

"THE KING OF COMEDY"

by

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FINAL  
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"THE KING OF COMEDY"

FADE IN

OPENING CREDITS ("TONIGHT SHOW") 1

At END of CREDITS, JERRY LANGFORD is announced, appears and does a short monologue (VIDEOTAPE).

EXT. MIDTOWN MANHATTAN STREETS - DAY 2

PUPKIN, attractive, just past thirty, impeccably dressed, walks rapidly towards his destination. It's a television theater whose marquee announces THE JERRY LANGFORD SHOW. It is dusk and the show is breaking. People begin to pour out.

Three professional autograph hunters cluster together: MAE, a lady in her sixties; SIDNEY, neat, pimply, carrying a brown bag; and a YOUNG MAN, heavysset, late twenties.

Pupkin arrives at the stage door.

MAE

Hi, Rupert.

YOUNG MAN

(coolly)  
Hello, Rupert.

SIDNEY

Who did you get?

PUPKIN

(distractedly)  
Nobody.

As the autograph hunters talk to him, Pupkin continually slides away from them, but never too far from the stage door.

SIDNEY

I got Rodney Dangerfield,  
Rupert...Richard Harris...  
(etc. improvisation)...I'll  
swap them for a Barbra.

YOUNG MAN

You're wasting your time.

SIDNEY

...Alan Alda...very nice man...  
Robin Williams...very hard to  
get...

Cont.

PUPKIN

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

YOUNG MAN

What's that supposed to mean -- that it's mine, or Sidney's or Mae's?

MAE

It is so my whole life.

YOUNG MAN

What about your mother? Isn't she part of your life?

MAE

It's her whole life too.

The crowd around the backstage door swells.

POLICEMAN

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

A number of people comply, among them a COLLEGE GIRL who stands with her BOYFRIEND near Pupkin.

PUPKIN

(to Girl)

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

COLLEGE GIRL

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

BOYFRIEND

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

As the College Girl laughs, unselfconsciously, Langford emerges, flanked by Two Pages, husky young men in theater uniforms. The POLICEMAN is handing out the autographs while Langford works his way towards his limousine, acknowledging cries of "Jerry" only with a nervous smile. Flashbulbs pop. He climbs in the limo. The Pages close the door and turn back. Suddenly, Langford leaps out of the car and onto the sidewalk. A pair of hands swipe at him, trying to drag him back into the car. A girl, whom we'll know as MASHA, has snuck into the backseat of the limo. As she tries to grab Langford, she cries his name, drawing the

Cont.

attention of the Two Pages—who rush back. One of them goes to the door on the street side. The other opens the near door, forcing Langford back into the crowd. The street-side Page surprises Masha and drags her out. She fights like a wildcat. Slowly, the Two Pages subdue her, but, meanwhile, Langford's access to his limo has been cut off by the press of several aggressive young fans. Langford stands alone, amidst the crowd, a bit shaken, vulnerable. Pupkin is amazed to see Langford standing right next to him. But Pupkin makes his move.

Smiling at Langford who barely listens:

PUPKIN

How the hell did that girl get  
in there!? And what about you?  
They don't take very good care  
of you, Jerry.

Langford glances nervously at Pupkin as a YOUNG GIRL crowds him.

YOUNG GIRL

Jerry, I bear you eternal life!

PUPKIN

(moving into action)  
This is crazy! Just a minute!  
(to crowd)  
OKAY! STAND BACK!

Pupkin wrenches the Young Girl's hand from Langford's sleeve and gets cut. He clears a path toward the limo for Langford.

PUPKIN

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

The Pages are still struggling with Masha on the street. Pupkin opens the door, ushering Langford in.

PUPKIN

Stand back! 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 cuff link.

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.

Cont.

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 biding 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 punch lines, 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 thirty-four 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 looking for new people...

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 breaks.

D-10 The limousine stops at Langford's apartment building. Langford gets out. Pupkin follows.

EXT. LANGFORD'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Langford turns 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.

Langford climbs the stairs, Pupkin follows.

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.

The automatic door opens.

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!

Cont.

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.

INT. SARDI'S RESTAURANT - DAY

5

Pupkin and Langford are led to a table in the "bullpen," a select corner of the restaurant. Pupkin is dressed "richer."

PUPKIN  
 You look tired, Jerry.

LANGFORD  
 It's that obvious, huh? It's the show, Rube. The pressure, the problems. And on top of that, the custody suit!

PUPKIN  
 That was terrible, Jerry. Imagine awarding both kids to Charlene. Listen, Jerry, if there's anything I can do...

LANGFORD  
 Thanks, Rube. Just talking with you helps.

HIRSCHFIELD arrives with his pad and starts sketching.

PUPKIN  
 Hasn't he already done you, Jerry?

LANGFORD  
 (distracting  
 Pupkin)  
 Have you thought about it?  
 What I asked you?

PUPKIN

Hey! Are you kidding? I haven't thought about anything else! I feel for you. I know what you're going through. We've gone through the same things! We go back a long way, Jerry, a long way.

LANGFORD

All I'm asking is six weeks. You sit in for me. I get a little breather. I need it. I can't handle it all. It's too much. What do you say?

A YOUNG GIRL approaches Pupkin with her autograph book.

YOUNG GIRL

'To Dolores,' please...

CAMERA MOVES INTO EXTREME CLOSEUP OF letters as Pupkin writes "To Dolores, who senses greatness. Rupert Pupkin."

YOUNG GIRL

(reading it)

Thanks, Mr. Pupkin.

The Young Girl leaves.

PUPKIN

(turning to  
Hirschfield)

Jerry, what're you doing here --

(laughing)

C'mon, let's see --

Hirschfield turns the caricature so Pupkin and Langford can see it. It's a picture of the two of them, facing each other and smiling. Langford laughs.

PUPKIN

(laughing)

Perfect, Jerry -- just great.

(to Hirschfield)

You drew him bigger.

They laugh.

INT. PUPKIN'S ROOM - NIGHT

6

Only one area of the small room is visible in this scene. Pupkin, dressed as "earlier," converses with himself. He still has Langford's handkerchief.

LANGFORD: So when does your next film start?

PUPKIN: January 1st.

LANGFORD: How long does it shoot?

PUPKIN: Twelve weeks!

LANGFORD: You mean sixteen weeks!

PUPKIN: (laughing louder)  
Okay, sixteen weeks! Knowing you,  
you'd be shooting for twenty weeks!  
Twenty for you! Don't tell me!

LANGFORD: C'mon, Rube, see your way clear!

PUPKIN: All right, count on me for one month  
at least!

LANGFORD: Loosen up, will ya! Throw in another  
two -- make it six -- c'mon.

PUPKIN: You want my blood too! I'll give you  
blood. What is it -- eight pints of  
blood from your whole body -- I'll  
throw four pints and the one month.  
What more do you want?  
(quieter)  
No...but seriously, Jerry, you got  
to think of my situation...

INT. LANGFORD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

7

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 the 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.

Cont.

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.

MASHA  
 (voice over)  
 It's Masha, Jerry. Did you get my note? I left it on the backseat. Did you get it? I dropped it there before they pulled me out. Those guys hurt me, Jerry.  
 (pause)  
 Jerry?

LANGFORD  
 (icily)  
 Who gave you this number?

MASHA  
 (voice over)  
 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 good-bye to Jerry.

He returns to his dinner.

EXT. A STREET OFF BROADWAY - DAY 8

A cab pulls up in front of Gil's Steak 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. Then he enters.

INT. THE BAR-RESTAURANT - DAY 9

Pupkin goes to the near end of the empty bar.

PUPKIN  
 Miss!

Cont.

RITA, an attractive shopworn blonde in her late twenties, comes over.

PUPKIN

A beer please, Miss. Something imported.

RITA

Heineken's all right?

PUPKIN

Fine.

Rita serves him a Heineken's. She stares at him.

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 kids from our class have moved back.

RITA

What are you doing here?

Cont.

PUPKIN

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

He presents her with a single long-stemmed rose.

RITA

Ah, yes. Mr. Romance.

PUPKIN

Put an aspirin in the water.  
It lasts longer.

Rita puts the rose in a beer mug and drops in an Alka-Seltzer.

RITA

Nothing's gonna keep it alive in  
this place...Well, what are you  
up to these days, Rupert?

PUPKIN

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

RITA

Still going to movies all the time?

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, now, I guess...

RITA

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

PUPKIN

You're really looking wonderful,  
Rita.

RITA

Well, how are things with you,  
Rupert?

PUPKIN

Great! 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

Rupert! Jesus Christ.  
Rupert Pupkin!

PUPKIN

(smiling)

Yeah. Jesus Christ, Rupert Pupkin.  
The two of us are often confused.  
He's the one with the famous father.

Pupkin awaits a laugh but Rita just shakes her head. Pupkin  
looks around.

PUPKIN

You like this place?

RITA

Why, you got something better?

PUPKIN

Maybe...

Cont.

RITA

What?

PUPKIN

What are you doing tonight?

RITA

Tonight?

PUPKIN

What's so funny?

RITA

It only took you fifteen years!  
To ask me out!

PUPKIN

If I'd asked you then, would you  
have gone?

RITA

Oh, no.

PUPKIN

Why not?

RITA

I thought you were a jerk!

PUPKIN

See! But that guy isn't me  
anymore, Rita. I've changed.  
Everything's changed.

A bull-necked MAN in his forties enters, waves a brief hello to Rita as he passes and takes a seat at the far end of the bar. Rita smiles at him.

RITA

(to Pupkin)

Excuse me a minute, honey.

PUPKIN

I'm not honey! I'm Rupert.

Rita grabs a beer and takes it to the Man. They chat as Pupkin watches uneasily. Finally, Pupkin downs his beer and raises his glass.

PUPKIN

Miss!

The Man lets Rita go. She returns to Pupkin with another beer.

Cont.

PUPKIN

I'm in the mood to celebrate.  
I know this nice place. We can  
have dinner, talk over old times,  
get to know each other all over  
again.

RITA

And then?

PUPKIN

I'm free tomorrow night. We  
could go someplace else, talk  
some more, get to know each  
other even better.

RITA

How much better?

PUPKIN

What?

RITA

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

Pupkin still doesn't understand. Rita spells it out.

RITA

Before we start talking about  
that job...

PUPKIN

I'm not talking about any job.

RITA

I thought you said you had  
something better.

PUPKIN

Oh. You'll see. Right now, I'm  
asking you out. How about it?

RITA

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

PUPKIN

Busy?

RITA

Yeah. Busy. B-U-S-Y.

PUPKIN

But this is the biggest night  
of my life.

RITA

Sorry. I've already got a date.

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

MAN

Rita!

Rita goes to the Man, pours him a beer and resumes their chat. Pupkin watches uneasily, then downs his beer and raises his glass.

PUPKIN

Miss! Miss!

Rita returns to him.

PUPKIN

Is that your date?

RITA

Maybe.

PUPKIN

What do you want to go out with him for?

RITA

He's a 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.

