greatness. So, now, will you
please give your warmest welcome
to the newest King of Comedy, Rupert
Pupkin!!!"

PUPKIN pushes the cassette and we hear another enormous burst of applause. PUPKIN lets it run, listening intently.

He stands up and faces a wall of his room, still holding the microphone. WE SEE that the wall is covered by a huge blow-up of an audience laughing and applauding.

CUT TO:

INT: THE LANGFORD TELEVISION STUDIO - NIGHT

WE SEE a real audience laughing and applauding.

CUT TO:

PUPKIN strides triumphantly onto the stage, nodding to acknowledge the applause. He stops center stage as the television cameras maneuver about him.

CUT TO:

A SHOT of the "APPLAUSE" sign flashing, then stopping.

Still, the applause goes on.

CUT TO:

PUPKIN raises his hands to quiet the audience. After a few moments the applause dies down, except for a pair of hands in the center of the orchestra. PUPKIN peers out to see who is still applauding.

CUT TO:

RITA, in the middle of the audience, applauds enthusiastically.

CUT TO:

PUPKIN on stage. PUPKIN gives RITA a special smile and nod.

PUPKIN
Will somebody tell that lovely
lady that the applause sign is
off.

The audience laughs.

CUT TO:

INT: PUPKIN'S ROOM - DAY

PUPKIN stands facing the "audience" still holding the mike.

PUPKIN
That's a possible introduction,
Jerry. Now let's move on to my
act.

CUT TO:

INT: THE RECEPTION AREA OF THE LANGFORD SHOW - DAY

PUPKIN is pacing. He is wearing another suit, this one a broad-lapelled-grey. He is freshly shaved, his hair neatly combed, his shoes carrying a bright shine. He clutches a small flat box, neatly wrapped with the words 'FOR JERRY LANGFORD' written clearly across the top in large print.

CATHY LONG emerges from one of the back corridors into the reception area.

CATHY LONG
Yes?

PUPKIN
(suddenly a bit shy)
I didn't want to take any chances
with this ... uh ... Miss Long, so
I ... uh ... thought I'd just bring
it here myself.

He hands CATHY LONG the package as though it contained nitroglycerine.

CATHY LONG

We talked about this this morning,
did we, Mr. ... ?

PUPKIN

Pupkin. Rupert Pupkin.

CATHY LONG

Oh, yes. It's been some day.

(pause)

Well, I certainly appreciate your
bringing this over, Mr. Pupkin,
and we'll listen to it as soon as
possible.

PUPKIN

Fine. Er ... you don't have any
idea how soon that might be?

CATHY LONG

Well, you can try checking with us
tomorrow. We might know something
by then. Otherwise, it'll have to
be Monday.

PUPKIN

What if I just sort of waited around
here today, just in case? I'll
stay out of the way.

CATHY LONG

You'd just be wasting your time,
Mr. Pupkin. We won't know anything
until tomorrow at the earliest.

PUPKIN

Oh, I wouldn't consider it a waste
of time at all. I'd be glad to do
it.

CATHY LONG

Look, why don't you try us tomorrow.
Okay?

PUPKIN

Tomorrow? ... Right. I'll do
that. Thanks a lot, Miss Long.
And thank Jerry.

CATHY LONG smiles at PUPKIN and goes, leaving PUPKIN staring
at a picture of LANGFORD on the wall. WE FIX on LANGFORD
a moment and PULL BACK to see LANGFORD in what PUPKIN would
imagine his office to be.

INT: AN OFFICE - DAY

A large, corner office furnished in royal red, with high
ceilings and a huge desk. Potted palms and hydrangeas
rest on a marble floor. LANGFORD is moving about
restlessly, clutching PUPKIN's tape in one hand and waving
it about.

PUPKIN is seated on a comfortable couch.

LANGFORD
Dynamite! This is dynamite!

PUPKIN
(shyly)
You think so, Jerry?

LANGFORD
Look, I've been at this for fifteen years, Rupert, and I haven't come up with anything like this -- not me, not any of my writers.

PUPKIN
(smiling with obvious pleasure)
Well, I'm glad you like it, Jerry.

LANGFORD
Tell me something, Rube.
(pause)
How do you do it? I'm not asking to use the material myself. I just want to know how you

LANGFORD waves his arms in a gesture of frustration

LANGFORD
How you do it?

PUPKIN
Well, I don't know if I can explain it, really.

LANGFORD
Come on. Try, Rube.

PUPKIN
Well, it just sort of comes. I think about my life, see, mainly about the worst parts, all the awful things, and I just try to see them in a funny light. That's all.

LANGFORD
(eagerly)
Is that what you do? The worst parts, and then you look at them in a funny light? Is that what you do?

PUPKIN
More or less. It's hard to describe how its happens.

LANGFORD
But that's just it, Rube.
(MORE)

LANGFORD (CONT'D)

It doesn't happen for me. Why do you think the show is in so much trouble? By the time I've done my monologue, everyone has switched to Carson. Maybe if you did a little writing...?

PUPKIN

Sure, Jerry, I'd do anything I could to help out.

LANGFORD

You would? Great. Why don't you come out to my place this weekend and we'll hash it out. I'm having a few of my friends but we should be able to get a little work in.

PUPKIN

Would you mind if I brought someone?

LANGFORD

(smiling)

A girl, Rube?

PUPKIN

A very special girl, Jerry.

LANGFORD

I'd love to meet her.

THE HIGH-RISE OFFICE BUILDING ON UPPER BROADWAY - DAY

PUPKIN emerges, lost in thought. Suddenly he notices MARSHA waiting nearby. She doesn't see PUPKIN. He sneaks off.

CUT TO:

EXT: U.N. PLAZA - DAY

It is a bright morning. LANGFORD, attempting to camouflage himself by wearing a cap over his eyes and his trench coat collar turned up, his eyes hidden behind dark glasses, walks out of the building. A DOORMAN is standing by the door.

DOORMAN

Cab, Jerry?

LANGFORD

That's alright, thanks.

WE FOLLOW LANGFORD as he walks. Some people don't notice.

Others stare but leave him alone, a few commenting to their companions and pointing at him. A CAB DRIVER pulls alongside.

DRIVER

Hey, Jerry. My brother can sing
and juggle at the same time. How
about puttin' him on your show?

LANGFORD keeps walking.

DRIVER

How about it, Jerry?

LANGFORD

Sorry, I'm off duty.

CUT TO:

EXT. A MANHATTAN STREET - DAY

LANGFORD stands at the corner, next to a middle-aged COUPLE.

WOMAN

You're Jerry!!

LANGFORD pulls his cap a little more tightly around his
eyes.

WOMAN

You know something.

(She giggles)

I undress in front of you every
night and Larry here doesn't mind
at all.

LARRY

I can't get anything started with
her until you're off the air.
Your show is ruining my sex life,
Jerry.

LANGFORD

Well then, you'll just have to put
on a better show than I do.

CUT TO:

EXT: BROADWAY, A FEW BLOCKS SOUTH OF LANGFORD'S OFFICES -
DAY

WE WATCH LANGFORD continue to walk, feeling what it is to
be a celebrity out in public. After a few beats, we

CUT TO:

EXT: BROADWAY - DAY

WE SEE MARSHA trailing LANGFORD. LANGFORD notices her and
starts walking quickly. MARSHA walks quickly. LANGFORD
starts jogging. MARSHA starts jogging. Finally, LANGFORD
breaks into a sprint. MARSHA runs after him. LANGFORD
disappears into his office building. MARSHA arrives several
seconds later.

MARSHA
Jerry! God damnit!

Just as MARSHA turns around, PUPKIN, unaware of her, walks cheerfully into the building.

CUT TO:

INT: RECEPTION AREA OF JERRY LANGFORD SHOW OFFICES - DAY

PUPKIN enters. The same middle-aged, plump RECEPTIONIST is seated behind the desk.

RECEPTIONIST
Yes, sir?
(recognizing him)
Oh, hi.

PUPKIN
Hi. How are you?

RECEPTIONIST
Not bad.

PUPKIN
I'm fine.

RECEPTIONIST
Can I help you?

PUPKIN
I'd like to see Jerry, please.

RECEPTIONIST
You are ... ?

PUPKIN
Mr. Pupkin.

RECEPTIONIST
Just a minute.

The RECEPTIONIST dials a number.

RECEPTIONIST
Mr. Pupkin is here ... That's right...
(to PUPKIN)
She'll be with you in a minute.

PUPKIN
Who?

RECEPTIONIST
Miss Long.

PUPKIN
But I wanted to see Jerry.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Langford's not in. Miss Long
will take care of you.

PUPKIN

Alright.

PUPKIN paces for a few beats. He smiles at the
RECEPTIONIST. A beat later, CATHY LONG comes out, carrying
the tape in its box.

CATHY LONG

Mr. Pupkin?

PUPKIN

How are you today?

CATHY LONG

Fine, Mr. Pupkin. Thank you for
your tape. We listened to it with
great interest. And, frankly, Mr.
Pupkin, we saw a lot of good things
in what you're doing. We feel you
have good potential. Very good
potential.

PUPKIN

(smiling)

Thanks.

CATHY LONG

That's why I'll be honest with
you, Mr. Pupkin ...

PUPKIN

Yes?

CATHY LONG

We just don't think you're ready
yet.

PUPKIN

(baffled)

Not ready?

CATHY LONG

Well, we just don't feel right now
that you're right for Jerry.

PUPKIN

(rapidly, half-
listening)

Right for Jerry. Sure.

CATHY LONG

Some of the material ... some of
the one-liners, for instance ...

PUPKIN

Yes?

CATHY LONG

... were not very strong.

PUPKIN

You didn't care for some of the jokes, is that it?

CATHY LONG

That's right.

PUPKIN

Good. Good. I can take care of that right way. Thanks. Just tell me the ones you think should go.

That would be a big help.

(to the RECEPTIONIST)

This is great.

(to CATHY LONG)

Which ones?

CATHY LONG

Well, it's not just that, Mr. Pupkin. You see, Jerry likes to panel his guests, you know, chat with them afterwards.

PUPKIN

Sure. Sure.

CATHY LONG

And frankly, we just don't feel you've got very much to talk about right now.

PUPKIN

But I've got my whole life to talk about!

CATHY LONG

Which is interesting to you, I'm sure and to your wife ... and to a few friends. But we feel that you should keep developing your act. Test it in some live situations. There are a number of clubs in the city you can try. And after a reasonable period, get in touch with us again and we'll be glad to send someone down to check out your progress.

PUPKIN stares at her for a few moments as the tension grows.

PUPKIN

May I ask you a question, Miss Long?

CATHY LONG

Of course.

PUPKIN

Are you speaking for Jerry?

CATHY LONG

Let's put it this way, Mr. Pupkin.

Mr. Langford has complete faith in our judgment.

PUPKIN

I'm sorry to have to say this,
Miss Long, and I certainly don't
want you to take it personally,
but I have to tell you that I don't
... I don't have faith in your
judgment.

CATHY LONG

Well, I'm sorry you feel that way,
Mr. Pupkin. But I'm afraid there's
nothing that can be done about
that.

PUPKIN

No ... No ... I'm afraid I'll have
to disagree with you again.

CATHY LONG

(with strained
politeness)

That's your privilege, Mr. Pupkin.
Now, if you'll excuse me, please,
I have some things to do. I'm
sorry the news isn't better.

CATHY LONG turns to go.

PUPKIN

Miss Long?