Rita leaves Pupkin and returns to the Man. They resume chatting. Pupkin sits for a moment, then heads slowly for the john.

INT. THE JOHN - NIGHT

10

Pupkin enters and goes to one of two urinals. A beat later, the Man enters and goes to the other. They both stare straight ahead. Pupkin steals a glance at the Man's face, then turns eyes straight as the Man turns to glance at him. When the Man resumes staring straight ahead, Pupkin steals a look at his penis. A beat later, the Man quickly sizes up Pupkin's penis.

INT. THE BAR - NIGHT

11

Pupkin and, a moment later, the Man, return from the john and resume their seats. A Third Man is now seated midway between them.

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!

Pupkin watches Rita pour the Man another beer. After a few moments, Pupkin downs his own beer and again raises his glass.

PUPKIN

Miss! Miss!

The Man says something to Rita who hands him a bottle of beer. The Man slides the bottle down the bar toward Pupkin. As it reaches the middle, the Third Man raises his glass just as the bottle passes under his hand. The bottle stops just in front of Pupkin who slides it back with equal force. Only this time the Third Man is putting his glass down. The collision creates a mess. Pupkin shrugs an apology as Rita starts cleaning it up.

RITA

(to Third Man)

I'll get you another one.

As Rita does so, the Man approaches Pupkin, leans on him and wraps a familiar "paw" around his shoulder.

Cont.

MAN

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... Nobody likes a wise guy.

PUPKIN

What about Bob Hope?

The Man restrains himself and returns to his seat where Rita awaits him. Pupkin downs his beer and raises his glass.

PUPKIN

Miss! Miss!

Rita is about to return but the Man stays her and approaches Pupkin instead, a bottle in hand. He pours half of it into Pupkin's pocket and slams the bottle hard on the counter, then marches back to Rita.

Pupkin again bats down his beer as the Man and Rita watch him, expecting him to call for another. But Pupkin just sits there, so Rita and the Man resume talking, occasionally glancing Pupkin's way. But Pupkin just sits there, until Rita and the Man have forgotten him. Then, he seemingly loses his balance and falls to the floor like a stone. Rita and the Man wait for him to move but he lies motionless. Rita hurries off toward the kitchen while the Man walks over to the inert Pupkin and prods him cruelly with his foot.

MAN

Come on, stupid. Wake up so I can kick your ass outta here.

The Man looks to the kitchen, expecting Rita. Pupkin opens one eye, grabs a free chair, rises and bangs the Man smartly over the head. The Man falls, out cold. Pupkin gets to his feet quickly and brushes off his suit, which is dark gray, like the Man's. Pupkin stands above him, his back to Rita as she returns from the kitchen in the company of the beefy owner.

RITA

(to owner)

He was making trouble one minute. Next minute, he's on the floor.

Pupkin turns as Rita approaches. She's too startled by the turnaround to speak. The owner lifts the Man to his feet and sweet-talks him out of the bar. Rita turns to Pupkin.

RITA

Okay, Tarzan. I get off at nine.

INT. A CHINESE RESTAURANT - UPPER WEST SIDE -  
NIGHT

12

Formica tables. Painfully plain decor. Rita and Pupkin face each other in a booth. A WAITER sets dishes down. Rita hands him an empty glass.

RITA

Another one, Chan...So all this time you've been thinking of me, huh?

PUPKIN

I guess so.

Pupkin smiles as he gazes at her, which crowds her.

RITA

What kind of things were you thinking?

Pupkin drops his gaze.

RITA

Oh, he! Those kinds of things!

PUPKIN

Rita, that's not...

RITA

Rupert Pupkin is an unclean person!!

PUPKIN

Come on, Rita.

RITA

Oh, come on, yourself. Relax. Have a little fun. I'm off duty.

The Waiter arrives with Rita's drink, chopsticks and a beer for Pupkin.

PUPKIN

It's only this is a very important night to me, Rita.

RITA

Your nose wriggles.

PUPKIN

Really.

Cont.

RITA  
Yeah. When you talk.

Pupkin serves Rita.

RITA  
It always looks like they put  
worms in this stuff.

PUPKIN  
Just taste.

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.

(pause)

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

She takes a long drink. They eat. Pupkin uses chopsticks.

PUPKIN  
I'd look at you and wonder what  
it felt like, being that normal  
and in the right crowd, with  
good marks and respect and...

RITA  
Ah, for Chrissakes, Rupert, I  
woke up every day sick,  
understand! I threw up all the  
time, I was so tense...

PUPKIN  
You never told me that.

They eat.

RITA  
So you've been devoted to me?

PUPKIN  
I used to go to the Garden.

Cont.

RITA

Oh, the Follies! I didn't know you liked skating, Rupert! How did you know which chicken was me?

(pause)

I thought it would be 'Rita Keane's Ice Follies.' And there I was, eighteen months in the chorus of 'Henny Penny!'

PUPKIN

You just didn't get the breaks. You didn't hang on long enough.

RITA

Didn't get the breaks...no great loss...

PUPKIN

It was to me.

A beat.

RITA

Boy, you really must have been carrying a torch.

(drinks)

What did you think when I got married? You knew I got married?

PUPKIN

I knew it wouldn't last. Peter Drysdale! Really, Rita!

RITA

You think I should've married you, right? You do, don't you ...You have insurance? Life insurance?

PUPKIN

My talent is my insurance.

RITA

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

Co

Rita raises her glass to the Waiter who is standing nearby. As she does, a nice-looking MAN sitting right behind Pupkin raises his glass to her, as a kind of toast. Rita smiles briefly and her eyes return to Pupkin. The Waiter takes the glass. Throughout the rest of the scene, a subtle flirtation continues between Rita and the Man.

PUPKIN

Are you seeing anyone?

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

Yeah, I see people. I go out with who I want, when I want. I'm no nun, Rupert. I see a lot of guys.

PUPKIN

Then there's no one special.

RITA

You mean am I going steady! Look at me, Rupert. I'm thirty-two years old.

Pupkin smiles.

RITA

Okay. I'm thirty-four.

PUPKIN

What about that guy tonight? The guy in the bar. Why him?

RITA

Rudy? Rudy runs the garage around the corner. He likes to show me a good time.

Cont.

Pupkin waits.

RITA

Look, Rupert, what do you think they pay me in that dump, huh? One-fifteen a week, and they're not the world's greatest tippers. Somebody has to take care of me.

PUPKIN

Who's your favorite movie star?

The Waiter arrives with Rita's drink.

RITA

You are, Rupert. Especially your nose.

PUPKIN

Just tell me. Who do you like?

RITA

Is this some kind of a game? Are you going to tell me something about my character? Read my palm or what?

PUPKIN

You'll see.

Rita pauses, thinks.

PUPKIN

Everybody's got a favorite movie star. C'mon.

RITA

Okay. Okay. Let's see.

(pause)

Marilyn Monroe.

Pupkin pulls out his leather-bound "Talent Register."

RITA

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

Pupkin expertly flips to a middle page in the book. His finger pointing under a name, he turns the book to Rita.

RITA

That's her name. All right. 'Marilyn Monroe.' I was right. Do I get a prize, Rupert?

PUPKIN

She signed this for me when she was in town doing publicity on her last movie, 'The Misfits.'

Rita starts flipping through the book.

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

(checking the book)  
Burt Reynolds.

RITA

Oh, yeah. The guy with no clothes. And this?

PUPKIN

Mel Brooks. He's always 'on,' funny. Not every comedian is.

RITA

And this?

PUPKIN

Carol Burnett...

RITA

No kidding. How about this?

PUPKIN

Sid Caesar. Remarkable guy. That's Woody Allen. He's very nice. And Ernie Kovacs. He's dead. A great loss.

RITA

Some of these must be worth money.

PUPKIN

Like this one.

Pupkin flips to the back pages and shows Rita a name.

RITA  
(squinting)  
I can't make it out.

PUPKIN  
Try.

RITA  
I can't.

PUPKIN  
Roooooper...

RITA  
(squinting, focusing)  
Redford!

PUPKIN  
That's Robert Redford.

RITA  
It is?

PUPKIN  
No! It's...it's Rupert Pupkin.  
(tears out the  
page and hands  
it to her)  
Take care of it. In a few weeks,  
everyone's going to want one.

Rita looks at him. He's still the same.

PUPKIN  
That's what I've been trying to  
tell you. Things are truly  
breaking for me. Only a couple  
of hours ago, I was talking with  
Jerry Langford. That's right.  
The Jerry Langford. He gave me  
the go-ahead, Rita. Would you  
believe it? Don't tell anyone  
yet but you're looking at the new  
King of Comedy.

Rita looks at the Man who is mimicking Pupkin "when already?"  
She laughs, in spite of herself.

PUPKIN  
Why not me, Rita? A guy can  
always get what he wants if he's  
willing to pay the price. All it  
takes is a little talent and a  
lot of sacrifice and the right  
break for me. Is that so funny?  
Crazier things have happened.

RITA

You're right.

As Pupkin continues speaking, Rita sees the Man mimicking Pupkin and exaggerating, pointing to his watch, "c'mon!"

PUPKIN

You don't understand what a shot on Langford means. That's coast to coast, national TV, a bigger audience than the greatest comedians used to play to in a whole lifetime. A shot like that means a free ticket on the comedy circuit...a comedy special of my own...and all that leads in one direction, Rita ...Hollywood. That's when we really start living. A beach house in Malibu, right on the ocean. You'll get a beautiful tan. We'd keep a suite at the Sherry -- that's the only place to stay when you're big -- way up, so we can look down on everybody else and yell --

(cupping his mouth)

'Tough luck, suckers!' C'mon, Rita, what do you say?

RITA

It sounds wonderful, Rupert.

(checks watch)

It's getting late, I'm a working girl. You know what I mean?

PUPKIN

I don't get it, Rita. I thought you wanted something better... better than...that. I'm offering you a way out. Every King needs a Queen, Rita. I want you to be mine. Say yes.

RITA

You really want to help me out? You see this.

(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.

WAITER

Telephone for you, Miss.

RITA

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

PUPKIN

No.

RITA

What the hell's going on?

Rita goes to adjacent phone booths in back of the restaurant.

INT. THE PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

13

RITA

Hello?

MAN

(voice over)

Hi.

RITA

Who is this?

MAN

(voice over)

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

RITA

Where are you?

The Man taps on his booth. Rita turns and finds herself staring at the Man. She smiles.

INT. THE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

14

Pupkin at the table opens fortune cookies. First one reads: "WISDOM IS THE PROVINCE OF THE HEART." Second one reads: "SOME DINOSAURS WERE NO BIGGER THAN A CHICKEN." He opens a third when Rita arrives.

RITA

You know who that was -- the bar. I have to go back to work.

PUPKIN

(reading, holding fortune)

'Blessed are those who reach the turning in the road.'

RITA

My backup's got sick. It happens all the time.

PUPKIN

It's your fortune, Rita. Just what I was telling you. You're the one at the turning in the road.

RITA

I had a real nice dinner, Rupert.