CATHY LONG turns back.

PUPKIN

When are you expecting Jerry in?

CATHY LONG

He won't be in until very late
this afternoon.

PUPKIN

That's fine. Thank you.

CATHY LONG stares at PUPKIN for a moment, glances at the
RECEPTIONIST and then goes. PUPKIN takes a seat in the
reception area. He smiles once more at the RECEPTIONIST.

The RECEPTIONIST drops her eyes. A few beats go by. CATHY
LONG passes by the entranceway and glances at PUPKIN.

PUPKIN continues sitting there.

RECEPTIONIST

Is there anyone else you would like to see?

PUPKIN

That's alright. I'm happy just waiting.

A few beats pass in silence.

RECEPTIONIST

Well, would you mind waiting outside, please, Mr. Pupkin? This is a reception area, not a waiting room.

PUPKIN

I understand.

PUPKIN remains seated. A few more moments pass. Several OFFICE PERSONNEL pass by the entranceway and glance at PUPKIN. After a few more beats, a large, plainly-dressed MAN in his mid-fifties emerges from the back offices. He goes over to PUPKIN, who stands.

OFFICIAL

Mr. Pupkin? I'm Raymond Wirtz, in charge of security for the Langford organization.

WIRTZ puts his arm on PUPKIN's shoulder and, as the following dialogue unfolds leads him out the door, down the corridor and into the elevator.

WIRTZ

Now I think you understand that we have certain rules here that are essential to the smooth functioning of our operation.

PUPKIN

Sure. Sure.

WIRTZ

And that without these rules, we really wouldn't be able to function at our best. You follow my point?

PUPKIN nods.

WIRTZ

Now one of these rules is that only authorized personnel and those having official business with our organization are permitted on our premises. And that's why I'm asking you, Mr. Pupkin, to cooperate with us.

They have reached the elevator and WIRTZ has pushed the button.

PUPKIN

You want me to leave the building.

WIRTZ

That's right. It's nothing personal, Mr. Pupkin. Just doing my job.

The elevator arrives. WIRTZ signals with his head that PUPKIN should enter. PUPKIN gets in.

WIRTZ

Have a pleasant day.

CUT TO:

EXT: STREET OUTSIDE THE LANGFORD BUILDING - DAY

PUPKIN comes out and takes up a position outside the door, preparing to wait for LANGFORD. MARSHA sees him and comes over to him.

MARSHA

Well, did you give it to him?

PUPKIN

(out of a daze)
Huh?

MARSHA

Did you get my letter to him?

PUPKIN

He's not in there.

MARSHA

Look, if you don't want to give it him, okay. I'll get somebody else. But don't try to con me.

PUPKIN

I told you I'd try and I will. I'm going to wait for him right here.

MARSHA

Give me the envelope, huh?

PUPKIN

Sure, but ...

MARSHA

I saw him go in myself!

PUPKIN

Who?

MARSHA

Jerry!

PUPKIN

But they said he wasn't in.

MARSHA

Just give me the envelope.

PUPKIN

When did he go in?

MARSHA

Ten minutes ago! That's when.

PUPKIN

You sure?

MARSHA

Look, I saw him my ...

PUPKIN

And he hasn't come out?

MARSHA

I've been standing right here.
Now how about it?

PUPKIN turns and goes back into the building. MARSHA yells after him.

MARSHA

I'm staying right here!

CUT TO:

INT: RECEPTION AREA OF THE JERRY LANGFORD OFFICES

PUPKIN enters briskly and goes up to the RECEPTIONIST.

PUPKIN

(with authority)

Tell Jerry Langford I'm here,
please.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry, sir. Mr. Langford's
not in.

PUPKIN

I happen to know he is. So would
you please tell him I'm here.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry. He's not in.

PUPKIN

You're putting your job on the
line, lady.

The RECEPTIONIST starts making a call inside. PUPKIN glances at her and walks right in to the inner corridors.

He starts peering into the open doors of the offices that line the corridor. The whole place is like a gigantic maze. OFFICE PERSONNEL pass by him, taking no notice of him. He continues wandering around desperately, completely lost. A few beat later, he spots WIRTZ leading a pair of SECURITY GUARDS. PUPKIN keeps peering into offices quickly as he flees. The GUARDS and WIRTZ finally catch up to PUPKIN at the steno pool and, after a brief chase around the pool, they catch PUPKIN and subdue him. They start dragging him out past the eyes of the OFFICE PERSONNEL.

PUPKIN
 (calling as he is
 dragged)
 Jerry! Jerry!
 (to WIRTZ)
 You're going the have a hell of a
 lot of explaining to do!
 (calling)
 Jerry!

WIRTZ
 You had your warning, Mr. Krupkin.

PUPKIN
 Jerry! Help me. Jerry!

CUT TO:

A CLOSE-UP of PUPKIN as he is dragged out.

PUPKIN
 (screaming)
 Jerry!

CUT TO:

EXT: LANGFORD BUILDING LOBBY AND EXIT - DAY

WE WATCH the SECURITY GUARDS and WIRTZ pitch PUPKIN out into the street.

WIRTZ
 If we see your face again, Mr.
 Pupkin, we'll call the police.

PUPKIN
 Start looking for a new job!

MARSHA comes straight up to PUPKIN who is brushing himself off. His eyes are glazed and distant.

MARSHA
 Well?

PUPKIN
 Huh?

MARSHA
 Does he have it?

PUPKIN
 (abstractedly)
 Don't worry. I'll get it to him.

MARSHA
 Yeah? When?

There is a pause.

PUPKIN
 This weekend. He asked me to go
 out there, to his house.

CUT TO:

THE BAR-RESTAURANT WHERE RITA WORKS - DAY

PUPKIN enters the bar-restaurant. Through the window WE SEE him talking to RITA. He is voluble, animated. She looks skeptical, with a wry smile on her face. Finally WE WATCH him extract an answer from her. She shrugs, smiles and says yes. He comes walking out the door, his hounded expression softened by a smile.

CUT TO:

INT: THE FITTING AREA OF A MEN'S STORE - DAY

WE WATCH PUPKIN getting fitted in a new suit, attended by a SALESMAN and a TAILOR.

CUT TO:

INT: LUGGAGE SHOP - DAY

WE WATCH PUPKIN buy a suitcase.

CUT TO:

INT: CARTIER'S JEWELERS - DAY

WE WATCH PUPKIN perusing the beautiful diamond, sapphire, and emerald rings and we take a few moments to PAN OVER these beautiful jewels as he sees them. Finally, he picks out a splendid ring with a single, middle-sized sapphire and hands a surprised SALESLADY the money in cash.

CUT TO:

INT: SUBURBAN TRAIN - DAY

PUPKIN and RITA are seated side by side. Since it is Saturday morning, the train is sparsely populated. A CONDUCTOR has just finished taking PUPKIN's tickets. RITA is edgy. PUPKIN is strangely calm and a little remote.

He is wearing his new suit.

RITA
 What are we going to do?

PUPKIN

(patiently)

Look, I told you, I've got some work to discuss with him. That's all.

RITA

But what about me?

PUPKIN

You're with me.

RITA

That's fine, but while you two are talking, what am I going to do?

PUPKIN

You can chat with the other guests.

RITA

I'm sure they'll be thrilled hearing about the wonderful world of draft beer.

(pause)

Let's tell 'em I'm a model, okay?

PUPKIN

What?

RITA

If they ask what I do, let's just say I model. You don't mind pretending just a little, do you?

PUPKIN

If it make you feel better.

There is a pause.

RITA

This is a gas! Too bad nobody'll believe it.

(pause)

After you guys are done working, what happens? Are we going out someplace, or what?

PUPKIN

I'm sure Jerry has something arranged.

There is another pause.

RITA

What do these people do for fun? Do they party or do freaky things or just get drunk or ... I mean, What do they do?

PUPKIN

I guess they just sit around and talk and enjoy each other's company, like anybody else.

RITA

Talk?!? What can you talk about for three or four hours?!

PUPKIN

What do you mean? They've got plenty to talk about. They do things. All kinds of interesting things happen to them and then they talk about them. What do you think Jerry's show is all about?

RITA

Yeah, a cocktail party with no drinks. That's what all those shows are. At least they help you get to sleep.

There is a pause.

RITA

(glumly)

Boy, this is going to be some great weekend. I thought we were gonna have some fun.

PUPKIN

(smiling)

Just take it easy, Rita. Everything's going to be fine.

WE MOVE IN for a CLOSE-UP of PUPKIN who is fading out.

FADE TO:

EXT: A NEO-CLASSICAL MANSION

It is a large white house with colonial columns set in the middle of a palatial estate whose rolling lawns are punctuated with fine old trees. We circle around to the back where LANGFORD, a handful of his FRIENDS (which can be familiar television celebrities) and PUPKIN and RITA are just finishing a lavish lunch on the patio. A pair of SERVANTS are clearing the table and serving the coffee and desert as the scene unfolds. As we arrive, we hear a loud burst of laughter. PUPKIN is regaling the COMPANY with stories.

PUPKIN

Oh, you have no idea how bad it's gotten in New York. Now the muggers are so efficient that, each time they jump you, they take your name and address and put you on a mailing list.

(MORE)

PUPKIN (CONT'D)
 (the COMPANY chuckles)
 And once you're on the list, you're
 in real trouble, like this friend
 of mine who was mugged thirty-two
 times on his way home from work.
 (a little laughter
 from the COMPANY)

A SERVANT places the desert, a little, elegant tart, in
 front of PUPKIN and RITA.

PUPKIN
 (to SERVANT)
 Thanks.

The SERVANT smiles. As PUPKIN continues his story, he
 glances occasionally at RITA who has begun to nibble at
 her tart. PUPKIN also glances conspiratorially at LANGFORD
 who smiles back.

PUPKIN
 So what my friend does is get
 himself a dog, one of those huge
 German Shepherds. One night, he's
 walking the dog in Central Park
 when he hears this voice behind
 him.
 (in a German accent)
 Okay, Harry, drop your vallet and
 keep your hantz over your head or
 I bite your little fanny off.

The COMPANY breaks up.

ONE GUEST
 (to LANGFORD)
 Looks like you've found yourself a
 winner, Jerry.

LANGFORD
 (looking at PUPKIN)
 He's the one who found himself a
 winner.

RITA looks up, smiles and blushes. The rest of the COMPANY
 smiles benignly and grows attentive as RITA returns to
 eating her tart. Suddenly she bites down on something
 hard. She fishes it out of her mouth and looks at it.
 The COMPANY giggles. It is the ring PUPKIN purchased at
 Cartier's. The COMPANY applauds lightly and laughs.

LANGFORD lifts his wine glass.

LANGFORD
 To Rita and Rupert -- a short
 engagement and a long, happy
 marriage.

The COMPANY drinks with murmurs of "Hear! Hear!" RITA
 and PUPKIN beam. RITA looks lovingly at PUPKIN.

A SECOND GUEST
 (the PUPKIN)
 Have you set a date?

PUPKIN
 (looking pointedly
 at LANGFORD)
 Oh, yes.

A THIRD GUEST
 I hope we're all invited.

PUPKIN
 Everyone's invited.

CUT TO:

INT: THE LANGFORD TELEVISION STUDIO

The theater is packed. World Series bunting hangs from the balcony and the front of the stage. We hear RICK ROSS and the ORCHESTRA strike up Mendelssohn's Wedding March. Down one aisle walks RITA, accompanied by the MAN whom PUPKIN hit over the head at the bar. Down the other aisle marches PUPKIN, accompanied by LANGFORD. The AUDIENCE cheers wildly. The two COUPLES walk to the stage where a white-haired OFFICIAL awaits them. BERT CANTER stands at his side. PUPKIN and RITA disengage from their ESCORTS and stand before the OFFICIAL. The music stops and the AUDIENCE grows quiet.

OFFICIAL
 We are met here in these extraordinary circumstances to join this man and this woman in holy wedlock. But, before we begin, let me voice a personal word of thanks to you, Rupert and to you, Rita, for choosing me to perform this prestigious ceremony. Because we are on prime time, I am going to discard my customary remarks in favor of a few personal reflections. When I was principal at Clifton High and these two were students, I had very little faith that Rupert here would amount to very much. But like his teachers and his fellow students, I underestimated this fine young man. Some say that this misjudgment is directly tied to my recent dismissal as head of the Clifton School System. But let me take this opportunity to set the record straight. Knowing that Rupert and Rita here were most certainly destined for a great career and a lifetime of happiness, I Voluntarily stepped down.

(MORE)

OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

I would only here add my own wishes
to those of millions of viewers
for their continued health, wealth
and boundless success.

The OFFICIAL looks quickly past RITA and PUPKIN.

OFFICIAL

We'll be back to marry them in a
minute, right after this word.

FADE TO:

INT: THE TRAIN - DAY

PUPKIN and RITA are seated as they were. We hear the
CONDUCTOR calling.

CONDUCTOR'S VOICE

Greenwich. Greenwich next stop.
Greenwich.

PUPKIN and RITA grab their small suitcases and quickly
move down the aisle towards the door.

CUT TO:

INT: A SUBURBAN TAXI - DAY

RITA is peering out the window. PUPKIN is still lost in
thought.

RITA

Look at that one. How'd you like
to live in that?!?! Or that one!
What do you figure these run?

The taxi stops in front of a walled lot behind which is
visible a handsome English stucco home.

PUPKIN

(to DRIVER)
What's this?

DRIVER

This is it.

RITA

It's gorgeous!

PUPKIN is genuinely puzzled.

PUPKIN

(to DRIVER)
You sure?

DRIVER

Look, friend, I wouldn't want to
tell you how many times I made
(MORE)

DRIVER (CONT'D)
 this trip. (pause) That'll be
 three seventy-five.

PUPKIN, still puzzled, hands him a five dollar bill.

PUPKIN
 (abstractedly)
 Keep it.

The DRIVER gets out and puts PUPKIN and RITA's bags, which he had stacked on the front seat, onto the sidewalk.

DRIVER
 Thanks. If you need a ride back,
 just ask the guy for Wayne. That's
 me.

The CAMERA PULLS BACK as PUPKIN opens the gate and he and RITA walk up the drive.

CUT TO:

EXT: LANGFORD'S HOUSE - DAY

PUPKIN and RITA stand before the front door. PUPKIN rings, After a few beats, the door is opened by an Indonesian HOUSEBOY. PUPKIN walks in right past him, RITA following behind.

CUT TO:

INT: LANGFORD'S HOUSE - DAY

PUPKIN hands the HOUSEBOY the two suitcases as he talks.

PUPKIN
 You must be Jonno. I'm Rupert
 Pupkin and this is Rita Keane.
 Mr. Langford's expecting us.

Jonno nods politely but uncertainly.

JONNO
 (uncertain)
 Mr. Langford asked you to come?

PUPKIN
 That's right. Would you mind taking
 those up? Jerry and I have some
 work that may oblige me to stay
 overnight.

JONNO
 But Mr. Langford's not here.

PUPKIN
 Out playing golf, right?

JONNO
 (still puzzled and
 unsure)
 That's right.

PUPKIN
 Maybe he'll finally break a hundred.

JONNO
 Maybe it's better if you came
 back...

PUPKIN
 (interrupting)
 That's alright. We don't mind
 waiting.

PUPKIN walks from the foyer into the living-room, leaving
 JONNO staring after him holding the bags. RITA walks into
 the living room after PUPKIN.

RITA
 (worried)
 The table's only set for one.

PUPKIN
 That's from breakfast. Relax,
 will you?

CUT TO:

INT: LANGFORD'S KITCHEN - DAY

JONNO is on the phone. A black lady COOK stands at his
 side.

JONNO
 (into the phone)
 Let me talk to Jerry Langford please
 ... I know he is ... It's important.

CUT TO:

INT: LANGFORD'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

It is a handsomely furnished room, done in old American
 antiques and other tasteful pieces. There is a grand piano
 heavy with pictures in one corner and wall-to-wall
 bookshelves that are mostly full and mixed with a balance
 of classics and modern popular reading. The whole room
 marks LANGFORD as a man of discernment. The shelves also
 house a fine stereo and a small, discreet bar. RITA and
 PUPKIN walk in like strangers in paradise, awed by the
 obvious elegance and expense the room reflects.

PUPKIN
 (as though he owned
 it)
 How do you like it?

RITA
 (admiringly)
 I could live here.

PUPKIN
 (smiling proudly)
 It's the only way to live.

RITA stands in the center of the room, ill at ease, while PUPKIN strolls about comfortably, picking up an ashtray here, a cigarette case there, inspecting the artifacts for inscriptions, clues, hints about LANGFORD's character and life.

RITA
 How come he isn't here?

PUPKIN
 You heard the guy. He's out playing golf.

RITA
 Didn't you tell him when we'd get here?

PUPKIN continues to move about the room, fielding RITA's suspicious inquiries effortlessly.

PUPKIN
 We didn't have time to iron out the details. Now just relax. We're the first guests, that's all.

RITA
 (interrupting)
 That Jonno character hadn't even heard of us!

PUPKIN
 (a little irritated)
 It probably slipped Jerry's mind.

He has better things to think about than what he tells his houseboy.

RITA
 It's just not time way I expected it, that's all.

There is a pause. PUPKIN continues his investigation. He has moved to the grand piano in the rear of the room.

RITA
 What do we do now?

PUPKIN is looking at a picture of an American Gothic couple standing in front of a wood-frame house. As he comments on the pictures, the CAMERA PANS over them. They form a kind of slide-show of LANGFORD's life.

PUPKIN

These are Jerry's parents. His father runs the Post office in Wolverine -- that's in North Dakota.

PUPKIN then fixes on a picture of an eleven-year-old boy standing next to a puppet stage with a puppet (obviously held by the boy) staring at its master.

PUPKIN

This one was in Newsweek. He started giving these puppet shows when he was still in grade school.

WE SEE a picture of a very young LANGFORD seated before a microphone with some celebrity.

PUPKIN

And this is from his quiz show in St. Louis. Can you believe it?

RITA

Sure I can.

PUPKIN

That was the name of the show.

WE MOVE to a picture of LANGFORD smiling at JACK PAAR.

PUPKIN

And here's when he wrote for Jack Paar. He made a hundred and fifty a week and look at him now.

Another picture of LANGFORD with a group of women sitting in a studio.

PUPKIN

And this is his morning show.

A picture of LANGFORD standing in a park with his two boys, eleven and eight.

PUPKIN

And his kids. He's divorced.

RITA, who has been only half-listening, has picked up a small, beautifully enameled cigarette box.

RITA

Look at this. I love these kind of things. Look at the work. I've got this thing about boxes.

RITA puts it down reluctantly, picks it up, then puts it down again.

CUT TO:

INT: THE KITCHEN - DAY

JONNO is holding the phone, waiting. The COOK stands, looking at him.

JONNO
Mr. Langford? ... I'm sorry to
disturb you ...

CUT TO:

INT: THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

RITA has just finished fixing herself a drink. She takes a large sip and starts pacing around. PUPKIN is seated.

RITA
How much longer are we gonna have
to wait?

PUPKIN
I don't know. Until he gets back.

RITA.
Do we have to just sit here?

PUPKIN
He should be back pretty soon.

RITA
Doesn't he have any music or
anything? Let's get a little life
into this place. It's like a
funeral parlor.

She walks over to the stereo and opens the cupboard beneath it, revealing rows and rows of records.

RITA
This is more like it.

She pulls out a record.

PUPKIN
Come on, Rita.

RITA
Come on, yourself.

She puts the record on. Frank Sinatra starts singing "They Can't Take That Away From Me." She takes a big sip of her drink, puts it down and comes over to PUPKIN.

RITA
How about a little spin, handsome?

PUPKIN
(pulling back)
Here?

RITA snuggles into PUPKIN and starts dancing him around.

He resists feebly.

RITA

Come on, Rupert. I came up here
for a good time.

PUPKIN gives in and starts dancing with her in the style of the 1950's, elbow out, arm up, box step. After a few moments, PUPKIN closes his eyes. He has reached a moment of perfect bliss, his dream girl in his arms. They dance silently as we hear Sinatra singing.

SINATRA'S VOICE

The way you wore your hat, The way
we danced till three, The memory
of all that -- Oh no, they can't
take that away from me, No ...
they can't take that away ...
from ... me.

The orchestra plays.

RITA

You never could dance, could you?

PUPKIN

How would you know?

RITA

Oh I danced with you a couple of
times -- at the Sigma U party.

PUPKIN

You were there with Tommy Winston.

RITA

You didn't ask me.

PUPKIN

That's the one time I did ask you
and you went with him anyway.

RITA

Well, I couldn't go with you!

PUPKIN

Why not?

RITA

Be serious, Rupert.

CUT TO:

INT: THE DINING ROOM - DAY

JONNO stands a few feet from the kitchen door, staring at RITA and PUPKIN dancing in the living room, an unbelieving, anxious expression on his face.

CUT TO:

INT: THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

The music has stopped momentarily and PUPKIN and RITA disengage. PUPKIN looks lovingly at RITA.

PUPKIN
Well, it's all ended happily and
that's what counts.

RITA grows jumpy under his gaze. She looks around.

RITA
I wonder what the rest of this
place looks like?

PUPKIN
I'm sure it's all very nice.

RITA
(gaily)
Well, there's only one way to find
out.

RITA scampers over to the stairs and pauses on the first step.

RITA
You coming or not?

RITA bounds up the stairs.

PUPKIN
Rita!

CAMERA FOLLOWS PUPKIN up the stairs.

CUT TO:

INT: UPSTAIRS - DAY

There is no sign of RITA.

PUPKIN
Where are you?

There is no answer. CAMERA FOLLOWS PUPKIN from room to room. They are all guest rooms, neat, pretty, clean.

PUPKIN
Come on, Rita. This isn't funny.

Finally, PUPKIN opens the door to another room.

CUT TO:

INT: A BEDROOM - DAY

It is clearly LANGFORD's bedroom with a few clothes strewn about, and other signs of being lived in. RITA lies on the bed.

PUPKIN
 (shocked)
 What are you doing, Rita?

RITA
 I love it! All those millions of
 women out there dying to change
 places with me right now.

PUPKIN
 Come on. We shouldn't be here.

RITA
 Relax, will you. Let me have a
 little fun, for Christ's sake.

RITA gets off the bed and runs into the john.

CUT TO:

INT: A LAVISH BATHROOM - DAY

RITA
 Look at this. It's nicer than my
 whole apartment.

PUPKIN enters the large, beautifully done bathroom. RITA
 examines her face in the mirror.

PUPKIN
 (urgently)
 Let's go, Rita.

RITA
 Boy, I really need some sun.