She checks herself in the mirror -- lipstick?

PUPKIN

That was that Rudy on the phone, wasn't it?

RITA

Oh, c'mon, Rupert. Let's see a smile.

PUPKIN

Why don't we finish off the night at the bar where we started it?

RITA

After the stunt you pulled there?

PUPKIN

Well, I could at least drop you off!

RITA

(leaving)

No, really, I can manage.

PUPKIN

(following)

But I insist.

RITA

Look, Rupert, it's been a lot of fun, really -- but, I'm in a hurry. I'll see you sometime, huh?

PUPKIN

But, Rita...

She is gone. Pupkin hurriedly pays cashier.

EXT. RESTAURANT - STREET - NIGHT

15

Pupkin streaks out the door and looks up the street. CAMERA PANS. Then, down the street. CAMERA PANS. Halfway down, Rita and the Man are walking, glancing back occasionally to see if he's around. CAMERA DOLLIES as Pupkin follows, darting in and out of parked cars. They go into a "brownstone" (?). Pupkin follows. He enters frame and exits into "brownstone."

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

16

It is an extremely well-furnished studio apartment with all the requirements of a contemporary bachelor pad -- rug, stereo system, recessed lighting, queen-sized bed. Rita looks about uneasily.

MAN

Welcome to the pleasure dome.

RITA

You don't kid around, do you?

MAN

I do all right. What's your libation?

RITA

Huh?

MAN

Your potion. Your drink.

RITA

Bourbon and soda. Make it light.

The Man goes to his little bar and fixes strong drinks.

MAN

You from the South?

RITA

Me?

MAN

That's a southern drink, bourbon, isn't it?

RITA

South Jersey.

MAN

I specialize in accents, tastes, social predilections. A person's general social milieu. Understanding that can give you a leg up.

(handing her drink)

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

RITA

I'm Mary.

MAN

Pleased to meet you, Mary.

(lifts his glass)

To our evening.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING FOYER - NIGHT

Pupkin tries the lobby door but it's locked. He turns to the intercom -- about sixteen apartments? -- and presses one of the buttons.

WOMAN

(voice over)

Yes?

PUPKIN

Rita?

WOMAN

(voice over)

Who?

PUPKIN

Rita Keane. I want to talk to her.

WOMAN

(voice over)

Rita Keane?

PUPKIN

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

WOMAN

(voice over)

There's no Rita here.

PUPKIN

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

WOMAN

(voice over)

You must have the wrong apartment.

PUPKIN

I'm sorry.

Pupkin pushes another button.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rita is seated on the couch. The Man is putting a record on the phonograph.

Cont.

MAN

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

RITA

Me. I fly for National.

MAN

Oh! You're the Mary I'm supposed to fly.

RITA

What's that smell?

MAN

Sandalwood incense. It seemed very you.

INT. THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

19

Pupkin yells into the intercom.

PUPKIN

I said I'm sorry!

The intercom clicks off. Pupkin pauses, then pushes another button.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

20

Rita and the Man are seated on the couch. As the Man talks, Rita notices a woman's shoe lying nearby.

MAN

Did you know that you have remarkable hair?

RITA

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

MAN

Now?

RITA

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

MAN

Why don't we make our own movie?

RITA

No. I don't think so.

MAN

Don't fight it, Mary. Give it a chance.

RITA

Let's stop playing games, okay. We're both grown-ups.

MAN

You have something against pleasure?

RITA

What I mean is we both know when something's not working, okay?

MAN

Shall I freshen up your drink?

Rita shakes her head.

MAN

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

INT. THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

21

Pupkin pushes another button and waits.

MAN

(voice over)

Yeah?

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

22

The Man has backed Rita up against the end of the couch.

MAN

I'm really a very sensitive person.

RITA  
C'mon. Get offa me.

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.

MAN  
Then it's me?

RITA  
I don't even know you.

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

The Man kisses Rita roughly.

RITA  
(pushing him away)  
Let's just write this off as a  
big mistake.

MAN  
Not until you tell me what's  
wrong with me.

RITA  
I just want to go home.

MAN  
(rubbing her  
breasts)  
These are nice.

RITA  
Please, I'm tired.

MAN  
What's wrong with me?

RITA  
You're a nice guy and I'm a nice  
girl and...

MAN  
I want to know! It's important  
to me. Now tell me!

Cont.

RITA

You don't want to know.

MAN

How can I do something about it  
if I don't know what it is?

RITA

(pauses)

How can I put it? It's like...  
like your fly's wide open and  
your tongue's hanging out of it.

MAN

You think that's funny? My wife  
died last year. Last year!

INT. THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

23

Pupkin, even more desperate, pushes another button.

OLD LADY

(voice over)

Que es, por favor?

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

24

The Man is strong-arming Rita (now frightened).

MAN

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

RITA

You're hurting me.

MAN

I'm only doing what you want.

RITA

Oh, please.

INT. THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

25

Pupkin, frantic, pushes another button.

INT. MAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

26

The Man has Rita pinned and is undoing her blouse.

MAN

Afterwards, you'll thank me.

The buzzer sounds with one, long blast. Rita takes advantage,  
grabs her bag and rushes out as the buzzer continues.

INT. THE ENTRANCEWAY - NIGHT

Pupkin still has his finger on the buzzer as Rita rushes out.

PUPKIN

Rita!

RITA

What do you want?!

EXT. DOORWAY STREET - NIGHT

PUPKIN

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

RITA

Just go home and leave me alone.

Pupkin takes off his jacket and puts it around Rita.

PUPKIN

(quietly)

Here. You'll need this. It's getting chilly.

RITA

I'm so stupid. Such a jerk.

PUPKIN

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

RITA

Not all the time.

PUPKIN

I once stood up straight on the backseat of a motorcycle.

EXT. DOORWAY - RITA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

They enter FRAME.

RITA

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

PUPKIN

That's okay, Rita. I wouldn't want to impose. I know I'm not always the easiest guy to be with. I can be a little intense sometimes.

RITA

What do you want, Rupert?

PUPKIN

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...Wait a minute. What if I set something up, just the three of us, you, me and Jerry -- that'd give you something to look forward to. We'll all go out to dinner some night or maybe out to his place on a weekend. You'll see. You'll like Jerry, Rita.

(pause)

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.

(gives Rita a  
gentle kiss on  
the forehead)

Now run along in.

Rita just stares at him.

PUPKIN

Go on.

Rita slowly goes in. She looks back. Pupkin is gone.

INT. PUPKIN'S ROOM - DAWN

30

Pupkin practices his call to Langford: i.e., "Hello, this is Rupert Pupkin. Is Jerry there?" "Jerry Langford, please. Rupert Pupkin calling." "I'm Rupert Pupkin. May I speak to Jerry Langford?" "Jerry Langford here. Rupe Pupkin calling." "Hi, Mr. Pupkin calling Jerry Langford." "Rupe Pupkin for Jerry, please."

INT. OFFICES OF A PRODUCTION COMPANY - DAY

31

Pupkin delivers a folder to a YOUNG RECEPTIONIST with a form to sign.

PUPKIN

You can sign anything...Jane Fonda,  
Goldie Hawn...

The young Receptionist signs. Pupkin reads it.

PUPKIN

Roberta Posner...Would you mind  
if I used your phone a second,  
Roberta?

RECEPTIONIST

Not too long. You need nine.

Pupkin pulls out a piece of paper and dials.

PUPKIN

May I speak to Jerry Langford, please? Thanks...Jerry Langford, please. Rupert Pupkin...Jerry knows. He asked me to call...I see. That's all right. I'm in a meeting myself. I'll call again.

RECEPTIONIST

That's not Jerry Langford, the...

PUPKIN

Thanks for your phone.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - DAY

32

Pupkin is on the phone in a booth. A few folders rest nearby.

PUPKIN

Jerry Langford, please...May I speak to Jerry Langford, please? ...Rupert Pupkin. I called earlier...I see. How long do you expect that will last? ...Oh, fine, I'm at...  
(reading the dial)  
...CH4-1482. I should be here another half-hour, forty-five minutes. Please be sure he gets my message. Thanks.

PAN OFF TO people.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - DAY

33

TIME CUT TO record store. PAN TO people waiting. WIDE SHOT. Music is blasting into the street.

TIME CUT TIGHTER as Pupkin tells angry person: "I'm waiting for a call!"

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - DAY

34

TIME CUT TO record store. PAN TO people waiting. WIDE SHOT. Music is blasting into the street.

TIME CUT TIGHTER as Pupkin "I'm waiting for call" to angry person.

TIME CUT TO people. Different music. PAN BACK TO Pupkin in booth, tie open, manila folders on floor. A LARGE MAN walks in. Pupkin pretends to speak on the phone. The Large Man leaves. Pupkin hangs up the phone. When he's sure the Large Man is gone, he takes out his pocket watch from his lapel and checks the time. He takes the folders and leaves.

INT. THE RECEPTION AREA OF THE JERRY LANGFORD SHOW OFFICES - DAY 35

Elevator doors open revealing neon logo of "Jerry." Pupkin steps out, opens glass doors and presents himself to the RECEPTIONIST.

RECEPTIONIST

Yes Sir?

PUPKIN

Mr. Langford, please.

RECEPTIONIST

Your name?

PUPKIN

Pupkin. Rupert Pupkin.

The Receptionist puts a call through. Pupkin observes the blowups of Langford talking with celebrities.

INT. A TELEVISION STUDIO - DAY (VIDEOTAPE) 36

Langford is seated at desk on stage.

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 grapefruits. The grocer looked at me and said, 'What are you going to do with all those?' So I told him:

(confidentially)

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

Langford and audience laugh heartily.

INT. THE RECEPTION AREA - DAY

RECEPTIONIST

(holding phone)

I'm sorry, Mr. Pumpkin, but Mr. Langford's secretary has no record of your appointment. Mr. Pumpkin?

PUPKIN

Pardon me?

RECEPTIONIST

We have no record of your appointment.

PUPKIN

Well, technically speaking, I don't have any official appointment. You see, Jerry asked me to call, personally, and when I couldn't get through...

RECEPTIONIST

(into phone)

He has no appointment.

A man enters and stands behind Pupkin, demanding attention. So the Receptionist passes Pupkin the phone and attends to the man.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Langford's secretary wants to know what this is in reference to.

PUPKIN

(taking the phone)

Hello?...Jerry and I discussed my being on the show last night and he told me to call...Sure.

(returning the phone)

I'm supposed to wait.

The man, a MR. GANGEMI, disappears into the inner offices. A beat later, CATHY LONG, trim, smart-looking, emerges.

CATHY LONG

I'm Cathy Long. May I help you?

PUPKIN

I'm sorry, but you are...?

Cont.

CATHY LONG

I'm Bert Thomas's assistant.

Pupkin still isn't clear.

CATHY LONG

He's our executive producer.

PUPKIN

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 personally. I'm here to follow up on that.

CATHY LONG

What do you do, Mr. Petkin?

PUPKIN

Stand-up comedy.