PUPKIN
 Rita, this is Jerry's ...

RITA
 Lay off, will you, Rupert.

PUPKIN
 But we have no right ...

RITA picks up a can of shave cream and squirts a large
 dollop in PUPKIN's face. WE COME IN for a CLOSE UP of
 PUPKIN's face, buried under shaving cream.

PUPKIN
 That wasn't funny, Rita.

RITA hands him a towel.

RITA
 Here.

She looks around.

RITA
 Now for something that smells nice.

She swings open the cabinet with a flourish. The door swings open violently and the mirror shatters against something as pills and bottles tumble into the sink.

PUPKIN and RITA stand there, staring at each other. RITA begins to laugh, but her laugh is cut short by the slam of the downstairs door.

CUT TO:

INT: THE FOYER

LANGFORD has entered, drawn and businesslike. JONNO and the COOK have moved out to greet him.

LANGFORD
(looking around)
Where are they?

JONNO
I was going to call the police but then I thought to myself 'what if they are Mr. Langford's friends?'

We hear some whispers and scuffling at the top of the stairs. LANGFORD, JONNO and the COOK look up. PUPKIN comes bounding down the stairs jauntily with RITA following cautiously behind. PUPKIN has large traces of shaving cream behind his ears and on his neck.

PUPKIN
Hi, Jerry. We were just freshening up.

PUPKIN stops at the base of the stairs, turns around, and waves RITA down.

PUPKIN
(to RITA)
Come on, Rita. No need to be shy.

PUPKIN smiles conspiratorially at LANGFORD. RITA comes slowly down.

PUPKIN
Jerry, I'd like you to meet Rita Keane. Rita, say hello to Jerry!

RITA
(tentatively)
Pleased to meet you.

LANGFORD nods imperceptibly, his face tense, his eyes alert. RITA, reading her frigid reception, looks to PUPKIN who walks blithely past LANGFORD into the living room, toward the bar.

PUPKIN
What's your pleasure?

PUPKIN glances at the small mess he has left on the bar and turns back to LANGFORD who has moved into the living room with JONNO and the COOK a few steps behind. PUPKIN flashes LANGFORD an apologetic smile.

PUPKIN

(to LANGFORD)

We've already taken the liberty, so to speak. Rita was a little nervous. It isn't every day she meets someone like you.

LANGFORD

What's going on here?

PUPKIN

We've been sitting around, waiting. That's all. How was your golf game?

JONNO

I told them you weren't here.

COOK

That's right.

PUPKIN

He did, Jerry. He was very helpful. We had to take an early train. There was nothing else until after one.

(pause)

I brought the material. It's upstairs, in my bags.

(pause)

Where is everybody?

LANGFORD

Who?

PUPKIN

The other guests!

(in a confidential tone)

We're getting a little hungry, to tell you the truth.

LANGFORD

(as though confirming what PUPKIN said)

You are.

PUPKIN

(backing off)

But we don't mind waiting, do we, Rita?

RITA says nothing. She has sensed something terribly wrong and is slowly backing away from PUPKIN.

LANGFORD

You know, I could have you arrested,
both of you.

PUPKIN

(seizing the idea)

You know you could! And there'd
be absolutely no way we could prove
we belonged here. I never thought
of that.

LANGFORD

Well, you should have before you...

PUPKIN

(still fixed on the
idea)

Maybe we could work up a routine
about that, about a guy who throws
all his friends in jail. Let's
talk about that.

LANGFORD

(sharply)

Let's not.

PUPKIN

Sure, Jerry. Whatever you ...

LANGFORD

(exasperated)

Look, if you've got something for
me to sign, let's have it and get
it over with so I can get back ...

PUPKIN

(interrupting)

That wouldn't be right, Jerry.
Not in your own house!

LANGFORD

(summoning his last
bit of patience)

I have a lot of work to get to.

(to JONNO)

How did they get here?

PUPKIN

We took a taxi, Jerry ... But don't
worry about us. You go ahead and
do your work and we'll just take a
stroll around until lunch is ready.

LANGFORD

You're a little thick, aren't you?

PUPKIN

(smiling as though
complimented)

Well, maybe a ...

RITA

What's he's saying, Rupert, is that he wants us out.

PUPKIN

Don't listen to her, Jerry. She doesn't understand anything about us.

RITA

Don't get me into this.

LANGFORD

(to JONNO)

Call the station.

JONNO goes back into the foyer, followed by the COOK.

LANGFORD

There'll be a cab here in a few minutes. Now if you'll just wait at the gate ...

PUPKIN

Look, Jerry, if I've said anything out of line, let's chalk it up to inexperience, okay? I'll just go upstairs and get my tape and we can start working. It shouldn't take long and then you'll have the rest of the afternoon to yourself.

LANGFORD

I've told you just as clearly as I can. I want you out of here and I want you out now. Scram, beat it, vamoose, out! Is that plain enough!

RITA deftly pockets the enamel box.

PUPKIN

But what about my material? When are we going to go over it?

RITA

Come on, Rupert, the man wants us to go.

PUPKIN

Tell her she's wrong, Jerry!

RITA

Look, Mr. Langford. I didn't know anything about all this. I hardly know this guy. I haven't seen him in years.

PUPKIN

Rita!

RITA

So if there's anything I can do,
any way I can make this up to you.

PUPKIN

She's nothing, Jerry. She's just
some girl who works in a bar.

Don't let her spoil things.

LANGFORD starts herding RITA and PUPKIN towards the door.

LANGFORD

Come on. Let's go.

PUPKIN

All I'm asking is fifteen minutes.
That's all. Just long enough to
listen to my act. Is that asking
too much -- fifteen minutes of
your day against my whole life?

LANGFORD

I'll call the police if I have to.

LANGFORD realizes he is being hard. He stops for a moment.

LANGFORD

I have my own life, that's all.

PUPKIN

But what about me, Jerry? What
about my life? I made plans --
based on what you said. You can't
just turn your back on me.

LANGFORD

I'm not telling you again.

There is a long pause as the truth finally sinks in. PUPKIN
just stares at LANGFORD with disbelief that turns to anger.

PUPKIN

So this is the way it works when
you're big, huh? You just play
with people. Is that part of the
kick, Jerry?

(pause)

I can see I was all wrong about
you. All wrong.

RITA starts tugging at PUPKIN.

RITA

Come on, Rupert.

PUPKIN

(to RITA)

Shut up!

(MORE)

PUPKIN (CONT'D)

(to LANGFORD)

You weren't my friend at all, were you? You were just playing some kind of game with me. Well, that's not going to stop me, Jerry. I'm just going to work a little bit harder, that's all, use a little bit more enterprise. And not count on anybody. That's where I made my mistake. I can see that now.

PUPKIN picks up the pair of small suitcases.

PUPKIN

(glaring at LANGFORD)

Come on, Rita. We're wasting our time.

CUT TO:

EXT. LANGFORD'S FRONT DOOR - DAY

PUPKIN strides out with RITA following. She casts LANGFORD an apologetic glance as she goes. The door slams behind them. They walk down the path silently for a few moments as the CAMERA PULLS UP, following them in an OVERHEAD SHOT.

We hear them start talking as they make their way towards the gate.

RITA

(baffled and angry)

What did you think was going to happen? You think he'd just ... ? What's the matter with you?

(pause)

You can't just walk into a guy's house! And what about me? What did you ...

PUPKIN

(interrupting in a calm but firm voice)

Shut up, Rita. I'm thinking.

CUT TO:

EXT: OUTSIDE THE U.N. PLAZA - DAY

CUT TO:

INT: A NEW MERCEDES BENZ - DAY

MARSHA sits at the wheel of this lavishly appointed sedan, her face made up as though she were going to a fancy party.

PUPKIN sits on the other side of the front seat. His expression has changed somewhat from the PUPKIN we have seen.

He is less wide-eyed, less innocent, tougher.

MARSHA
(whining)
How much longer?!?

PUPKIN
Do you want him or not?

There is a pause.

MARSHA
You sure he's in there?

PUPKIN
Certain.

MARSHA
(with obvious delight)
My parents are going to be furious!

PUPKIN pulls a toy revolver from his jacket pocket and looks it over. MARSHA glances at it.

MARSHA
It looks real.

PUPKIN
That's the whole point.
(gesturing with his
head towards the
entrance of the
building which is
some 50 yards away)
Pay attention.

MARSHA looks towards the entrance. A few beats pass.

MARSHA
What if he doesn't come down?

PUPKIN
He will.

MARSHA
But what if he doesn't?

PUPKIN
We'll come back tomorrow.

MARSHA
And wait again?

PUPKIN
Look, you're going to have him all
to yourself. What else do you
want?

A MAN resembling LANGFORD walks out the entrance.

PUPKIN
Is that him?!?

MARSHA
No.

PUPKIN
You sure?

MARSHA
Sure I'm sure. That looks too much
like him.

PUPKIN
What do you mean?

MARSHA
When it's him it doesn't look like
him.

PUPKIN
Keep watching.

PUPKIN closes his eyes and rests for a moment.

MARSHA
That's him.

PUPKIN's eyes snap open. WE SEE LANGFORD, concealed in his trench coat, dark glasses and tightly pulled cap start walking east.

MARSHA
What should I do?

PUPKIN
Wait a second and follow him.

CUT TO:

EXT: A STREET GOING EAST - DAY

LANGFORD is walking innocently towards his offices. The Mercedes prowls a quarter of a block behind.

CUT TO:

INT: THE MERCEDES - DAY

MARSHA
What about here?

PUPKIN
Too busy. Keep going.

CUT TO:

EXT: ANOTHER EASTBOUND STREET - DAY

LANGFORD continues walking. The street is practically empty.

CUT TO:

INT: MERCEDES - DAY

PUPKIN

Go past him and stop.

CUT TO:

EXT: THE SAME EASTBOUND STREET - DAY

WE STAY with LANGFORD as he walks. WE SEE the Mercedes pull past him. Suddenly PUPKIN is IN THE FRAME, walking side by side with LANGFORD.

PUPKIN

Just keep walking or I'll kill you right here.

LANGFORD looks at PUPKIN in terror. He falters a bit, out of fear.

PUPKIN

I said keep walking. This is a gun in my pocket and I've got nothing to lose.

LANGFORD

(who keeps walking)
What do you want?

PUPKIN

Just keep walking and don't talk to anybody. I'll tell you what to do.

A MAN coming the other way stops and stares at LANGFORD out of curiosity. PUPKIN and LANGFORD keep walking. They get to where the Mercedes is waiting. PUPKIN jabs LANGFORD in the ribs with the gun.

PUPKIN

Get in!

LANGFORD

Look, this is ...

PUPKIN

(interrupting)
Just shut up and get in.

LANGFORD gets in the front seat. PUPKIN follows.

CUT TO:

INT: THE MERCEDES - DAY

LANGFORD moves to the middle of the front seat.

MARSHA

Hi, Jerry.

LANGFORD looks over and recognizes MARSHA. A CLOSE UP records his reaction of sheer terror.

CUT TO:

EXT: A BROWNSTONE-LINED STREET IN THE EAST EIGHTIES - DAY

WE SEE LANGFORD get out of the Mercedes which is parked in front of a fire hydrant. LANGFORD follows MARSHA into a brownstone. PUPKIN walks behind LANGFORD.

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - DAY

PUPKIN, LANGFORD and MARSHA enter. It is an absolutely stunning studio apartment, furnished lavishly by Marsha's parents for their daughter in antique furniture suitable for a woman of fifty. MARSHA has imprinted her own stamp on the apartment in two ways: First, the place is absolutely chaotic. Secondly, there are a number of blow-up pictures on the wall. A picture of LANGFORD sits on the bureau. There is a big brass bed with an ornate brass frame at the foot. LANGFORD stares at MARSHA and PUPKIN.

PUPKIN closes the blinds and turns on the lights. MARSHA trains the gun on LANGFORD. PUPKIN finishes his work and takes the gun back.

PUPKIN

I didn't like being so rough out there, Jerry. But I wanted you to know that I meant business. I didn't want anything happening to you over some misunderstanding.

LANGFORD just stares at him, frozen with fear.

PUPKIN

Now I know you're wondering what this is all about. Actually you've got nothing to worry about. You just do what I tell you and by, say, midnight, you'll be safe and out of here. Of course if you try anything clever, I'll kill you -- or Marsha will. She knows how to use this too.

LANGFORD

You realize what you're saying.

PUPKIN

Come on, Jerry. This isn't a spur of the moment thing. Give me a little credit, will you.

PUPKIN looks over to a small phone table with a chair next to it. He motions to it with his head.

PUPKIN

(to LANGFORD)

Sit down.

LANGFORD docilely sits by the phone.

PUPKIN

Now, you're going to call your office and tell them this: that unless a man who identifies himself as the King is allowed on the show tonight as the first guest, they'll never see you alive again.

LANGFORD

What?

PUPKIN

I'll say it again ...

CUT TO:

INT: BERT THOMAS' OFFICE - DAY

It is a large office in two pieces. A SECRETARY sits in the smaller part next to the door of the larger section.

Her phone is ringing. She answers.

THOMAS' SECRETARY

Bert Thomas! ... He's in a meeting, Mr. Langford ... I see.

CUT TO:

INT: A CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

THOMAS, a young, trim executive in his late thirties, in modish dress, sits at the table with several other PEOPLE, including CATHY LONG. They are sipping coffee from containers. There are memos and lists and other papers on the table. The SECRETARY stands at the doorway. THOMAS and the others are looking up at her.

SECRETARY

He says it's urgent.

THOMAS

(smiling)

Yeah? Well, tell him I'll call him back.

(MORE)

THOMAS (CONT'D)
 (to the others)
 It's that Martino kid, the
 impressionist.

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT -- DAY

LANGFORD sits by the phone with PUPKIN a few steps away,
 holding the gun and MARSHA looking on. LANGFORD looks
 desperate.

PUPKIN
 Then try again!

CUT TO:

INT: BERT THOMAS' OFFICE - DAY

An irked BERT THOMAS wearily picks up the phone.

THOMAS
 Yeah? ... Okay, Martino, let's
 stop the bullshit ... what? ...

Okay, I'm listening.

WE WATCH THOMAS' expression as it turns from skepticism to
 concern bordering on alarm.

THOMAS
 Give me that again? ... Wait a
 minute. What do we call our second
 cameraman?

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - DAY

The scene is as before, only now LANGFORD is sweating a
 bit.

LANGFORD
 (into the phone)
 Helen Keller.

PUPKIN
 (warning)
 No tricks, Jerry.

CUT TO:

INT: BERT THOMAS' OFFICE - DAY

THOMAS is still at the phone.

THOMAS
 Don't do anything, Jerry. Stay
 right there.
 (MORE)

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Tell him we'll do anything he wants.
Tell him to cool it. Are you okay?
... Look, tell him to call us about
five, okay. We'll let him know
what to do. And don't do anything
stupid.

THOMAS puts down the phone.

THOMAS

(calls to his
SECRETARY)

Vivien!

THOMAS' SECRETARY appears at the doorway.

THOMAS

Get me the number of the F.B.I.
right away. And get me Crockett's
office. And keep your mouth shut
about this.

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - DAY

LANGFORD is standing awkwardly in the middle of the room,
wearing a sweater that matches the patch of cloth we saw
in the envelope MARSHA gave PUPKIN. PUPKIN is still
training his pistol on LANGFORD and MARSHA is appraising
the fit.

MARSHA

(to PUPKIN)

What do you think?

PUPKIN

Looks fine.

MARSHA

(to LANGFORD)

I had to guess on the sleeves.

(to PUPKIN)

He gets to keep it, doesn't he?

PUPKIN

Sure, if he isn't dead.

CUT TO:

INT: THOMAS' OFFICE - DAY

THOMAS is on the phone.

THOMAS

(panicky)

I know he's in a meeting and I
don't care. I've got to talk to
him!

(MORE)

THOMAS (CONT'D)

... No, he can not call me back.
Don't you understand? This is an
emergency ... NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - DAY

LANGFORD is seated on a chair whose back is pressed right up against the high, ornate brass bedstead at the foot of the bed. MARSHA trains the gun on LANGFORD now. PUPKIN is unpacking a suitcase. He takes out a handsome blue suit, ruffled shirt, a bow tie, black shoes, underwear, socks, shaving equipment, soap, a hairbrush, a clothesbrush, a small shoe shine kit, aftershave lotion, deodorant and a dozen or so rolls of inch-and-a-half wide adhesive tape.

He removes this stuff from a suitcase that is barely big enough to hold it -- so the mere packing of all this paraphernalia into such a small space represents something of an achievement. As he takes the stuff out, he talks to LANGFORD, his back turned to him.

PUPKIN

This wasn't an easy decision for me, Jerry, believe me. For one thing, I knew it meant we could never be friends again and that hurt me. It's hard to lose a friend, even one who has let you down. You always hope you can patch things up. You know, a guy like me doesn't make friends that easily.

PUPKIN pauses a moment, then turns to LANGFORD, his voice filled with emotion.

PUPKIN

Why didn't you just listen to the tape when I asked you? Then I wouldn't have to be doing all this. Was it really too much to expect -- a few minutes of your time to listen to something I'd worked on my whole life?

LANGFORD's eyes shift rapidly. He is obviously calculating how to deal with PUPKIN.

LANGFORD

(with disarming
charm)

Hey, if that's what's bothering you, let's go over to my office and listen to that tape right now.

PUPKIN

Are you crazy, Jerry? Do you know what would happen to me?

MARSHA listens to this exchange a bit nervously. Gesturing to her gun, she says:

MARSHA
Am I going to have to hold this
thing all day?

PUPKIN sees she has lowered it practically to her side.

PUPKIN
(to MARSHA)
Just keep it on him.
(to LANGFORD)
You know, Jerry. Friendship is a
two-way street. All that time I
was worrying about you and your
ratings and everything, you couldn't
have cared less about me.

LANGFORD thinks rapidly for a beat or two.

LANGFORD
You're right. You know that? I
was thoughtless. It's just that
when you're doing a big show, it's
hard to tell who your friends really
are. I was wrong. I apologize.
Why don't we just shake hands and
forget the whole thing?

PUPKIN
(suspiciously)
That's easy to say, Jerry.

LANGFORD
But I mean it. I'll tell them
that the whole thing was a joke
and then we can go to my office
and listen to that tape. Come on.
What do you say?

LANGFORD rises with his hand extended toward PUPKIN.

MARSHA
(to LANGFORD, sharply)
Sit down!

LANGFORD looks to PUPKIN.

MARSHA
I said sit!

LANGFORD reluctantly sits down.

PUPKIN
(to MARSHA)
What's the matter? You heard what
he said.

MARSHA

All of a sudden, with a gun on him, he wants to make up and be friends. And, once he's out the door, what happens then?

PUPKIN

What happens then, Jerry?

MARSHA

You get to his office and they jump you, that's what happens, Rupert.

PUPKIN

She's right, Jerry.

LANGFORD

Not if I tell them not to. This is Jerry, Rupert, I give you my word.

PUPKIN

(to MARSHA)

He gives me his word.

MARSHA

Yeah? And what else? Come on, Rupert, I'm sick of waiting.

PUPKIN

And what else, Jerry?

LANGFORD

Come on, Rupert. My word's good enough, isn't it.

PUPKIN stares at LANGFORD for a few beats. Then he shakes his head sadly and says in a very quiet, discouraged voice.

PUPKIN

No, Jerry. It's not.

(to MARSHA)

Keep the gun up!

PUPKIN comes over to LANGFORD with a few rolls of adhesive tape in his hand.

PUPKIN

I'm sorry to do it this way, Jerry, but I'm no good at knots. Just put your arms up and out, okay?

LANGFORD spreads his arms back against the brass bedstead.

As PUPKIN goes to tape them, LANGFORD tries to grab him, but, with sudden, demonic force, PUPKIN pins him against the bedstead. They are practically nose to nose.

PUPKIN

Oh, no, Jerry. None of that. Now hold still.

CUT TO:

INT: A LARGE EXECUTIVE OFFICE - DAY

We are in the office of WILSON CROCKETT, president of the National Broadcasting Network. CROCKETT sits behind his desk, facing a group which includes several other NETWORK

EXECUTIVES, BERT THOMAS, CATHY LONG, F.B.I. INSPECTOR

PATTEN, and his assistant, GIARDELLO. They are in the midst of debate.

PATTEN

Look, I tell you, the bureau is doing everything possible to locate Mr. Langford. Right now our men are out checking out every radical group in this city.

AN EXECUTIVE

Radical?

PATTEN

They're willing to sacrifice their leader in order to get their message across, aren't they? You've got to figure that this is a desperate outfit. I don't know who they are anymore than you do. But I do know I've got to stop them. Otherwise, what you're seeing here is just the first of a whole wave of these kinds of kidnappings.

THOMAS

(upset)

Does this mean we're not supposed to put him on?!?

PATTEN

Who am I addressing, please?

CROCKETT

That's Bert Thomas. He produces the show.

PATTEN

I'm only saying, Mr. Thomas, that we can't allow this to reach the public. When the kidnappers call in, of course you're going to be cooperative. Promise them anything they want. After all, this King character is going to have to show up sooner or later.

(MORE)

PATTEN (CONT'D)

And once we get our hands on him,
he'll tell us where Mr. Langford
is.

PATTEN grinds his fist into his palm.

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - DAY

WE SEE PUPKIN in the shower, shampooing.

CUT TO:

INT: THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE

The scene is as before.

PATTEN

Sure. Let him go on if you have
to. It's just a taping. You can
always erase him afterwards, can't
you?

(pause)

All I'm saying is this: don't put
him on the air.

THOMAS

That's fine, Inspector, but let's
say he finishes his bit and you've
worked him over ...

PATTEN

Questioned him, Mr. Thomas.

There is light laughter.

THOMAS

Okay, questioned him and he still
won't talk. We get to eleven thirty
and what do we do? Do we air him
or what?

There is a heavy pause.

PATTEN

I would say no.

THOMAS

But they might kill Jerry!

CROCKETT

(breaking in)

Okay, Burt. (to PATTEN) Thank
you, Inspector. We appreciate
your position and we'll do all we
can to cooperate with you.

(MORE)

CROCKETT (CONT'D)

But I have to tell you right now that, if it comes down to it, we're not taking any chances with Mr. Langford's life.

PATTEN

I understand but ...

CROCKETT

(interrupting)

If your men haven't been able to locate Mr. Langford by air time, we're going to have to put this King guy on, no matter what he's said.

After all, Inspector, what's ten or fifteen minutes of talk show time against a man's life?