CATHY LONG

Fine. Are you working in the area?

PUPKIN

Actually, right now, I'm developing new material.

CATHY LONG

I see. Well, as soon as you're performing let us know and we'll send someone down.

PUPKIN

Jerry and I went over all this last night.

CATHY LONG

Does Jerry know your work?

PUPKIN

Yes. I don't think he does.

CATHY LONG

Well, could you get us a tape?

PUPKIN

Oh, sure. I've got plenty of tapes. Tapes are no problem.

Cont.

CATHY LONG

Fine. Why don't you get us a tape? We'll listen to it and get right back to you.

PUPKIN

I can see how Jerry might need that. This is great.

CATHY LONG

Now, if you'll excuse me...

PUPKIN

Sure. Sure. Thanks.

Cathy Long leaves. Pupkin looks to the Receptionist.

PUPKIN

This is great.

EXT. A HIGH-RISE ON UPPER BROADWAY - DAY

38

Pupkin emerges from the building. Masha confronts him.

MASHA

Last night, in the car, did he talk about me?

PUPKIN

No. We talked about me, as a matter of fact.

MASHA

He must have said something about me!

PUPKIN

He said nothing about you. Nothing.

MASHA

You must really love this!

PUPKIN

Well, if you hadn't made such a schmuck of yourself in the car last night...

MASHA

...Yeah. You'd never've had the chance to talk with him.

Cont.

PUPKIN

But I did talk to him...Please, Masha. I don't want to be cruel, but right now Jerry and I have a business relationship going... Understand? So maybe it would be better if I wasn't seen with you. Okay?

MASHA

Well, who the hell wants to be seen with you??!! Just give him this!

Masha thrusts a pink envelope, with Langford's name writ large on it in lipstick, into Pupkin's hands. He smells it and tries to return it to her.

MASHA

Just get it to him!

PUPKIN

Why me? You're always telling me how you used to 'break bread with him' and all that. You guys are old friends!

MASHA

Okay, Rupert. Guess we've got to sweeten the pie a little? Huh?

Masha pulls out crushed wads of bills -- over \$900 -- and stuffs them in Pupkin's pockets. Instinctively, he dives for those that fall. Passersby start gathering.

MASHA

When do you see him again?

Pupkin, embarrassed, tries to get away but Masha follows.

PUPKIN

A day. Two. I dunno. When he's heard my stuff.

MASHA

You owe me this, Rupert. You get it to him. If you don't, I'll know. Believe me. I'm everywhere. Everywhere!

Cont.

MASHA (Cont.)

(to onlookers)

What the hell are you looking at?  
Get outta here. Go back to your  
boring goddamn lives!

To Pupkin, now further down the block:

MASHA

AND DON'T YOU OPEN IT. IT'S  
PERSONAL!!

We HEAR Masha's VOICE OVER fading up as her letter is read.

EXT. A TIMES SQUARE MOTEL - "DIXIE MOTEL" - DAY 39

Pupkin enters. Masha voice over her letter.

INT. PUPKIN'S ROOM - DAY 40

He is reading the letter. CAMERA MOVES INTO EXTREME CLOSEUP OF  
letter. (ZIP TILTS.) Masha voice over:

Dear Tormentor!

I'm not apologizing for last night, not to you, Mr. Shut-Me-Out.  
I was only trying to get this to you! That's all. You've got  
no right to be angry! And you know it! (Promises, Promises.)

If you could have seen your face when you saw mine! Was my baby  
scared? Did Jerry suffer. Not like I have. (Promises,  
Promises.) Two years is a long time between meetings, Jerry.  
But I've been away, playing the solitary room at  
Westhaven "rest home." Some rest!!

Did you know God, dog, fag and gland all have something in  
common? They come from L-A-N-G-F-O-R-D. Interesting, no? You  
all over?

This is to announce the End of Phase I of the Great Romance.  
Start Phase II: The Time Limit. Your obligations are three  
years overdue, Sir. This offers you one final chance before  
DRASTIC ACTION.

Someone has a fortieth birthday coming up. A certain person is  
knitting him a sweater (sample enclosed!) because the world is a  
cold place (which she will make much warmer if he stops playing  
Mr. Aloof!) Present yourself Chez Moi, Apt. 4C, 64 East 84th St.  
for a SLEEVE MEASUREMENT. (Promises, Promises.) Keys enclosed.

I'VE REACHED THE END OF MY ROPE, JERRY. END OF MY ROPE.  
PROMISES, PROMISES.

Love n stuff,  
M.

Cont.

P.S. I woke up this A.M. thinking the pain that lives in my tummy was finally gone. Delivered. Like a baby, our baby. But, by breakfast, it was back. Only you can deliver it, Jerry. Help me! For God's sake!

P.P.S. I tell my shrink about us. He thinks I have a very rich fantasy life!!!! Ha! Ha! Ha! Joke's on him and Mommy and Daddy who pay him to listen, so they won't have to.

P.P.P.S. I'm not crazy. Only over you, lover boy! (Promises, Promises.)

Pupkin finishes the letter and carefully files it away. He then moves to a table in his neat, plainly furnished room. A small cassette recorder and a large tape recorder sit on the table. He speaks into the mike of the larger recorder.

PUPKIN

Testing. Testing. Testing.

We hear a sound montage: replay of "testing, testing" -- scraps of his voice, laughter, applause, a fast-forward squeal, a scrap of music. At the same time, CAMERA EXPLORES neatly made collages on the walls: of comedians like Kovacs, Keaton, Chaplin, Ceasar, Woody Allen; celebrity figures like Muhammed Ali, Barbara Walters, Mick Jagger, Jackie Kennedy. (book pg. 98); a martyr section for the fallen Kennedy's, King, James Dean; and a talk-show collage, Snyder, Cavett, Griffen, Douglas and Davidson orbiting about Jerry Langford. Bookshelves are a complete library of comedy. Other shelves hold taped TV monologues, i.e., "LANGFORD MONOLOGUES, 6/13/72 to 9/9/81.

Pupkin 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 on to Jerry. I appreciate it more than you know.

(stops tape, reflects,  
then starts it again)

Now, Jerry, before I begin, I just want to thank you for listening to this material and for the opportunity 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

Cont.

PUPKIN (Cont.)

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. We hear the Jerry Langford theme song and the voice of BERT CANTER, the announcer.

BERT CANTER

(voice over)

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

Pupkin deftly stops the cassette and substitutes his voice.

PUPKIN

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

Pupkin rapidly presses fast-forward on the cassette, then the "play" button. We hear thundering applause. Pupkin lets it run then stops it. 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

Cont.

PUPKIN (Cont.)

the entertainment business. After all, the verdict is always in your hands. But I think that 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!!!'

Again, another enormous burst of applause. Pupkin lets it run. He stands up, faces a wall of his room, holding the microphone. We SEE that the wall is covered by a huge blowup of an audience laughing and applauding.

The applause fades away. Then:

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

PUPKIN

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

INT. THE RECEPTION AREA OF THE LANGFORD SHOW - DAY 41

Pupkin is pacing. He clutches a small flat box, with the words "ATTN. JERRY LANGFORD" written on top in large print. Cathy Long emerges from one of the back corridors.

PUPKIN

(handling her tape)  
Jerry asked for this.

CATHY LONG

Oh yes...

PUPKIN

I'm Pupkin. Rupert Pupkin.

CATHY LONG

Oh, yes. It's been some day.

Pause.

PUPKIN

The demo's inside.

CATHY LONG

We appreciate this. We'll listen to it just as soon as we can and get right back to you.

PUPKIN

Whenever Jerry finds a moment.

CATHY LONG

Fine.

PUPKIN

...Which would be when?

CATHY LONG

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

PUPKIN

I'll just wait here in case Jerry finds a minute.

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

All right. Tell you what. Why don't you try us tomorrow afternoon for sure. Okay?

PUPKIN

Tomorrow?...Right. That's very kind of you, Miss Long. Thanks.

As Cathy Long goes, Pupkin turns to a wall blowup of Langford.

INT. LANGFORD'S OFFICE - FANTASY STYLE RE "PROD. DESIGNER" - DAY 42

Langford, seated behind his desk, has Pupkin's tape.

LANGFORD

There's this public service ad I saw on a bus once, a saying. 'At least once in his life,' it said, 'every man is a genius.' But, with you, Rube...

(holding up tape)

...it's more than once. It's all the time! You've got it. You're stuck with it. You couldn't get rid of it if you wanted to...And it'll always be there!

PUPKIN

You think so, Jerry?

LANGFORD

Do I think so? I envy you! I hate you!

Cont.

Leaping up, Langford playfully assaults Pupkin who laughs.

PUPKIN

C'mon, Jerry...Cut it out...

LANGFORD

Look. I know there's no 'formula' for something like this.

(brandishes the  
tape)

It comes from...

(gesture says:  
"God knows where")

...But tell me, Rube, how do you do it? I'm not looking to use the material. It's yours. Just tell me: how do you do it...and do it...and keep on doing it???

PUPKIN

I don't know, Jerry. It just sort of comes. I think about my life, see, the worst parts mainly, the awful things, and try to see them in a funny light. That's all. It just kind of happens.

LANGFORD

But that's just it, Rube. It doesn't happen for me...not anymore.

(pause)

Look, maybe if you came out to my place this weekend, we could hash this out. I'll be having a few people...but we'll be able to get some work in.

PUPKIN

Sure, Jerry. Mind if I bring someone?

LANGFORD

A girl, Rube?

PUPKIN

A very special girl, Jerry.

LANGFORD

I'd love to meet her.

EXT. HIGH-RISE OFFICE BUILDING - UPPER BROADWAY - DAY 43

Pupkin emerges, spots Masha and manages to sneak off unseen.

EXT. U.N. PLAZA - DAY

44

Langford, disguised in shades, cap and trench coat, emerges.

DOORMAN

Cab, Jerry?

LANGFORD

That's all right. Thanks.

We FOLLOW Langford as he walks. Some people don't notice. Others stare, a few comment and point to him. A cab pulls up.

DRIVER

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

LANGFORD

Sorry, I'm off duty.

DRIVER

Thanks, Jerry!

EXT. A MANHATTAN STREET - DAY

45

Waiting for the light, Langford stands next to a fiftyish COUPLE.

WOMAN

Sam. Sam! It's Jerry!!

SAM

Hi ya, Jerry.

WOMAN

You know something, Jerry? I undress in front of you every night and Sam doesn't mind at all.

SAM

I can't get anything going with her till 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.

Cont.

SAM

Thanks, Jerry.

Langford crosses the street and is stopped by another light. As he waits, a WOMAN on the phone next to him notices him.

WOMAN

You won't believe this, Morris but Jerry Langford is standing right next to me...I swear... wait...Jerry? Could you sign this for me? Please.

Langford signs the magazine she's handed him. The light changes.

WOMAN

Please. One more thing...for my niece.

LANGFORD

Lady, I'm late for work...  
(relenting)  
Okay...what's her name?

WOMAN

Doris. And if it could be 'with admiration...and affection.'

LANGFORD

There you go.

The light changes. Langford starts to go. The Woman grabs him.

WOMAN

Jerry...wait...please...if you could talk to my nephew, Morris. Here.

LANGFORD

(trying to pull free)  
Lady, I've missed two lights already.

WOMAN

He's in the hospital. Two seconds.

Langford breaks free and starts moving away.

WOMAN

One second. Just 'hello'...  
(yelling after him)  
Too busy to say hello to a sick boy?! You should get cancer, Jerry! Cancer!

EXT. BROADWAY - DAY

46

Langford spies Masha trailing him and walks quicker. Masha walks quicker. Langford jogs. Masha jogs. Langford sprints. So does Masha. Langford zips into his building. Masha arrives too late.

MASHA

Jerry! Goddamnit!!

She turns to see Pupkin, unaware of her, enter the building.

INT. RECEPTION AREA OF LANGFORD SHOW OFFICES - DAY 47

Pupkin enters and addresses the Receptionist.

RECEPTIONIST

Yes, Sir? Oh, hi.

PUPKIN

Hi. How are you?

RECEPTIONIST

Not bad.

PUPKIN

I'm fine.

RECEPTIONIST

Can I help you?

PUPKIN

Yes. I'd like to see Jerry, please.

RECEPTIONIST

You are...?

PUPKIN

Rupert Pupkin.

The Receptionist dials a number.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Popkin is here...That's right...

(to Pupkin)

She'll be with you in a minute.

PUPKIN

Who?

RECEPTIONIST

Miss Long.

Cont.

PUPKIN

But I wanted to see Jerry.

RECEPTIONIST

Miss Long will take care of you.

PUPKIN

All right.

Pupkin paces, smiles at the Receptionist. Cathy Long arrives with the tape.

CATHY LONG

Mr. Popkin?

PUPKIN

How are you today?

CATHY LONG

Fine, Mr. Popkin. Thank you for your tape. We listened to it with great interest. And, frankly, Mr. Popkin, we see a lot of good things in what you're doing.

PUPKIN

I'm glad. I'm glad.

CATHY LONG

We feel you have good potential. Very good potential. That's why I'll be honest with you, Mr. Popkin...

PUPKIN

That's the best way...

CATHY LONG

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

PUPKIN

Not ready...

CATHY LONG

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

PUPKIN

Right for Jerry. Sure.

CATHY LONG

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

Cont.

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 away. Thanks. Just tell me the ones you think should go. That would be a great help. This is great. Which ones?

CATHY LONG

Well, it's not just that, Mr. Popkin. 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

Nothing to talk about. 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 your friends...But let's be honest...we feel that you should keep developing your act. Test it in live situations. You'd be surprised how valuable that can be. There are a number of clubs in the city you can try. Once you play one of those, get in touch with us again and we'll send someone down to check you out. I promise you.

Cont.

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: Jerry trusts us. He 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. Popkin. 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

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

Cathy Long turns to go.

PUPKIN

Miss Long? When are you expecting Jerry in?

CATHY LONG

Not until late this afternoon. Now, if you'll excuse me...

PUPKIN

Sure.

Cont.

CATHY LONG

We really do thank you for stopping up. And we mean that about calling us when you're playing in town.

PUPKIN

Thank you.

Cathy Long leaves. Pupkin takes a seat in the reception area. He smiles at the Receptionist. The Receptionist drops her eyes. Cathy Long passes by the entranceway and glances at Pupkin, then at the Receptionist.

RECEPTIONIST

Is there anyone else you would like to see?

PUPKIN

That's all right. I'm happy just waiting.

A few beats pass in silence.

RECEPTIONIST

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

PUPKIN

I understand.

Pupkin remains seated. 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 comes out and approaches Pupkin.

OFFICIAL

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

WIRTZ puts his arm on Pupkin's shoulder and leads him out the door and to the elevator.

WIRTZ (OFFICIAL)

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

Cont.

PUPKIN

Sure. Sure.

WIRTZ

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

They have reached the elevator and Wirtz pushes the button.

PUPKIN

You want me to leave the building.

WIRTZ

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

The elevator arrives. Pupkin gets in.

WIRTZ

Have a good day.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE LANGFORD BUILDING - DAY 48

Pupkin comes out and positions himself outside the door, waiting for Langford. Masha sees him.

MASHA

Well, did you give it to him?

PUPKIN

Huh?

MASHA

Did you get my letter to him?

PUPKIN

He's not in there.

MASHA

Okay. Now that you're in, you can't be bothered! Give it back! I'll find another way to get it to him. C'mon.

Cont.

PUPKIN

Look, I'm waiting for him right now.

MASHA

Give me the envelope, and the money.

PUPKIN

How could I give it to him if he wasn't there?

MASHA

I saw him go in myself!

PUPKIN

Who?

MASHA

Jerry!

PUPKIN

Well, then he went out again, because they assured me...

MASHA

That's what they always say! You chump!

Pupkin rushes back in.

INT. RECEPTION AREA OF THE JERRY LANGFORD SHOW OFFICES - DAY

49

PUPKIN

(to Receptionist)

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

This is gonna cost you your job, lady. Now I'm telling you for the last time...

The Receptionist starts making a call inside. Pupkin goes to the inner corridors. He peers into offices in corridors. The place is a gigantic maze. Office Personnel pass by him. wanders desperately, lost. He spots Wirtz and a pair of security guards. Pupkin peers into offices quickly as he flees. The men catch up to Pupkin and, after a brief chase, subdue him. They drag him out past the eyes of the Office Personnel.

PUPKIN

Jerry! Jerry!  
 (to Wirtz)  
 You're going to have a hell of a  
 lot of explaining to do! Jerry!

WIRTZ

You had your warning, Mr. Krupkin.

PUPKIN

Jerry! Help me. Jerry! Jerry!!

EXT. LANGFORD BUILDING LOBBY AND EXIT - DAY

50

Pupkin is tossed out into the street.

WIRTZ

If we see your face again, Pupker,  
 we'll call the police.

PUPKIN

Start looking for a new job!

Masha comes straight up to Pupkin.

MASHA

Well?

PUPKIN

Huh?

MASHA

Does he have it?

PUPKIN

Don't worry. I'll get it to  
 him.

MASHA

Yeah? When? Flag Day????

PUPKIN

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

INT. SUBURBAN TRAIN - DAY

Pupkin and Rita are seated side by side in the sparsely populated train.

RITA

What are we going to do?

PUPKIN

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

RITA

What about me?

PUPKIN

You're with me.

RITA

Fine. But when you two are talking, what am I supposed to do?

PUPKIN

You can chat with the other guests.

RITA

What do I say?

PUPKIN

You're a wonderful person. You've got a lot to offer.

RITA

Yeah. I can fix the drinks.

(pause)

Look, why don't we just say I'm a model, okay?

PUPKIN

What for?

RITA

I don't know. For fun. You don't mind pretending a little, do you?

PUPKIN

If it makes you feel better.

It makes her feel better.

Cont.

RITA

This is really something! Too bad nobody'll believe it!

(pause)

After you guys are done working, what happens? We go out someplace or what?

PUPKIN

I'm sure Jerry's arranged something.

Another pause.

RITA

What do these people do for fun? Do they party or do freaky things or what?

PUPKIN

They sit around and talk, enjoy each other's company, like anybody else.

RITA

All night??

PUPKIN

Hey, these are Jerry's friends! When they get together, it's not just blah blah blah. They've got careers to talk about, plans, projects.

Rita is unconvinced.

PUPKIN

You like Jerry's show, right? Well, it's like that, only live!

RITA

Cocktail parties without drinks. That's what all those shows are. They put you to sleep.

CAMERA PANS FROM Pupkin's face TO window -- scenery.

EXT. BACKYARD PATIO OF LANGFORD'S NEOCLASSICAL MANSION - DAY

52

Rita, Pupkin and Langford at lunch. A gallery of show biz celebrities are seated at the long table.

Servants place strawberry tarts before each guest. Rita starts on hers and bites into something hard. It's a diamond engagement ring. Everyone smiles. Pupkin cleans the ring and places it on her fourth finger. Rita smiles lovingly. The company toasts the newly engaged couple.

INT. THE JERRY LANGFORD SHOW - NIGHT

Pupkin is Langford's only guest. Langford tells the audience:

LANGFORD

Rupert and I go way back, don't we, Rube?

PUPKIN

Actually...

(checking his watch)

...It's been about five minutes, hasn't it?

LANGFORD

(in mock astonishment)

Is that all?? With you, five minutes feels like a lifetime!

The audience laughs.

LANGFORD

(to the audience)

This man saved my life.

PUPKIN

No, Jerry, you saved mine.

The audience starts buzzing. Langford glances towards the wings as a MAN in his fifties emerges and sits next to Pupkin. Pupkin looks at Langford, then back to the Man.

MAN

Don't you remember me, Rupert?  
I'm Nathan Pearlman.

Pupkin studies him, then remembers. He turns to Langford.

PUPKIN

This is my high school principal, Jerry. Don't tell me he's a performer.

PEARLMAN (MAN)

Yes, Rupert. I'm a justice of the peace, now. (I perform weddings.)

The audience buzzes again. The orchestra strikes up "Here Comes The Bride" and, from the wings, Rita emerges on the arm of Bert Canter. She looks breathtaking. At last, Pupkin understands.

PUPKIN

Now??? Here???

LANGFORD

How many of you would like to see the King of Comedy marry his Queen?

The audience applauds. Langford leads a glowing Pupkin to the "chapel."

PUPKIN

You going to stand up for me, Jerry?

LANGFORD

You do stand-up for me, Rube.

Pupkin takes his place at Rita's side.

PEARLMAN

Dearly Beloved: When Rupert here was a student at Clifton High School, none of us -- myself, his teachers, his classmates -- dreamt he would amount to a hill of beans. Well, we were wrong. And you, Rupert, were right. That's why, tonight, with the nation watching, we'd like to apologize to you personally, to beg your forgiveness for all the wrongs we did you. And we'd like to thank you...every one of us...for the meaning you've given our lives. Please accept our warmest wishes, Rita and Rupert, for a long and successful reign together.

The audience applauds. Pupkin and Rita beam.

PEARLMAN

(to the camera)

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

EXT. LANGFORD'S HOUSE - DAY

54

Pupkin and Rita are at the front door. A cab drives away. An Indonesian HOUSEBOY opens the door. Pupkin walks right in. Rita follows.

INT. LANGFORD'S HOUSE - DAY

Pupkin hands the Houseboy the two suitcases.

PUPKIN

You must be Jonno. I'm  
Rupert Pupkin and this is  
Rita Keane. If you'll just let  
Jerry know we're here.

JONNO (HOUSEBOY)

Mr. Langford asked you to come?

PUPKIN

Oh no, we just thought we'd drop  
in uninvited, for the weekend.

(laughs)

We'll be in separate rooms. The  
blue bag is mine.

JONNO

But Mr. Langford's not here.

PUPKIN

Out playing golf, right?