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - DAY

WE SEE PUPKIN in his new suit and ruffled shirt, impeccably groomed, standing next to the bed. He is talking to LANGFORD but we don't see anyone but PUPKIN.

PUPKIN

Open. (pause) Bite ... Good.

He is wrapping LANGFORD's mouth shut but all we see is that he is doing something.

PUPKIN

Can you breathe? Both ways? In and out?

WE PULL BACK TO SEE LANGFORD nodding. He is strapped to the bed with tape and encased like a mummy, only his eyes and nose showing. PUPKIN has wrapped him in tape from tip to toe. MARSHA emerges from the kitchen stirring something.

PUPKIN

(to MARSHA)

You've got until around midnight. Have a good time.

(to LANGFORD)

So long, Jerry! Wish me luck.

PUPKIN leaves.

CUT TO:

INT: BERT THOMAS' OFFICE - DAY

The phone rings. BERT THOMAS' SECRETARY answers.

THOMAS' SECRETARY

Bert Thomas! Who's calling please?

(MORE)

THOMAS' SECRETARY (CONT'D)
 (her voice grows
 tense)
 Yes, Mr. King.

CUT TO:

INT: BERT THOMAS' DESK - DAY

THOMAS sits by his phone. There is a large machine, looking like a large tape recorder, attached to the phone and monitoring the call. GIARDELLO is at a second phone and starts placing a call. PATTEN stands next to THOMAS.

There are two other PLAINCLOTHESMEN in the room, CROCKETT and CATHY LONG.

PATTEN
 (quietly to THOMAS)
 Keep him talking.

THOMAS nods and picks up the phone.

THOMAS
 Yes? ... Yes, Mr, King. We
 understand.

Everything's been arranged. Now if you'll just tell me a little about the nature of your material, so that we can...

CUT TO:

EXT: UPPER EAST SIDE MANHATTAN STREET - DAY

PUPKIN stands in a public phonebooth on a streetcorner.

PUPKIN
 (into the phone)
 I'll tell you everything you need
 to know at the studio this evening,

MR. THOMAS. I APPRECIATE YOUR CO-
 operation. Goodbye.

PUPKIN steps out of the booth and starts walking downtown.

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Late afternoon. MARSHA is setting the dining room table for two. She talks as she works.

MARSHA
 I've got so much to tell you I
 just don't know what to begin with.
 Are you okay?

LANGFORD mumbles incoherently through his gag and tape.

MARSHA

Good. Tell me if you're not. I guess you're wondering why I do stuff like this. I think it's because I'm a Leo, but my shrink says I'm pathologically rebellious and self-destructive. You don't think I'm self-destructive, do you?

LANGFORD, mummified, again mumbles and struggles a bit in his bonds.

MARSHA

I knew you wouldn't. That's 'cause you're the only person in the world who really understands me.

CUT TO:

INT: CROCKETT'S OFFICE - DAY

CROCKETT sits behind his desk. With him are BERT THOMAS, CATHY LONG and three other EXECUTIVES.

CROCKETT

Can Randall* sub for Jerry?
 ([*Tony Randall is
 one of any number
 of substitute
 hosts.])

THOMAS

His agent's calling us back but it looks good. I only told him Jerry's sick.

CROCKETT

Well, if worse comes to worse,
 Canter can always carry it.
 (to CATHY LONG)
 Let me see your list.

CATHY LONG hands CROCKETT a blue piece of paper. He glances over it quickly.

CROCKETT

Any one of these a writer?

THOMAS

(pointing to a name
 on the list)
 McCabe. The Vanishing Siberian
 Tiger.

CROCKETT

He's out.

CATHY LONG

What if we don't run this King
 guy? Who'll fill the time?

CROCKETT

We'll stretch the other guests.
But I think we're going to wind up
running him. For one thing, we've
got to think about Jerry.

FIRST EXECUTIVE

And from a news point of view,
we've got a responsibility to air
this story.

CROCKETT

Exactly, Lou.

(pause)

I mean, who would you rather watch --
some tiger expert or a live
kidnapper.

A SECOND EXECUTIVE

But nobody's going to know he's a
kidnapper. They'll think we've
gone crazy.

CROCKETT

Then they'll read about it in the
papers tomorrow and, believe me,
tomorrow night, everyone in America
will be watching Jerry talk about
his experience. And he can put
this King guy on rerun.

THOMAS

You're going to put him on twice?

A THIRD EXECUTIVE

What if his stuff's unusable?

SECOND EXECUTIVE

And remember what Patten said about
...

CROCKETT

Hold on.

(pause)

We can always edit the guy. And,
as for a wave of these things, I
just don't buy the idea that there
are that many people out there
crazy enough to spend their lives
in prison for a few minutes on
television.

CUT TO:

EXT: MADISON AVENUE IN THE SIXTIES - DAY

PUPKIN walks purposefully down the street.

CUT TO:

EXT: OUTSIDE THE JERRY LANGFORD SHOW THEATER - DAY

The street is quiet. Suddenly three cars pull up and some dozen PLAINCLOTHESMEN get out. Two wait outside the theater; the ten others disappear inside through the backstage entrance.

CUT TO:

EXT: MIDTOWN MANHATTAN STREET - DAY

PUPKIN is now walking cross-town, towards the theater.

CUT TO:

EXT: LANGFORD THEATER -- DAY

A line of some 100 PEOPLE has gathered outside the theater.

A sign at the bottom of the poster showing Langford reads "Tonight's Guest Host: Tony Randall."

CUT TO:

INT: THE TELEVISION STUDIO

FROM THE POV OF THE STAGE, WE WATCH SIX PLAINCLOTHESMEN

descend into the orchestra and take widely scattered aisle seats. When the last has taken his seat we ...

CUT TO:

EXT: THE LANGFORD THEATER - DAY

Depending on the season, it is either dusk or late afternoon. The USHERS swing the doors open and the TICKETHOLDERS file in.

CUT TO:

EXT: A MIDTOWN MANHATTAN STREET - DUSK

PUPKIN is crossing Broadway, a few blocks from the theater.

CUT TO:

INT: STUDIO

At the center of the stage, a pretty MODEL used solely to test color quality sits in Langford's chair as several MEMBERS of the Tactical Patrol Force admire her considerable cleavage. A number of TECHNICIANS go about their work. CAMERAMEN move to and from their stations.

CUT TO:

INT: CORRIDOR LEADING FROM THE BACKSTAGE DOOR TO THE STAGE

Four PLAINCLOTHESMEN are gathered behind the stage door.

They watch ZSA ZSA GABOR (or some other sexy talk show celebrity) enter and then return to talking among themselves.

CUT TO:

EXT: THE TELEVISION THEATER - DAY TO EARLY EVENING

The situation appears normal. Only the regular backstage door GUARD, a big, grey-haired man, stands at the door.

Nearby two other young MEN, in colorless suits, stand talking. We WATCH CLARENCE MCCABE, a writer, his plain WIFE and her PARENTS arrive in front of the theater, locate the backstage entrance and present themselves before the GUARD.

MCCABE

(a bit pompously)

Good evening, officer. This is the backstage door I take it?

GUARD

Your name please?

MCCABE

Clarence McCabe, the writer. And this is Mrs. McCabe and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Solters of Cleveland.

GUARD

(checking his list)

I'm sorry, sir. I don't see you here.

MCCABE

I'm on the show tonight, officer.

GUARD

Well, you're not here.

MCCABE

(getting a bit agitated)

Look, Cathy Long gave me instructions to present myself at a quarter to six. May I see her please?

GUARD

I'm under strictest orders tonight to admit only authorized personnel.

MCCABE

(huffy)

This is absurd.

(to the others)

Wait right here.

MCCABE marches past the GUARD and rushes to the backstage door. He opens it. The GUARD trails behind.

GUARD

Stop him!

CUT TO:

INT: THE BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR - EVENING

The four PLAINCLOTHESMEN jump MCCABE and start pulling him downstairs.

MCCABE

Hey!

CUT TO:

EXT: OUTSIDE THE THEATER - EVENING

PUPKIN arrives at the backstage door. Seeing no one, he walks in.

CUT TO:

INT: A ROOM IN THE BASEMENT OF THE THEATER - EVENING

MCCABE has just been hustled before PATTEN.

PATTEN

Are you the King?

MCCABE looks baffled.

CUT TO:

INT: BACKSTAGE - EVENING

PUPKIN is looking for a familiar face. He approaches a CAMERAMAN.

PUPKIN

(getting CAMERAMAN's
attention)

Excuse me.

The CAMERAMAN looks up.

PUPKIN

I'm the King.

CAMERAMAN

Yeah?

CUT TO:

INT: THE BASEMENT ROOM - EVENING

PATTEN is sitting behind a desk. MCCABE is standing before him, still securely held by four PLAINCLOTHESMEN.

PATTEN
Don't talk to me about tigers!

CUT TO:

INT: BACKSTAGE - EVENING.

PUPKIN approaches the STAGE MANAGER.

PUPKIN
(to STAGE MANAGER)
I'm the King.

STAGE MANAGER
(smiling)
What can I do for you, your
highness?

CATHY LONG passes by. She spots PUPKIN, and walks swiftly over.

CATHY LONG
What are you doing here, Mr.
Pupkin?!?!

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The lights are dimmed. Music is playing on the phonograph.

Two candles burn on the elegantly-set dinner table. MARSHA stands in the middle of the room, in front of LANGFORD.

She is singing. LANGFORD is still encased in tape.

MARSHA
(singing to the
music)
"I'm gonna love you, Like no one's
ever loved you, Come rain or come
shine, Happy together, unhappy
together, And won't it be fine."

CUT TO:

INT: THE BASEMENT ROOM - NIGHT

Now PUPKIN stands before PATTEN, held by PLAINCLOTHESMEN who frisk him and hand PATTEN the autograph book.

GIARDELLO stands next to PATTEN.

PATTEN
(to the
PLAINCLOTHESMEN)
I hope you brought me the right
guy this time.
(to PUPKIN)
Where's Jerry Langford?

PUPKIN
 (to GIARDELLO)
 Are you on the show?

PATTEN
 No, Mr. King. That's my assistant,
 Mr. Giardello.

PUPKIN
 I want to see someone on the show.

PATTEN
 Well, you tell us where Mr. Langford
 is and we'll let you see anyone
 you want.

PUPKIN
 Just get me someone from the show.

PATTEN starts browsing through the autograph book.

PATTEN
 Come on, Mr. King. Let's not fool
 around.
 (looking up from
 the book)

Should we know about any of these people?

PUPKIN
 (gesturing to the
 book)
 That's Orson Bean.

PATTEN
 I see.
 (to GIARDELLO)
 Check these out.

GIARDELLO starts looking through the autograph book.

PATTEN
 Now are you going to talk to us,
 or not?

PUPKIN
 Sure I'll talk. Just get me someone
 from the show.

PATTEN
 (to GIARDELLO)
 Get that Thomas guy in here.

GIARDELLO leaves.

PATTEN
 We haven't much time, Mr. King.

PUPKIN looks towards the door.

PATTEN
Let's start with your name.

PUPKIN
Rupert Pupkin.

PATTEN
That's your real name?

PUPKIN
Yes sir.

PATTEN
You an American?

PUPKIN
Yes.

PATTEN
Then why do you people do these things?

THOMAS enters. He scrutinizes PUPKIN.

PUPKIN
Are you on the show?

THOMAS
Yes. I'm Bert Thomas.

PUPKIN pulls thin piece of neatly typewritten paper from his inside jacket and hands it to THOMAS.