JONNO

That's right.

PUPKIN

Maybe he'll finally break a  
hundred.

JONNO

Maybe it's better if you come  
back...

PUPKIN

That's all right. We don't mind  
waiting.

Pupkin walks into the living room. Jonno stares. Rita  
follows.

RITA

The table's only set for one.

PUPKIN

That's from breakfast.

INT. LANGFORD'S KITCHEN - DAY

Jonno is on the phone. A black lady COOK stands alongside.

JONNO

Let me talk to Jerry Langford  
please...I know he is...It's  
important.

INT. LANGFORD'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

57

It is a handsomely furnished room, done in old American antiques. A grand piano, pictures, bookshelves, stereo, discreet bar. ("Production Designer.") Rita and Pupkin walk in like strangers in paradise, in awe.

PUPKIN

How do you like it?

RITA

I could live here.

PUPKIN

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 artifacts.

RITA

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

PUPKIN

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

RITA

That Jonno character hadn't even heard of us!

PUPKIN

It probably slipped Jerry's mind. He has better things to think about than what he tell his houseboy.

RITA

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

Pause. Pupkin continues his investigation near the piano.

RITA

What do we do now?

Pupkin is looking at a picture on the wall. He comments on the other pictures as the CAMERA PANS OVER them. A slide show of Langford's life. First picture:

PUPKIN

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

Next picture: An eleven-year-old boy standing next to a puppet stage with a puppet.

PUPKIN

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

Next picture: A very young Langford at a telephone with a 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.

Next picture: Langford smiling at Jack Parr.

PUPKIN

And here's when he wrote for Jack Parr. He made \$90.23 a week, and look at him now.

Next picture: Langford and a group of women in a studio.

PUPKIN

And this is his morning show.

Next picture: Langford in a park with his two boys, 11 and 8.

PUPKIN

And his kids. He's divorced.

Rita, half-listening, picks up a small, enameled cigarette box.

RITA

Look at this. You know what these are worth if you can find them? Look at the work. I've got this thing about boxes.

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

INT. THE KITCHEN - DAY

Jonno is on the phone. The cook stands alongside.

JONNO

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

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Rita finishes fixing herself a drink, sips it and paces around..

RITA

Do we have to just sit here?

PUPKIN

He should be back pretty soon.

RITA

Let's get a little life into this place. It's like a funeral parlor.

(goes to stereo  
and sees rows  
of records)

This is more like it.

She pulls out a record and puts it on.

PUPKIN

Come on, Rita.

RITA

You should see yourself.

Sinatra sings "They Can't Take That Away From Me." Rita takes a slug of her drink, puts it down and goes to Pupkin.

RITA

How about a little spin, handsome?

PUPKIN

Here?

Rita starts dancing him around. He resists feebly.

RITA

Come on, Rupert. There's no law against having a little fun.

Pupkin gives in, dancing with her in '50s style, eyes closed, his dream girl in his arms. They dance silently to Sinatra.

Cont.

RITA

You never could dance, could you?

PUPKIN

How would you know?

RITA

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

PUPKIN

You were there with Tommy Lynch.

RITA

You didn't ask me.

PUPKIN

Oh no. Took me two years, but I asked you. And you went with him anyway.

INT. THE DINING ROOM - DAY

60

Jonno and the cook are staring, astonished, at the couple dancing.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

61

Still dancing, Pupkin gazes lovingly at Rita.

PUPKIN

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

RITA

(breaks away)

What's the rest of this place like?

PUPKIN

I'm sure it's very nice.

RITA

Let's find out.

(goes to the stairs, pausing at the first step)

You coming or not?

Rita bounds up the stairs.

PUPKIN

Rita!

Pupkin waits a beat, then runs after her, up the stairs.

INT. UPSTAIRS - DAY

62

PUPKIN

Rita?

No answer. Pupkin goes from one guest room to the next.

PUPKIN

Come on, Rita. This isn't funny.

INT. A BEDROOM - DAY

63

Pupkin looks in to find Rita lying on Langford's unmade bed.

PUPKIN

What are you doing, Rita???

RITA

All those millions of women out there who'd give a year of their lives to trade places with me!

PUPKIN

That's Jerry's bed! Come on, Rita.

RITA

Oh, come on yourself. Let's have a good time. Relax.

PUPKIN

I order you from that bed this instant!

With a giggle, Rita hops up and runs into the john.

INT. A LAVISH BATHROOM - DAY

64

RITA

Get a load of this. It's nicer than my whole apartment.

Pupkin, worried, enters as Rita examines her face in the mirror.

PUPKIN

Let's go, Rita.

RITA

Boy, I could use some sun...

PUPKIN

We shouldn't be here. This is Jerry's...

Cont.

RITA

(overlap)

Lay off, will you, Rupert.

Rita picks up a can of shave cream and squirts Pupkin's face.

PUPKIN

That wasn't funny, Rita.

RITA

How about something that smells nice?

She swings the cabinet open violently. Pills and bottles tumble into the sink, shattering. Pupkin gives Rita a look.

Rita laughs, cut short by the slam of the downstairs door.

INT. THE FOYER (FROM ABOVE?)

65

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?'

They look up when they hear whispers and scuffling at the top of the stairs. Pupkin comes jauntily down the stairs with Rita cautiously behind.

PUPKIN

Hi, Jerry. We were just  
freshening up.

(stops at base of  
stairs, waves  
Rita down)

Come on, Rita. No need to be  
shy.

(smiles  
conspiratorially  
at Langford.)

Rita, I'd like you to meet the  
Jerry Langford. Say hello to  
Jerry, Rita. Jerry, I'd like  
you to meet the Rita Keane.

Cont.

RITA  
(coming downstairs  
tentatively)  
Pleased to meet you.

Langford nods imperceptibly, his face tense, his eyes alert. Rita looks to Pupkin who walks blithely past Langford into the living room, towards the bar.

PUPKIN  
What's your pleasure?

Jonno and the Cook follow slowly. Pupkin flashes Langford an apologetic smile, concerning the small mess at the bar.

PUPKIN  
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 in  
my bag.  
(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

You are.

PUPKIN

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

Rita slowly backs away from Pupkin.

LANGFORD

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

PUPKIN

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.

PUPKIN

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

Let's not. At this point.

PUPKIN

Sure, Jerry. Whatever you say, you're the boss.

LANGFORD

Look, if there's something to be signed, let's get it over with.

PUPKIN

(strained kidding)

You want me to sign my autograph in your house??!!

LANGFORD

I have a lot of work to get to.  
(to Jonno)  
How did they get here?

Cont.

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

Well, maybe a...

RITA

What 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...please -- c'mon...

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. Is that plain enough!

Cont.

Rita deftly pockets the enamel box.

PUPKIN

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

RITA

Oh for Chrissakes, Rupert, don't be such a dope, open your eyes. The man is telling us to go.

PUPKIN

Tell her she's wrong, Jerry!

RITA

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

PUPKIN

Rita!

RITA

If there's any way I can make this up to you. I'm sorry about all this...

PUPKIN

She's nothing, Jerry. She's just some girl who works in a bar. Don't let her spoil things.

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

Look, if you don't leave I'm gonna call the police.

(realizes he is  
being hard, stops  
for a moment)

It's just that I have my own life, that's all. Understand?

Cont.

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

(quietly)

Jonno, call the police.

There is a long pause as the truth finally sinks in.

PUPKIN

Okay, Jerry, okay. You don't have to do that. We'll leave... we'll leave... 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

Come on, Rupert.

PUPKIN

(to Rita)

Shut up!

(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 people like you or anybody. That's where I made my mistake. I can see that now.

(takes his suitcases)

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

EXT. LANGFORD'S FRONT DOOR - DAY (OR ON TRAIN --  
"PROD. DESIGNER")

66

Pupkin and Rita leave. She casts Langford an apologetic glance as she goes. The door slams behind them.

Cont.

RITA  
 Jesus Christ, Rupert...What the  
 hell...What did you do...

PUPKIN  
 Shut up, Rita. I'm thinking.

INT. A NEW MERCEDES BENZ - DAY

67

Masha sits at the wheel. Pupkin sits next to her.

MASHA  
 My parents are going to be  
 furious!

Pupkin pulls a toy revolver from his jacket pocket.

MASHA  
 It looks real.

PUPKIN  
 That's the whole point.

A few beats pass.

MASHA  
 How much longer?

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?!?

MASHA  
 No.

PUPKIN  
 You sure?

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

PUPKIN  
 What do you mean?

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

PUPKIN

Keep watching.

Pupkin closes his eyes and rests for a moment.

MASHA

That's him.

Pupkin's eyes snap open. We SEE Langford, walking west and crossing south.

EXT. 55TH STREET AND MADISON AVENUE - DAY

68

Langford is walking. The Mercedes prowls a quarter block behind.

INT. THE MERCEDES - DAY

69

MASHA

What about here?

PUPKIN

Too busy. Keep going.

EXT. FURTHER DOWN THE STREET - DAY

70

Langford continues walking.

INT. MERCEDES - DAY

71

PUPKIN

Go past him and stop.

EXT. SAME STREET - REVERSE WIDE SHOT - LANGFORD  
- DAY

72

He is walking, his back to us. The Mercedes passes him. Pupkin suddenly appears in the FRAME side by side with Langford. They stop. Pupkin brushes off Langford's collar. Pupkin talks to him. We don't hear what they say. Tension. They start walking and get into the Mercedes. Pupkin jabs Langford in the ribs with the gun.

PUPKIN

Get in!

LANGFORD

Look, this is...(continue improvisation)

PUPKIN

Just shut up and get in.

INT. THE MERCEDES - DAY

73

Langford about to get in. Freezes. Shocked.

INT. THE MERCEDES - DAY

REVERSE OVER Langford TO Masha.

MASHA

Hi, Jerry.

They get in.

EXT. A TOWNHOUSE IN THE EAST EIGHTIES - DAY

Langford gets out of the Mercedes and follows Masha into the townhouse. Pupkin walks behind.

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - GROUND FLOOR - DAY

They walk into a WIDE SHOT SHOWING an elegant black-and-white checkered marble floor, a winding staircase and a large chandelier. They go up the stairs.

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.

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - LARGE ROOM (3RD FLOOR?)  
- DAY

It is furnished lavishly. Masha's imprint is in the general chaos, and the picture of Langford predominantly positioned on the bureau. There is a bed with an ornate brass frame at the foot. Langford stares at Masha and Pupkin. Pupkin trains the gun on Langford. Langford is 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 just have to kill you -- or Masha will. She knows how to use this too.

LANGFORD

You realize what you're doing?

PUPKIN

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

Cont.

Pupkin motions to the phone.

PUPKIN  
(to Langford)  
Sit down.

Langford docilely sits by the phone.

PUPKIN  
Now, you're going to call  
your office.

LANGFORD  
What?

PUPKIN  
Pick up the phone.

INT. A CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

78

Bert Thomas sits at the table with several PEOPLE, including  
Cathy Long. Coffee, memos, lists and papers are on the table.

A SECRETARY enters.

SECRETARY  
It's Mr. Langford. He says it's  
urgent.

THOMAS  
Yeah? Well, tell him I'll call  
back.  
(to the others)  
It's that Martino kid, the  
impressionist.

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

79

Langford with phone, Pupkin holds the gun. Masha looks on.

PUPKIN  
Then try again!

INT. BERT THOMAS' OFFICE - DAY

80

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 changes.

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

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

LANGFORD

Helen Keller.

PUPKIN

No tricks, Jerry!

Pupkin holds up the first of a series of homemade cue cards. It reads I HAVE A GUN AT MY HEAD. In fact, Masha is holding it there.

LANGFORD

'I have a gun at my head.'

He continues reading as Pupkin flips the cards.

LANGFORD

'If a man who identifies himself as...

(pauses for card to change)

...'The King...

(single card, pause again)

...'is not allowed to be the first guest on tonight's show... you'll never see me...

(pause)

...'ALIVE...again.'

INT. BERT THOMAS' OFFICE - DAY

THOMAS

Don't do anything, Jerry. Stay right there. Tell him we'll do anything he wants. Are you okay? Look, tell him to call us at five o'clock sharp. Give him my private number. We'll let him know what to do. And don't be a hero!

Thomas puts down the phone. His Secretary enters with some letters, deposits them on his desk. Thomas stops her.

THOMAS

Get me Warren on the phone. And get me Crockett's office. Fast and quiet.

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - 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. Pupkin still trains his pistol on Langford.

MASHA  
 (to Pupkin)  
 What do you think?

PUPKIN  
 Looks fine.

MASHA  
 (to Langford)  
 You'll like it, hon. I had to  
 guess on the sleeves.  
 (to Pupkin)  
 He gets to keep it, doesn't he?

PUPKIN  
 Sure, if he isn't dead.

INT. BERT THOMAS' OFFICE - DAY

84

Thomas is on the phone.

THOMAS  
 I know he's in a meeting and I  
 don't care. I've got to talk to  
 him!...No, he can not call me  
 back. This is an emergency...  
 NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

85

Langford is seated on a chair whose back is pressed up against  
 the foot of the bed. Masha trains the gun on Langford now.  
 Pupkin is wearing a handsome blue suit, white shirt, a bow tie,  
 black shoes. He talks to Langford, his back turned to him.

PUPKIN  
 Right now, we're adversaries.  
 It's the way you wanted it. I'm  
 not the kind of guy who makes  
 friends easily. Now, I thought  
 I'd made one in you, I really did.  
 But you let me down, and that hurt  
 me. Friends do that sometimes, I  
 know that. I just want you to  
 know that I'm willing to forget --  
 'forgive and forget.' That's my  
 motto. When this is all over, I  
 hope we can pick up where we left  
 off. I really do. As far as I'm  
 concerned, Jerry, the door is still  
 open.

Cont.

PUPKIN (Cont.)

(pauses a moment,  
then turns to  
Langford)

Why didn't you listen to the tape when I asked you? If you'd only listened to it, none of this would have happened! You told me to call your office! You set me up!

LANGFORD

(with disarming charm)

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?

Masha listens nervously. She gestures to her gun.

MASHA

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

Pupkin sees she has lowered it practically to her side.

PUPKIN

(to Masha)

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

You're right...um...I was absolutely thoughtless. It's just that when you're doing a big show, it's hard to tell who's really on your side. I can see where you stand now. I was wrong. I apologize. Why don't we just shake hands and forget the whole thing?...I'm not gonna press charges...I understand...I know what it's like.

PUPKIN

That's easy to say, Jerry.

Cont.

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. Personally, I could use a good laugh. What do you say?

Langford rises with his hand extended toward Pupkin.

MASHA

(to Langford,  
sharply)

Sit down!

Langford looks to Pupkin.

MASHA

I said sit!

Langford reluctantly sits down.

PUPKIN

(to Masha)

What's the matter? You heard what he said.

MASHA

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?

MASHA

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

PUPKIN

Is that what happens, Jerry?

LANGFORD

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

PUPKIN

(to Masha)

He gives me his word.

Cont.

MASHA

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

PUPKIN

And what else, Jerry?

LANGFORD

Look, I don't know what else to  
say. You just gotta believe that  
I'm telling the truth. My word's  
good enough, isn't it?

Pupkin stares at Langford for a few beats.

PUPKIN

No, Jerry. It's not.  
(to Masha)  
Keep the gun up!

Pupkin goes to Langford with rolls of adhesive tape in 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.

PUPKIN

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

INT. WILSON CROCKETT'S OFFICE - DAY

86

WILSON CROCKETT, President of the Network, sits behind his  
desk, facing other NETWORK EXECUTIVES, Bert Thomas, Cathy Long,  
F.B.I. INSPECTOR FALLON, his assistant GIARDELLO, and six  
other Plainclothes F.B.I. Men. (will describe)

FALLON

Look, I tell you, the bureau is  
doing everything possible to  
locate Mr. Langford. Right now  
our men are out checking every  
crank and every...

AN EXECUTIVE

Do you have any leads!?

Cont.

FALLON

I don't know who they are anymore than you do. I do know they'll be stopped. Otherwise, what you're seeing here is just the beginning...

THOMAS

But what do we do? Do we put him on or what?

FALLON

You're with the show?

CROCKETT

That's Mr. Thomas. He produces the show.

FALLON

I'm only saying, Mr. Thomas, that we don't allow this to reach the public. When the kidnapers call in, you're going to promise them anything they want.

THOMAS

Then we put him on?

FALLON

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

(pause)

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

THOMAS

Okay, Inspector. What if he finishes his bit and you work him over...

FALLON

Question him, Mr. Thomas.

There is light laughter.

THOMAS

Okay, you question him and he still doesn't talk. Eleven-thirty comes and what do we do? Put him on the air or what?

FALLON

I would say no.

Cont.

THOMAS

Then they kill Jerry!

CROCKETT

Okay, Bert.

(to Fallon)

Thank you, Inspector. We appreciate your position and we'll do all we can to cooperate with you. 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.

FALLON

I understand but...

CROCKETT

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. We're talking about ten or fifteen minutes of talk show time against a man's life. There's no argument here.

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

87

We SEE Pupkin fixing his hair in the mirror, talking to Langford whom we don't see.

PUPKIN

Can you breathe? Both ways?  
In and out?

CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL Pupkin wrapping Langford's mouth shut, but we cannot see exactly what he is doing.

We PULL BACK FURTHER TO SEE Langford nodding. He is strapped to the bed, encased like a mummy, wrapped in tape from tip to toe, only his eyes and nose showing. Masha emerges from another room, stirring something.

PUPKIN

(to Masha)

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

(to Langford)

So long, Jerry. Wish me luck.

Pupkin leaves.

INT. BERT THOMAS' OFFICE - DAY

The phone rings. Bert Thomas' Secretary answers.

THOMAS' SECRETARY

Bert Thomas. Who's calling please?

(voice grows tense)

Yes, Mr. King.

INT. BERT THOMAS' DESK - DAY

Thomas at the phone, now bugged. Giardello, at a second phone, starts placing a call. Fallon stands next to Thomas. Cathy Long, Crockett and several other plainclothesmen are present.

FALLON

Keep him talking.

Thomas nods and picks up the phone.

THOMAS

Yes?...Yes, your majesty. We understand. Everything's been arranged. Now, if you'll just tell me a little about the nature of your material so we can...(improvisation)

EXT. UPPER EAST SIDE MANHATTAN STREET - DAY

Pupkin stands in a public phone booth.

PUPKIN

I'll tell you everything you need to know at the studio this evening, Mr. Thomas. I appreciate your cooperation. Good-bye.

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

Masha, setting the table for two, chatters on.

MASHA

I've got so much to tell you, Jerry, I don't know where to begin. Are you okay?  
(improvisation)

Langford mumbles incoherently.

Cont.

MASHA

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, do you? You  
don't think I'm self-destructive,  
do you? (improvisation)

Langford, mummified, mumbles and struggles a bit.

MASHA

I knew you wouldn't.

INT. CROCKETT'S OFFICE - DAY

92

Crockett is at his desk. Bert Thomas, Cathy Long and THREE  
other EXECUTIVES are present.

CROCKETT

Can Randall sub for Jerry?

THOMAS

It looks good. I told him Jerry's  
sick. That's what we're telling  
everyone.

CROCKETT

(to Cathy Long)

Let me see your list.

Cathy Long hands Crockett a blue piece of paper.

CROCKETT

Any one of these a writer?

THOMAS

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. I don't want to take  
any chances with Jerry.

Cont.

## FIRST EXECUTIVE

From a news point of view, we've got a responsibility to tell this story.

## CROCKETT

Exactly, Lou.

(pause)

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

## SECOND EXECUTIVE

Who's going to know he's a kidnapper? They'll think we've lost our minds.

## CROCKETT

They'll read about it, in the papers, next morning. And, believe me, that night, everyone will be watching Jerry's show, to hear him talk about what happened to him. If we want, we can put this King guy on rerun.

## THOMAS

What do you mean? Put him on twice?

## THIRD EXECUTIVE

What if he's unuseable?

## SECOND EXECUTIVE

And remember what Fallon said about...

## CROCKETT

Hold on.

(pause)

We can always edit the guy. And, as for a waive of these things, I just don't buy it. What're we talking about here? How many people are gonna be stupid enough, crazy enough to spend years in jail for a few minutes on television?

EXT. LANGFORD THEATER - LATE AFTERNOON

93

A sign reads "Tonight's Guest Host: Tony Randall." Ushers swing the doors open and a line of ticket holders file in.

INT. A BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR (BEHIND THE STAGE DOOR) 94

Four plainclothesmen are stationed behind the door. There is the usual backstage traffic.

EXT. BACKSTAGE DOOR - LATE AFTERNOON 95

The situation appears normal with the usual GUARD by the backstage door. Nearby, Two Young Men in colorless suits stand talking. MCCABE, a writer, his wife and her parents greet the Guard.

MCCABE

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 the list)

I don't see you here.

MCCABE

I'm on the show tonight.

GUARD

Not according to this.

MCCABE

Look. I was told to present myself here at quarter to six. May I pass, please?

GUARD

Strict orders tonight. I only admit authorized personnel.

MCCABE

This is absurd.  
(to the others)  
Stay right here.

McCabe rushes past Guard and opens backstage door. Guard follows.

GUARD

Stop him!

92  
INT. THE BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR - EVENING 96  
The Four Plainclothesmen jump McCabe and whisk him downstairs.  
EXT. THE THEATER - EVENING 97  
Pupkin arrives at the backstage door and, seeing no one, enters.  
INT. BASEMENT ROOM IN THE THEATER - EVENING 98  
McCabe has just been hustled before Fallon.

FALLON  
So you're the King.

INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING 99  
Pupkin, looking for a familiar face, approaches a CAMERAMAN.

PUPKIN  
Excuse me...I'm the King.

CAMERAMAN  
Is that right?