PUPKIN
Here's the introduction to my act.
Please make sure Mr. Randall follows
it exactly as I've written it.

PATTEN nods to THOMAS who takes the paper and reads it as he leaves.

PATTEN
Okay. How about helping us, Mr.
King?

PUPKIN
What about make-up? I need make-
up.

PATTEN
(to PLAINCLOTHESMEN)
Put some color in his cheeks.

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

MARSHA has finished a half bottle of wine. She is eating a beautifully decorated piece of stuffed capon and talking through her tears.

MARSHA

(crying)

It was the second lead! I'd never gotten a part in my life and here I get the second lead. And what does Daddy say?

SHOT of LANGFORD still bound from tip to toe.

MARSHA

Not "Marsha, that's wonderful" or "we're proud of you" or anything. Oh no. He starts lecturing me on how I should have tried out for Emily! Now do you understand, Jerry!

MARSHA gets hold of herself. She swallows a couple of pills and swills them down with some wine.

MARSHA

(calmer)

My doctor says I shouldn't get excited.

MARSHA picks at another piece of capon.

MARSHA

This is the best I ever made it. You want some?

LANGFORD, the mummy, nods. MARSHA picks up the plate across from her, fills it with food, and pulls a chair up next to LANGFORD. She undoes the tape around his mouth and picks a sock out of his mouth.

MARSHA

Now open. Marsha's going to feed her Jerry.

CUT TO:

INT: BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Two young GIRLS are working on big cue cards copying from the piece of paper PUPKIN has given THOMAS. TONY RANDALL stands next to THOMAS. The two of them watch. RANDALL is going over the lines.

CUT TO:

INT: THE BASEMENT ROOM - NIGHT

PUPKIN has obviously been worked over. He is sweating.

PATTEN

How about it, King?

PUPKIN

If I'm not on that show, Jerry Langford is dead, I promise you.

PATTEN nods to his PLAINCLOTHESMEN again who start working PUPKIN over.

CUT TO:

INT: THE TELEVISION STUDIO - NIGHT

The beginning of the taping is seconds away. Everyone is in his place. The STAGE MANAGER is counting down from five on his fingers. At zero, he points across to RICK ROSS, the orchestra leader, who strikes up the familiar Langford Show theme song.

CUT TO:

INT: THE CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Four TECHNICAL ENGINEERS are seated along a large console containing a multitude of small television screens. One screen shows the spotlight falling where Randall will enter. Another shows the logo of the Langford Show.

Another shows nothing in particular. Behind the TECHNICIANS, stand CROCKETT and the EXECUTIVES we have seen in the previous scenes. A TECHNICIAN is giving instructions to the CAMERAMAN.

TECHNICIAN

Hold on two. Hold. Hold. Come on, Keller. Get it framed!

CUT TO:

INT: THE TELEVISION STUDIO - NIGHT

The theme song is playing. BERT CANTER stands off-camera at one side of the stage before a microphone.

CANTER

Now! Direct from New York! It's the Jerry Langford Show with guest host Tony Randall and his special guests -- Olympic swimmer Mark Spitz, pundit Gore Vidal, the one and only Zsa Zsa Gabor and another of Jerry's taped exclusives, an interview with Prince Ranier of Monaco. As always, Rick Ross and the Orchestra and me, Bert Canter. And now ... say hello to Tony!!!!!!

CUT TO:

An APPLAUSE sign flashes like crazy. The AUDIENCE cheers wildly. In the back, we notice a handful of TACTICAL PATROLMEN scattered about. RANDALL strides on stage briskly, accepting the cheers of the crowd with his arms raised. He nods and then his eyes fix on those hastily written outsized cue cards. He reads them with a mixture of professionalism and wry distance, wanting to disown the words without seeming silly.

RANDALL

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you. Thank you very much. I have some sad news for you. Earlier today, my writing staff was executed in Central Park by the network firing squad so there'll be no sensational Randall monologue this evening.

The AUDIENCE cheers derisively.

RANDALL

No embarrassing displays of emotion, please.

(the AUDIENCE laughs)

Instead, we're going to do something a little bit different this evening -- a lot different if you ask me. We're going to give you a glimpse into the future.

It isn't often that you can call someone a sure thing in the entertainment business. After all, the verdict is always in your hands. But I think tonight, after you've met my first guest, you'll agree with me that he's destined for greatness -- in one way or another. So will you please give your warmest greeting to the newest King of Comedy, Rupert Pupkin!!!!

The music plays. The APPLAUSE sign flashes. The AUDIENCE applauds heartily -- and nobody appears to fill the spotlight at the edge of the wings. The spotlight holds for what seems like an eternity.

CUT TO:

INT: CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

TECHNICIAN

Just hold. Three. Pick up the audience.

CUT TO:

INT: THE STAGE - NIGHT

Finally after what seems like an eternity, PUPKIN emerges, straightening his jacket a bit and trying to crane the kinks out of his neck. He is a bit tense but very high and in full command. As he delivers his monologue, PUPKIN is more confident, comfortable and self-assured than we have ever seen him.

PUPKIN

Good evening, ladies and gentleman. Let me introduce myself. My name is Rupert Pupkin. I was born in Clifton, New Jersey, which was not, at that time, a federal offense.

(MORE)

PUPKIN (CONT'D)

(laughter)

Is there anyone here from Clifton?

(silence)

Good. We can all relax. Now, I'd like to begin by saying that my parents were too poor to afford me a childhood but the fact is nobody is allowed to be really poor in Clifton. Once you fall below eleven thousand you're exiled to Passaic. My parents did, in fact, put down the first two payments on my childhood. Then they tried to return me to the hospital as defective. But, like everyone else I grew up in large part thanks to my mother. If she was only here today I'd say, "Hey, mom. What are you doing here? You've been dead for nine years?"

(laughter)

You should have seen my mother. She was wonderful -- blonde, beautiful, intelligent, alcoholic.

(laughter)

We used to drink milk together after school. Mine was homogenized. Hers was loaded.

(laughter)

Once she was picked up for speeding. They clocked her doing fifty -- in our garage.

(laughter)

When they tested her they found that her alcohol was two per cent blood. They took away her license and she died shortly afterwards. We used to joke together Mom and me, until the tears would stream down her face and she'd throw up.

(laughter)

And who would clean it up? Not Dad. He was too busy down at O'Grady's throwing up on his own. In fact, until I was sixteen, I thought throwing up was a sign of maturity. While the other kids were off in the woods sneaking cigarettes, I was hiding behind the house with my fingers down my throat.

(laughter)

I never got anywhere until one day, my father caught me. Just as he was giving me a final kick in the stomach, for luck, I managed to heave all over his new shoes. "That's it," I thought. "I've made it. I'm finally a man!"

(MORE)

PUPKIN (CONT'D)

(laughter)

As it turned out, that was the only time my father ever paid any real attention to me. He was usually too busy out in the park playing ball with my sister, Rose. And, today thanks to those many hours of practice, my sister Rose has grown into a fine man.

(laughter)

Me, I wasn't especially interested in athletics. The only exercise I ever got was when the other kids picked on me. They used to beat me up once a week, usually Tuesday. After a while, the school worked it into the curriculum. And, if you knocked me out, you got extra credit.

(laughter)

Except there was this one kid who was afraid of me. I kept telling him, "Hit me! Hit me! What's the matter with you? Don't you want graduate?" As for me, I was the only kid in the history of the school to graduate in traction. The school nurse tucked my diploma into my sling. But my only real interest, right from the beginning, was show business. Even as a young man, I began at the very top, collecting autographs.

(laughter)

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dinner is over. MARSHA is sitting next to LANGFORD. As LANGFORD speaks, it is obvious that he is turning on the charm for strategic reasons.

LANGFORD

That was a wonderful dinner, Marsha. I want you to know how much I enjoyed it.

MARSHA

We can do it again.

LANGFORD

I'd like to show you my gratitude. But it's a little difficult, like this.

LANGFORD indicates his bonds.

MARSHA.

(in a tone of
intimacy)

Let's say I took all this off.
What would you do to me? Tell me.

CUT TO:

INT: THE TELEVISION STUDIO -- NIGHT

We break in on a great burst of laughter. PUPKIN is just finishing his monologue.

PUPKIN

A lot of you are probably wondering why Jerry couldn't make it this evening. Well, he's tied up -- and I'm the one who tied him.

(laughter)

You think I'm joking, but that's the only way I could break into show business -- by hijacking Jerry Langford.

(laughter)

I'm not kidding. Right now, Jerry Langford is strapped to a bedstead somewhere in the middle of this city.

(laughter)

Go ahead. Laugh. But the fact is... I'm here. Tomorrow you'll know I wasn't kidding and you'll think I was crazy. But I figured it this way: better to be King for a Night than Schmuck for a Lifetime!!!

(laughter)

Good night ladies and gentlemen.
God bless you.

The AUDIENCE applauds heartily. The music plays. And TONY RANDALL salutes PUPKIN with a wave of his hand. PUPKIN goes off stage after soaking up the applause.

CUT TO:

INT: THE WINGS - NIGHT

A group of PLAINCLOTHESMEN seize PUPKIN and march him briskly through the backstage corridor towards the backstage door.

CUT TO:

EXT: THE BACKSTAGE DOOR - NIGHT

A handful of PEOPLE are waiting, among them the autograph hunters, MAE, CELESTE and SIDNEY. MAE, out of a reflex of thirty years, immediately extends her autograph book towards PUPKIN, then, recognizing him, immediately pulls it back.

MAE
 (to PUPKIN)
 Who did you get?

PUPKIN says nothing as he is hustled into a limousine.

SIDNEY and CELESTE look on. MAE trails after PUPKIN and the PLAINCLOTHESMEN.

MAE
 (to PLAINCLOTHESMAN)
 Could I have a ride?

The PLAINCLOTHESMAN says nothing and starts getting in the limo.

MAE
 I've never been in one.

The limo pulls away.

CUT TO:

INT: INSPECTOR PATTEN'S DOWNTOWN OFFICE - NIGHT

PUPKIN stands among a crowd of PLAINCLOTHESMEN who have obviously been working him over. PATTEN sits behind his desk. GIARDELLO is at his side. The clock on the wall reads 10:20.

PATTEN
 Okay, Pupkin. We'll start all over again. Where is Langford? You know, we're going to find him sooner or later.

PUPKIN
 I'm trying to tell you, Inspector.

You let me walk out of here, right?

And as soon as I'm seen my act on the show -- as soon as I'm sure they've really put it on -- I'll tell you where Jerry is and you'll get him back safe and sound.

PATTEN
 Fine, Pupkin. Then why don't you watch the show here with us? That way we're all happy. (to GIARDELLO)
 What channel?

GIARDELLO
 Seven.

PATTEN
 We get that one in fine. So what do you say, Pupkin?

PUPKIN
 Look, I'll say it again. You let me go now.

PATTEN motions to the PLAINCLOTHESMEN wearily with his head. They drag PUPKIN off. PATTEN looks up at the clock.

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

MARSHA is frantically attempting to unwrap LANGFORD. With each pull of the tape, LANGFORD yelps. There is a small tangle of unwrapped tape collecting around LANGFORD's feet and sticking to MARSHA's clothes.

LANGFORD
Watch my hair!

MARSHA
I'm sorry, baby.

We hear the sound of tape ripping.

LANGFORD
Ow!

MARSHA
I'm sorry.

CUT TO:

INT: PATTEN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

PUPKIN is hustled before PATTEN again.

A PLAINCLOTHESMAN
Still nothing.

PUPKIN glances at the clock. It is 11:05.

PUPKIN
I've got to get out of here.

PATTEN
You're not going anywhere, Pupkin.

Now, where is he?

PUPKIN
I'm telling you, Inspector, if I don't see that show where I want to see it, Jerry Langford is dead. My people have instructions to execute him unless they hear from me by midnight.

PATTEN glances apprehensively at GIARDELLO.

PATTEN
Just where is it you want to watch this show?

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

LANGFORD is half unwrapped now. The place is covered with yard after yard of tape. MARSHA is working frantically to finish unwrapping LANGFORD who is helping now that his arms are free.

LANGFORD

Ow! God damnit! Not so fast!

MARSHA

(working frantically)

We haven't all night, baby.

MARSHA rips the tape off LANGFORD.

LANGFORD

OW!!!!

MARSHA

Oh, I love you, baby. I love you so much.

CUT TO:

EXT: BROADWAY - NIGHT

A limo drives down Broadway, followed by an unmarked car.

CUT TO:

INT: THE LIMO - NIGHT

PATTEN and GIARDELLO sit up front, with the DRIVER. PUPKIN sits in the back between two PLAINCLOTHESMEN. The limo pulls up in front of the bar-restaurant where RITA works.

PATTEN turns around in the front seat to address PUPKIN.

PATTEN

Here we, are, Pupkin. I don't know what this is all about, but as soon as you've seen yourself, you're going to talk to us or I promise you, you'll never see daylight again.

PUPKIN

I'll need a couple of minutes, Inspector.

PATTEN

What?!?

PUPKIN

After it's over, I want a couple of minutes. And I'll need ten dollars.

Does anyone of you gentlemen have my wallet?

PATTEN

Don't push me, Pupkin.

PUPKIN

A condemned man's last request,
Inspector.

PATTEN

Well, I'll tell you right away,
the answer is no, Pupkin.

PUPKIN

It's not much of a ransom, Inspector
...

PATTEN

(losing his temper)

Look, I'm drawing the line, that's
all! No ten dollars and that's
it.

(emphatically) No -- ten -- dollars!!!!

You understand?!?

PUPKIN

(in mollifying tones)

Sure. Sure, Inspector. No ten
dollars ...

PATTEN

(appeased)

Okay.

PUPKIN

... and no Jerry Langford.

There is a pause as PATTEN stifles himself.

PUPKIN

Come on, it's getting late,
Inspector.

PATTEN

(exploding to one
of his MEN)

Go ahead. Give him his goddamned
ten dollars! Give him twenty! I
don't care. Just get him out of
here!

One of the PLAINCLOTHESMEN in the back opens the door and PUPKIN and the other PLAINCLOTHESMAN get out. The unmarked car has pulled up behind the limo and other PLAINCLOTHESMEN stand next to it. PUPKIN and the two PLAINCLOTHESMEN start walking the ten yards or so to the bar-restaurant.

CUT TO:

INT: THE BAR-RESTAURANT - NIGHT

PUPKIN marches in flanked by the PLAINCLOTHESMEN. The clock over the bar reads 11:30. RITA looks up from talking with a CUSTOMER and sees PUPKIN. She says nothing. She just looks at him. There are five CUSTOMERS at the bar. A working class COUPLE in their late fifties are half-stewed, the man telling the woman that her friend, Maud, isn't really her friend because she wants \$150 for a used

REFRIGERATOR. A FEW SEATS DOWN, TWO MEN IN THEIR MID-

forties, in wind-breakers are locked in an intense but inaudible conversation. And, close to the television set which hangs over the far end of the bar sits a MOUSY MAN with glasses, who looks like an accountant. He is sipping a beer, his eyes fixed on the set where the CBS late movie is just showing its logo. PUPKIN marches up to the bar.

PUPKIN

(urgently to RITA)

Turn on Langford. Seven.

MOUSY MAN

Hey! I'm watching this.

RITA keeps staring at PUPKIN.

PUPKIN

Just turn it. Come on.

MOUSY MAN

I was here first, mister. You can't just walk in like this. It isn't fair.

RITA glances at the MAN. PUPKIN can't wait. He vaults onto the bar and turns the set to the Langford Show, just as, on screen, he walks from the wings onto the stage to the applause of the studio audience. Perched atop the bar, standing next to the image of himself, PUPKIN looks down at RITA, a smile of pride and triumph on his face.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE -- NIGHT

PUPKIN walking onto television screens in various homes across America -- in a chic New York living room, in a suburban bedroom, in the parlor of an Indiana farmhouse, in a kitchen where a COUPLE is in the middle of a raging domestic quarrel, in an otherwise dark bedroom where a COUPLE is in the throes of lovemaking, in a bar, a station house, in a television store window display.

CUT TO:

INT: MARSHA'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

MARSHA has just removed her dress and stands in her bra and panties as LANGFORD unwraps the last tape from about

his ankles. The room is swimming in tape, like an enormous boa constrictor gone mad. MARSHA moves towards LANGFORD, her arms open.

MARSHA

Oh, baby. Baby.

LANGFORD frees his ankles of tape just in time to side-step MARSHA and moves quickly to the dining room table where he grabs the gun. He trains it on her.

LANGFORD

Stop!

MARSHA moves toward him. He pulls the trigger, releasing a plastic pellet that hits MARSHA in the stomach, stinging her.

MARSHA

Ow!

LANGFORD glances down in horror at the gun which he now realizes is a toy and looks up in horror to see MARSHA, bigger than life, bearing down on him.

MARSHA

Don't be afraid of Marsha, baby.

CUT TO:

INT: BAR-RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The CUSTOMERS are watching the conclusion of Pupkin's monologue, along with the PLAINCLOTHESMEN and PUPKIN. WE COME IN a split second after a joke. The CUSTOMERS laugh, with the exception of the MOUSY MAN who is waiting, in bad humor, for Pupkin's act to finish. The PLAINCLOTHESMEN laugh reluctantly. PUPKIN, no longer standing on the bar, but back down with the others, watches with fascination.

RITA watches grimly, occasionally glancing at PUPKIN.

PUPKIN on TV But I figured it this way: better to be King for a Night than Schmuck for a Lifetime. (audience and CUSTOMERS laugh) Good night, ladies and gentlemen, and God bless you.

The television audience applauds and the CUSTOMERS applaud and cheer in good humor except for the MOUSY MAN. The HALF-STEWED MAN leans across his WOMAN to yell at PUPKIN as the two FRIENDS in windbreakers congratulate PUPKIN at the same time. There is a brief moment of carnival excitement.

HALF-STEWED MAN
 Hey, that's pretty
 good. Schmuck for a
 lifetime!
 (to the WOMAN)
 You know who he's
 tailn' about? Your
 brother!

FIRST FRIEND
 (to PUPKIN)
 How do you think up all
 that stuff?

HALF-STEWED
 WOMAN
 What about your
 brother?

SECOND FRIEND
 It's a trick, that's all.
 Larry can do it as good
 as him.

HALF-STEWED MAN
 What about him?

MOUSY MAN
 Is it over now?

HALF-STEWED
 WOMAN
 He's another one.

FIRST FRIEND
 He's funnier than Larry.
 Larry just makes a lot of
 faces.

HALF-STEWED MAN
 (getting a little
 angry)
 I told you to shut up
 about my brother.
 (to PUPKIN)
 She doesn't know
 nuthin'.

MOUSY MAN
 Well, if nobody minds ...

PUPKIN takes all this praise and excitement with a shy
 smile of satisfaction, glancing at RITA from time to time
 for her reaction. She merely stares at PUPKIN with a sad
 expression on her face.

PUPKIN
 Come on, Rita. Don't spoil the
 party.
 (to the CUSTOMERS)
 Drinks all around on me.

HALF-STEWED MAN
 (in a loud voice,
 to HALF-STEWED
 WOMAN)
 What about the hundred and fifty?
 We never saw a penny outta your
 brother.

HALF-STEWED WOMAN
 That's because my brother is a
family man, not like Phil.

The argument between the HALF-STEWED MAN and his WOMAN
 continues at the end of the bar. The two FRIENDS have
 resumed their intense conversation.

PUPKIN
 (to the two FRIENDS)
 What'll you have?

FIRST FRIEND

I'm okay. Thanks, pal.

SECOND FRIEND

Me, too.

The MOUSY MAN has climbed up on the bar and has turned the TV back to the late movie. He sits enthralled by a scene of violence courtesy of Tony Curtis as the Boston Strangler. PUPKIN looks down the bar at the STEWED COUPLE to offer them drinks, but they are lost in an argument over the relative merits of their brothers. PUPKIN turns to the PLAINCLOTHESMEN.

PUPKIN

I don't suppose you're allowed anything.

(to RITA)

I guess nobody's in a celebrating mood. How about you? You want something?

FIRST PLAINCLOTHESMAN

It's getting time, Pupkin.

PUPKIN

In a second.

RITA

(in a sad, serious voice to PUPKIN)

That was true, wasn't it? ... about the kidnapping.

PUPKIN nods and shrugs.

PUPKIN

Now you can say you knew me. That's something, anyway.

FIRST PLAINCLOTHESMAN

Come on, Pupkin.

PUPKIN

(to RITA, in a quiet, tender voice)

I guess I've got go. Take care of yourself, will you. And when you're bored -- you know, when you're brushing your teeth or something, give me a thought, okay?

RITA

Okay.

The PLAINCLOTHESMEN lead PUPKIN out of the bar. The two FRIENDS are still buried in their intense, private conversation. The PLAINCLOTHESMEN and PUPKIN walk past the HALF-STEWED COUPLE.

HALF-STEWED WOMAN

It's okay to talk about my sister,
but we can't say nuthin' about
Phil, is that it?

HALF-STEWED MAN

(to PUPKIN)

She's just had one too many.

The PLAINCLOTHESMEN lead PUPKIN onto the street.

EXT: THE BAR - NIGHT

As they walk the few steps to the car, the FIRST
PLAINCLOTHESMAN turns to PUPKIN.

FIRST PLAINCLOTHESMAN

I just don't get it, Pupkin. You're
gonna spend eight years in the can --
"minimum" -- and for what?

SECOND PLAINCLOTHESMAN

Yeah, Pupkin. You threw it all
away.

PUPKIN

(vaguely)

We'll see.

WE CLOSE IN on PUPKIN, smiling.

FADE TO:

INT: THE JERRY LANGFORD SHOW STUDIO - NIGHT

The STAGE MANAGER is counting down. At zero, he points to
RICK ROSS who launches the orchestra into the Langford
Show theme song. BERT CANTER, standing stage right, speaks
into the mike.

CANTER

And now! Direct from New York!
The Jerry Langford Show, starring
Jerry's special guest, out on bail,
Rupert Pupkin, the kidnapping King
of Comedy!!!!

The AUDIENCE applauds mightily and the FINAL CREDITS roll.

As they roll, the music to the Langford Show continues and
WE WATCH a MONTAGE that shows PUPKIN progressively taping
LANGFORD to the back of a brass bedstead on stage as the
two of them talk and laugh. By the end of the MONTAGE,
LANGFORD is once again mummified and PUPKIN, having
finished, bows and smiles. WE CLOSE on a FREEZE-FRAME
CLOSE UP of PUPKIN in ecstasy.

FADE OUT:

THE END