INT. THE BASEMENT ROOM - EVENING 100  
McCabe, held by the Guard and Plainclothesmen, faces Fallon.

FALLON  
Don't talk to me about tigers!  
(improvisation)

INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING 101  
Pupkin approaches the STAGE MANAGER.

PUPKIN  
I'm the King.

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

Cathy Long passes by, spots Pupkin and turns back.

CATHY LONG  
What are you doing here,  
Mr. Popkin?

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

102

Lights are dimmed. Two candles burn on the elegantly set dinner table. Masha stands before Langford, singing.

MASHA

'You're gonna love me  
Like no one's loved me  
Come rain or come shine.  
Happy together, unhappy together,  
And won't it be fine, etc., etc.'

INT. THE BASEMENT ROOM - NIGHT

103

Plainclothesmen frisk Pupkin, then hand Fallon the autograph book.

FALLON

Where's Jerry Langford?

PUPKIN

(to Giardello,  
next to Fallon)

Are you on the show?

FALLON

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

PUPKIN

I want to see someone on the show.

FALLON

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.

Fallon browses through the autograph book.

FALLON

Come on, Mr. King. Let's not  
fool around.

(looking up  
from book)

Who are all these people,  
Mr. King?

PUPKIN

That's Orson Bean.

FALLON

Okay...

Cont.

Fallon gives the book to Giardello who looks through it.

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

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

FALLON  
(to Giardello)  
Get that Thomas guy in here.

Giardello leaves.

FALLON  
We don't have much time,  
Mr. King.

Pupkin looks towards the door.

FALLON  
Let's start with your name.

PUPKIN  
Rupert Pupkin.

FALLON  
Your real name.

PUPKIN  
Rupert Pupkin.

Thomas enters with Giardello.

PUPKIN  
Are you on the show?

THOMAS  
Yes. I'm Bert Thomas.

Pupkin pulls a piece of neat, typewritten paper from his outside  
lapel pocket 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.

Thomas takes the paper, reading it as he leaves.

Cont.

FALLON

Okay. How about helping us,  
Mr. King?

PUPKIN

What about makeup? I need makeup.

FALLON

(to Plainclothesmen)  
Put some color in his cheeks.

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

104

Masha has finished a half bottle of wine. She is eating decorated stuffed capon. Langford is still bound from tip to toe.

MASHA

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? Not 'Masha, that's wonderful' or anything. Oh no. He starts lecturing me on how I should have tried out for Emily! Now do you understand, Jerry!? (improvisation)

Langford nods.

MASHA

I knew you would. That's because you're the only person in the world who understands me.

(gets hold of  
herself; swallows  
pills with wine)

My doctor says I shouldn't get excited.

(pause)

This is the best I ever made it.  
You want some?

Langford, the mummy, nods. Masha takes a plate, pulls up a chair next to Langford, and quickly and painfully, rips the tape from his mouth.

MASHA

Now open. (Masha's going to feed her Jerry) (improvisation)

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

105

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.

INT. THE BASEMENT ROOM - NIGHT

106

Pupkin has obviously been worked over. He is sweating.

FALLON

How about it, King?

PUPKIN

If I'm not on that show,  
Jerry Langford is dead, I promise  
you.

Fallon nods to his Plainclothesmen again who start working Pupkin over.

INT. THE TELEVISION STAGE - NIGHT (VIDEOTAPE)

107

The theme song is playing. We hear BERT CANTER.

CANTER

(voice over)

Now! Direct from New York! It's  
the Jerry Langford Show with guest  
host Tony Randall and his special  
guests...Shelly Winters, Gore Vidal,  
Tony Bennett, 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!!!

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 display of emotion,  
please.

The audience laughs.

RANDALL

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 audience applauds heartily -- and nobody appears. The spotlight holds for what seems like an eternity. Finally, Pupkin emerges, straightening his jacket a bit and trying to crane the kinks out of his neck. He is a bit tense but in full command.

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

108

Dinner is over. Masha is sitting next to Langford.

LANGFORD

That was a wonderful dinner, Masha. I want you to know how much I enjoyed it.

MASHA

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.

MASHA

Let's say I took all this off. What would you do to me? Tell me.

INT. THE TELEVISION STUDIO WINGS - NIGHT

109

Pupkin has finished his monologue. We hear applause as he comes through the wings. A group of Plainclothesmen seize him, and march him briskly through the backstage corridor.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM (NO WINDOWS - EMPTY WALLS) - 110  
NIGHT

Pupkin is seated. Plainclothesmen have obviously been working him over. Fallon and Giardello are there. The clock on the wall reads 10:20.

FALLON

Okay, Petkin. Once more, where is he? You don't leave until you tell me.

PUPKIN

I'm trying to explain to you. You let me walk out of here, see the show -- as soon as it's over -- I'll tell you where Jerry is.

FALLON

Why don't you watch the show here with us?

PUPKIN

Look, I'll say it again. You let me go now. (repeats)

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

111

Masha is frantically attempting to unwrap Langford. With each pull of the tape, Langford yelps.

LANGFORD

Watch my hair!

MASHA

I'm sorry, baby.

LANGFORD

Ow!

MASHA

I'm sorry.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

112

PUPKIN

I'm telling you, Inspector. It's five after eleven. If I don't see that show where I want to see it, Jerry Langford is dead. You got another twenty minutes.

FALLON

Just where is it you want to watch this show?

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

113

Langford is half unwrapped now. Masha is working frantically to finish unwrapping Langford who is helping now that his arms are free.

LANGFORD

Ow! God damnit! Not so fast.

MASHA

We haven't all night, baby.  
Come on. Come on.

Masha rips the tape off Langford.

LANGFORD

OW!!!!

MASHA

Oh, I love you, baby. I love you  
so much.

INT. UNMARKED CAR - NIGHT

114

Fallon and Giardello sit up front. Pupkin sits in the back with two Plainclothesmen. The car pulls up in front of the bar-restaurant where Rita works. Fallon turns to Pupkin.

FALLON

Here we are, Petkin. 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.

FALLON

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?

FALLON

Don't push me, Petkin.

PUPKIN

A condemned man's last request,  
Inspector.

Cont.

FALLON

Well, I'll tell you right away,  
the answer is no, Petkin.

PUPKIN

It's not much of a ransom,  
Inspector...

FALLON

Look, I'm drawing the line,  
that's all! No ten dollars and  
that's it. You understand?!

PUPKIN

Sure. Sure. No ten dollars...

FALLON

No ten dollars.

PUPKIN

No ten dollars.

FALLON

No ten dollars.

PUPKIN

Okay. No ten dollars, no Jerry.

There is a pause as Fallon stifles himself.

FALLON

Give him his goddamned ten dollars!  
Give him twenty! I don't care.  
Just get him out of here!

INT. MASHA'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

115

Masha in "sexy" bra and panties. Langford unwraps the last tape  
from about his ankles. Masha moves towards Langford, her arms  
open.

MASHA

Oh, baby. Baby.

Langford frees his ankles of tape just in time to sidestep  
Masha and moves quickly to the table where he grabs the gun.

LANGFORD

Stop!

Masha moves toward him. He pulls the trigger, releasing a  
plastic pellet that hits Masha in the stomach.

MASHA

Ow!

Langford glances down in horror at the gun which he now realizes is a toy and looks up in horror to see Masha, larger than life, bearing down on him.

MASHA

Don't be afraid of Masha, baby.

EXT. BAR-RESTAURANT - NIGHT

116

One of the Plainclothesmen in the back opens the door and Pupkin and the other Plainclothesmen get out. There's a second unmarked car behind theirs. Other Plainclothesmen stand next to it. Pupkin and the two Plainclothesmen enter the bar-restaurant.

INT. THE BAR-RESTAURANT - NIGHT

117

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. There are five CUSTOMERS at the bar. Pupkin marches up to the bar.

PUPKIN

Turn on Langford.

MAN

Hey! I'm watching that.

PUPKIN

Just turn it. Come on.

MAN

I was here first, Mister. You can't just walk in like this.

Pupkin vaults onto the bar and turns to the Langford show, just as, on screen, he walks from the wings onto the stage to the applause. Perched atop the bar, standing next to the image of himself, Pupkin looks down at Rita.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. 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.

Laughter.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

Is there anyone here from Clifton?

Silence.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

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 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 a defective. But, like everyone else, I grew up, in large part, thanks to my mother. If she were only here today I'd say, 'Hey, Mom. What are you doing here!? You've been dead for nine months.'

Laughter.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

You should have seen my mother. She was wonderful -- blonde, beautiful, intelligent, alcoholic.

Laughter.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

We used to drink milk together after school. Mine was homogenized. Hers was loaded.

Laughter.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

Once she was picked up for speeding. They clocked her doing fifty -- in our garage.

Laughter.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

When they tested her, they found that her alcohol was two percent 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.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

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.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

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!'

Laughter.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

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.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

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.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

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 to 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.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

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.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

You think I'm joking, but that's the only way I could break into show business -- by hijacking Jerry Langford.

Laughter.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

I'm not kidding. Right now, Jerry Langford is strapped to a bedstead somewhere in the middle of this city.

Laughter.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

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.

PUPKIN

(on TV)

Good night ladies and gentlemen.  
God bless you.

The television audience applauds and some Customers applaud in good humor.

Pupkin, satisfied, glances at Rita. She stares at Pupkin.

PUPKIN

Come on, Rita. Don't spoil the party.

(to Customers)

Drinks all around on me.

(turns to

Plainclothesmen)

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

In a second.

RITA

That was true, wasn't it?...About the kidnapping.

Pupkin looks.

PUPKIN

Now you can say you knew me.  
That's something, anyway.

FIRST PLAINCLOTHESMAN

Come on. Let's go.

PUPKIN

I guess I've gotta go. Take care of yourself, will you.

(pause)

Okay?

RITA

Okay.

The Plainclothesmen lead Pupkin out of the bar.

EXT. BAR-RESTAURANT - NIGHT

As they go to the car:

FALLON

It's a shame, somebody like you  
...young, with talent, doing a  
dumb thing like this. You weren't  
bad.

PUPKIN

You think so? Geez, I thought my  
timing was a little off in spots.

As they get into the car:

FALLON

Don't worry about timing. Where  
you're gonna spend the next few  
years, they only worry about one  
kind of time.

INT. THE JERRY LANGFORD SHOW (VIDEOTAPE) - NIGHT

Rick Ross and the Orchestra with the theme song. Bert Canter  
announcing:

CANTER

(voice over)

And now! Direct from New York!  
The Jerry Langford Show, starring  
Jerry's special guest, fresh from  
a hit engagement at  
Dannemora State Prison, Rupert Pupkin,  
the Kidnapping King of Comedy!!!!

The audience applauds wildly. Langford comes from the wings.  
More applause. He waves Pupkin in from backstage, then pulls him  
out. They wave to the audience. Then they embrace.

IMAGE FADES TO TV "SNOW."

ELECTRONIC END CREDITS COME UP.

FADE OUT

THE END